

The impact of zoos on society is largely underestimated, says study

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The benefits of zoos to society and local communities are largely underestimated by the wider population, new research shows.

Researchers found zoos have a unique platform to engage visitors with important messages that contribute to [human health](#) and well-being and sustainability.

Zoos and aquariums are some of the most popular tourist attractions, with an estimated 700 million visitors globally each year.

The value of zoos to [nature conservation](#) and applied [animal science](#) is well understood, but the new study says zoos also have an important role to play in how [human society](#) thinks of, and cares about, the [natural world](#), which is not widely known.

As part of the study, researchers conducted an in-depth review of the work of zoos, specifically relating to how they fulfill their four key aims—conservation, education, recreation and research—and how each aim has "added value" in representing the benefits of zoos to society.

The online presence of zoos, the publications they generate, and the activities that they support outside of the zoo, were also analyzed by researchers.

Researchers say that integrating zoos as a resource for human health, and educating visitors on biodiversity, conservation, planetary health, human well-being and [sustainable living](#), and enabling a pro-conservation behavior change within the wider society, will enhance the role of zoos further.

"A zoo is more than a place of entertainment and a collection of animals. Zoos allow us to experience nature and are a great resource for understanding more about conservation, biodiversity and sustainability, bringing many positive benefits to human mental health and well-being," said Dr. Paul Rose, Lecturer at the Center for Research in Animal Behavior and Psychology at The University of Exeter.

"We need places of conservation, such as zoos, to provide us with the education and understanding about the natural world, and for us to be educated, the aims of the zoos need to incorporate increased and

meaningful engagement with society and [local communities](#)."

The research found there is still more work to be done and there are many questions for scientists and zoo personnel to explore, as well as evaluating the effect of educational messages, and if the messages are making an impact to human behavior towards planetary health and sustainability.

The paper, written by the University of Exeter, University of Winchester, University of Birmingham, Sparsholt College Hampshire and Dublin Zoo, is published in the *Journal of Zoological and Botanical Gardens* and is titled "The Societal Value of the Modern Zoo: A Commentary on How Zoos Can Positively Impact on Human Populations Locally and Globally."

More information: Phillip J. Greenwell et al, The Societal Value of the Modern Zoo: A Commentary on How Zoos Can Positively Impact on Human Populations Locally and Globally, *Journal of Zoological and Botanical Gardens* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/jzbg4010006](https://doi.org/10.3390/jzbg4010006)

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