

## Zoo visits focused on sound give visitors new perspectives on the lives of animals

February 17 2022

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Encouraging zoo visitors to focus on sounds as much as sights can help them feel a sense of connection with the lives of animals, a study indicates.

According to the [research](#), concentrating on listening, rather than just looking, can also help people engage with [animals](#) in what they feel are more authentic ways.

Academics ran a set of guided listening visits at Paignton and Bristol Zoos that were designed to question, disrupt and offer alternatives to ingrained zoo visiting conventions.

The research, published in the journal *Ethnos*, was carried out by Tom Rice, Alexander Badman-King, Sam Hurn and Paul Rose from the University of Exeter, and Adam Reed from the University of St Andrew's.

Dr. Rice said: "Several people who participated in the visits found that paying closer auditory attention actually produced a heightened multisensory engagement with the zoo and its animals. Developing their appreciation of sound also allowed them to notice things at the zoo that they usually missed."

"A really important finding was that listening closely helped participants to be more attentive to the residents of the zoo, and to notice that instead of just looking at the animals, they were actually sharing the zoo environment with them."

Gloria, one of the participants in the Paignton listening visit said that by listening she felt she was "there with" the animals, even when she was not able to see them.

Anna, who took part in the Bristol listening visit, said that she found listening allowed her to get a "real" experience of the zoo that made her feel "a part of" it. For her the zoo became a place for concentration and thought about the animals, rather than them being there for her entertainment.

Several participants reported that they found the listening visits relaxing, calming or therapeutic, with two likening them to the practice of mindfulness.

One participant said: "There is sort of therapy in listening and picking up on all the things that are going on around in relation to the sound ... it does give you that calming effect."

Another said he had got more from the listening visit than he would have from a conventional trip to the zoo. In his experience, these tended to overload him with more [factual information](#) than he could absorb, whereas the listening visit was more focused on direct sensory experience.

Dr. Rice said: "These experimental listening [visits](#) suggest that zoos potentially have a lot to gain from offering visitors different perspectives. They can help them to forge new ways of relating to animals and to the environment more generally."

**More information:** Tom Rice et al, Listening to the Zoo: Challenging Zoo Visiting Conventions, *Ethnos* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/00141844.2021.1966070](#)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Zoo visits focused on sound give visitors new perspectives on the lives of animals (2022, February 17) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-02-zoo-focused-visitors-perspectives-animals.html>

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