

# A Unique Co-operation

## between zoo and museum

by Helena Olsson, Parken Zoo, Sweden

Over a year ago the director of this region's museums contacted Parken Zoo to discuss a possible co-operative project. The museum wanted to put on an exhibition about people's attitudes towards animals, and believed it was principally among zoo visitors, with their particular interest in the living world, that the audience for such an exhibition could be found.

The exhibition would focus on the relationships between humans and the rest of the animal world, addressing questions about how animals are valued, about the interdependence of humans and other species, about the ethics of how humans treat other species. The project would thus mix culture, history and biology in a way that has never been done in Sweden before. The main focus would be on ethics, a highly relevant issue with today's concerns over animal rights and welfare, as exemplified in the hunting debate, in controversies about the transportation of animals and their use in laboratories.

With Parken Zoo's interest aroused, the scene was set for a unique exhibition in which the expertise available in museums would be combined with that of zoos, rather than the two working for separate goals. Now, after a year of planning and preparation, the project is taking shape, with the central ideas already finalised. At the moment of writing, the builders are working hard on the construction

### Swedish flavour

The fact that this project is being realised in Sweden will give the event a particular flavour. Certainly, there is great interest in many countries in how society deals with 'animal issues', but each culture has its own history of ideas and attitudes, reaching far back into the past. In most countries around the world there are people who are very concerned about animal welfare, although levels vary from place to place.

With some 600 million visitors annually (10% of the world's population!), zoos represent a large constituency with a great deal of financial clout. Their views on the ethics of keeping animals in captivity have been a hugely influential motivator leading to reform of standards within zoos and other institutions. In contrast, the numbers visiting farms or laboratories is miniscule. Perhaps this exhibition can help people to appreciate that it is not only zoo animals that need to be considered, but also farm animals, pets and laboratory animals. But even if we try

to reflect a more all-embracing view of animals, it will be the Swedish soul that permeates our exhibition.

### Be loved – Be eaten

The event is called "Be loved – Be eaten" and has these ideas at its heart:

- the exhibition is about people
- the exhibition will examine people's motives and thoughts when they take principled stands and make moral choices
- it will be close to everyday life and grounded in genuine experiences
- the exhibition will provide the background detail to various ethical questions – big and small – that people face in how they relate to animals
- despite the serious nature of some of the issues addressed, the event will provide visitors with fun experiences

The exhibition is structured around four themes: (i) statistical facts and figures (ii) portraits of people and of animals (iii) ethical dilemmas, illustrated by concrete examples (iv) visitor survey.

### (i) Statistical facts and figures

Statistics are to be found throughout the exhibition, but in particular at the start, providing basic knowledge and perspective. There is data, for example, on the growth of human populations in Sweden and across the planet, on the various trends in the domestication of species, on numbers of farms animals kept in different countries, on the nature of pet keeping in different historical periods and so on. Such figures are not always easy to come by, but we have tried to reflect the realities of people's behaviour in relation to our fellow animals.

We also consider, of course, wild animals, including comparisons among, for instance, species numbers in the different classes of vertebrate. How many are wild animals and how many are pets? We also make economic and medical comparisons between humans and animals – how much is spent on the average pet dog in Sweden as opposed to a child in the Sahel? Do people spend more on their horses than they do on the Third World?

These and other questions will be illustrated using concrete models so that the concepts can be appreciated using all the senses, not just through columns of figures to be read.

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### (ii) Portraits of animals and of people

Throughout the exhibition visitors will meet “real” animals with genuine life histories as presented through pictures and texts from different times, places and contexts. The portraits will include not only the famous, such as Clever Hans, the “intelligent” horse, or the lion at the castle in Stockholm, but also the typical dog-next-door in 1940s Sweden, a 19th-century family’s lone cow, a modern-day pussycat.

### (iii) Ethical choices

Human attitudes towards animals have always been about choices, although not always entirely free ones. Under different themes, visitors will be able to examine concrete examples of ethical and moral dilemmas. Consider a poor farmer with a cartload of produce that must be delivered in time if he is going to support his family – how severely can he whip his horse in order to meet his deadline? What are the issues surrounding the use of animals – particularly primates – in developing surgical techniques? Visitors will have the opportunity to examine and discuss such questions as these, under certain themes:

**economics or empathy** – the exploitation of animals in agriculture, trade and economic development in general, laboratory animals, hunting, euthanasia and religious slaughter

**freedom and captivity** – the keeping of animals in cages and enclosures, and related welfare matters, the use of pets, farm animals, circuses, animals as entertainment, zoos and the parallels with the caging of humans as seen, for example, in psychiatric hospitals

**natural or artificial** – the border, if it exists, between natural behaviour and the artificial, as in selective breeding, artificial insemination, castration and other contraceptive methods, animal training, cloning and organ production

**the ghost in the machine** – the status of animal species as fellow beings, the way they sense and perceive the world around them and their levels of understanding, self-awareness and morality (as in the case of a sow in France a few hundred years ago which was

put on trial and sentenced to death for killing a baby), communication with other species

### (iv) Opinion poll

As a concluding activity visitors will have the chance to express their views on the issues addressed in the exhibition, including doing so in such simple concrete ways as dropping marbles into pipes to register an opinion. Members of the public can also tell their own animal stories and express their individual faiths in this fundamental question of how humans should relate to the rest of the living world.

### Zoos and education

What part does the zoo educationalist play in all this? He/she creates pedagogy in and around the exhibition that integrates different perspectives and knowledge, both cultural and biological. For the zoo school it is essential to bring out the conservation message and stimulate a questioning view regarding the treatment of animals.

The moral and ethical issues confronted in the exhibition can be used to stimulate discussion among school children. If a trip is then made to the zoo to study animals in their enclosures, to meet individual animals, watch them socially interact, learn their life histories and so forth, then the same issues can be re-visited and any change of opinion will provide further material for discussion.

Although zoos and the animals to be found in them are only one aspect of this exhibition, the variety of questions raised and the range of problems examined from different angles are of much relevance to anyone working with animals – indeed, to everyone, since we all share this planet and must find ways to live in a sustainable, meaningful way with our countless fellow species.

### STOP PRESS

The exhibition is now open and will stand for two years.

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