

Harambe the Gorilla

In May 2016, a three-year-old boy climbed into a gorilla enclosure at Cincinnati Zoo in the USA. To protect the child, staff at the zoo shot dead the gorilla who lived in the enclosure — a large male called Harambe. This article argues that it is wrong to keep animals like gorillas in zoos.

The only thing more upsetting than Harambe the gorilla's death was the reality of his life

Surely we can begin to agree that animals which share 98 per cent of our DNA should not be kept as entertainment for us to gawk at in a zoo.

Yet again, captivity has taken an animal's life. The latest victim: a 17-year-old gorilla named Harambe, who was gunned down after a young boy managed to crawl through a fence before falling into his enclosure at the Cincinnati Zoo.

The incident (which could have been prevented by surrounding the enclosure with a secondary barrier) has generated a great deal of debate online. [...] What we should be asking is why intelligent, self-aware animals are *still* being displayed as living exhibits for humans to gawk at.

Harambe and other animals serving life sentences in zoos are leading lives of quiet desperation. They are denied the most basic freedoms, including being able to choose where to roam, when and what to eat, and whom to socialise with. It's no wonder that these magnificent animals frequently exhibit signs of extreme depression and related psychological conditions. [...]

Zoos try to justify their existence in the name of "conservation*", but warehousing animals in these facilities does nothing to help protect endangered animals in the wild. In fact, some say doing so

actually harms wild populations because it diverts much-needed funds away from the protection of animals in their natural habitats.

After all, capturing (yes, some zoos still snatch animals out of their natural habitats), transporting and maintaining non-human animals for the professed purpose of "conserving" them is enormously expensive. It costs about 50 times as much to keep one African elephant in a zoo as it would to safeguard sufficient natural habitat to sustain that elephant and countless others.

When, in 2007, the Zoological Society of London spent £5.3m on a new gorilla enclosure, Ian Redmond, the chief consultant to the UN Great Apes Survival Partnership, said: "£5m for three gorillas [seems a huge amount] when national parks are seeing [three gorillas] killed every day for want of some Land Rovers, trained men and anti-poaching patrols. It must be very frustrating for the warden of a national park to see". Clearly, the same amount of money a zoo spends on buying expensive animals could benefit so many more of the same animals living in the wild. Our need for entertainment is expensive, unnecessary and without discernible* benefit, then, to the animals involved.

Abridged article from www.independent.co.uk

Glossary

(wildlife) conservation — ensuring the survival of wild plants and animals

discernible — noticeable