

Study reveals value of zoos and aquariums in boosting biodiversity understanding

March 16 2015

Zoos and aquariums around the world have a crucial role to play in helping people understand how they can protect animals and their natural habitats, new research from the University of Warwick, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and Chester Zoo has found.

Dr Eric Jensen, from Warwick's Department of Sociology, says it is the most compelling evidence to date of the influence of such attractions, which attract more than 700 million visits across the globe every year.

The findings of the study, which is the biggest of its kind ever conducted, involving 5,661 respondents at 26 zoos and aquariums, in 19 different countries, have been published in the journal *Conservation Biology*.

Dr Jensen, who is an internationally recognised expert on public engagement with wildlife, explained: "Zoos and aquariums are in a unique position to contribute to the goal of raising understanding of [biodiversity conservation](#). Indeed the majority have an institutional and, in some cases, legal commitment to public education.

"But because these establishments tend to be viewed as providers of entertainment by the public, it has been unclear to what extent zoos' educational messages are effective and, as there has been no previous global evaluation of their impact, it has been impossible to assess their importance on this scale - until now."

The study found there was an increase in respondents demonstrating some positive evidence of biodiversity understanding from pre-visit (69.8%) to post-visit (75.1%). Researchers also found an increase in respondents who could identify something they could do to help protect biodiversity from pre-visit (50.5%) to post-visit (58.8%).

"For the first time, there is strong evidence that many people leave these attractions not just with greater awareness but also a better understanding of biodiversity and conservation," added Dr Jensen.

"But the challenge for zoos and aquariums now is how to use these findings to directly improve the conservation of biodiversity, because it's important to remember that an increase in knowledge does not necessarily lead to a change in behaviour.

"The next equally important step should be to build on this knowledge to promote pro-[conservation](#) behaviour and social change."

Dr Markus Gusset, WAZA's Chief Conservation Officer, concluded: "The United Nations has a target that everyone should be aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably by 2020 at the latest.

"Our findings highlight that zoos and aquariums have an extremely important role to play if this goal is to be reached and if we are to eventually reverse the loss of [biodiversity](#) on the planet."

'Evaluating the Contribution of Zoos and Aquariums to Aichi Biodiversity Target 1' was published on Saturday 14 March 2015 in the journal Conservation Biology.

More information: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cobi.12383/abstract

Provided by University of Warwick

Citation: Study reveals value of zoos and aquariums in boosting biodiversity understanding (2015, March 16) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-reveals-zoos-aquariums-boosting-biodiversity.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.