

# Environmental enrichment

## and getting people closer to *ex-situ* conservation –

### a report on Animal Day at Lisbon Zoo

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In 2004, Lisbon Zoo commemorated Animal Day, a four-day event with a set of unique activities built around a single theme – environmental enrichment. The main goal of this event was to open up our visitor's minds to the importance of animal welfare and to the essential role played by zoos in species conservation.

#### how we did the Animal Day

The conservation effort made by every worker in Lisbon Zoo is normally unappreciated by the majority of our visitors, who come to us in search of a different and pleasant leisure day, in a beautiful setting, surrounded by unique animals.

We all know that changing people's minds is not easy and, if the majority of the Portuguese population does not yet see their zoo as a place where species conservation happens daily, we will have to work harder in order to transmit that message.

The Animal Day, an invitation to visit Lisbon Zoo, undoubtedly provided a great opportunity to present to the public our role in nature conservation!

With this goal in mind, it was essential to plan a unique and dynamic day at the zoo filled with new opportunities and experiences that would attract as many people as possible and assure the participation of everyone, even the most distracted visitor!

Our objective was to show to the general public how we cater for our animals' welfare, presenting to the public some examples of environmental enrichment already in place in many of Lisbon Zoo's enclosures.

The purpose of environmental enrichment is, of course, to allow animals to exhibit as many of their natural behaviours as possible, both for their own welfare and for educational reasons. Enrichment can challenge animals, improving their ability to cope with new situations. In this way it can be essential preparation for possible future reintroductions to their natural habitat.

This is a reality for an increasing number of species at Lisbon Zoo, providing valuable opportunities for our visitors to see – to be amazed by – the range of behaviours exhibited by different species, be it ways of moving, feeding methods, social interactions and communication or whatever.

In this way, through empathic experiences and in greater proximity to the animals, we can hope to increase our visitors' level of knowledge

about the animals with which we share our planet. This can only lead to a growing will to conserve nature and to look upon zoos as a critical part of that process.

And so our work began!

The preparation involved several departments: the Zoological and Veterinary Services, Nutritional Services, Animal Collection Services, Marketing Services, Commercial Services and Educational Services.

The activities were planned, discussed, tested and carried out through teamwork, gathering the best from every department.

With a focus on nutritional enrichment, we selected four species in which activities would be most attractive from the public's point of view, with a compatible schedule so that visitors could normally assist. To accomplish our goal of demonstrating the work being carried out in Lisbon Zoo for the improvement of animal welfare, it was extremely important to have the collaboration of the keepers and Nutritional Services in determining the most appropriate choice of "snacks" so that the animals could celebrate (their) Animal Day.



a ring-tailed lemur (*Lemur catta*) keeper soaks dry fruit and dates in honey

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**a brown bear (*Ursus arctos*)  
enjoys ice blocks thrown, under  
supervision, by visitors**

### Animal Day environmental enrichment programme

day	selected species	activity
Saturday 02/10/2004	Bennet's wallaby ( <i>Macropus rufogriseus</i> )	hanging and pinning food (apples, lettuce, carrots) to several appropriate furniture items in several locations around the enclosure
Sunday 03/10/2004	brown bear ( <i>Ursus arctos</i> )	placing ice blocks containing fruit (apples and pears) or fish
Monday 04/10/2004 Animal Day	meerkat ( <i>Suricata suricatta</i> )	placing in the enclosure kits made with cardboard egg boxes or cardboard tubes, containing shreds of paper and mealworms
Tuesday 05/10/2004 Portuguese holiday	ring-tailed lemur ( <i>Lemur catta</i> )	placing of small wooden rafters with small cavities in which were hidden several food items (such as dry fruits and dates) soaked in honey

The activities were accompanied and guided by Filipa Baptista, one of our Lisbon Zoo guides, who had received the preparation and information required for this task. The Education Department created guidelines for all the major topics to be covered.

So that all the public could follow the activities and hear Filipa's talk it was necessary to install sound equipment. Several rehearsals were gone through, in order to assess the animals' reaction to the presence of a large number of people, to the sound equipment and to the activity itself to ensure that everything went as planned on the day.

These rehearsals were also essential to adjust the timetables of the several participants, and co-ordinate the various tasks involved, from the preparation of the environmental enrichment kits to locating them in the enclosures to the study of each species' behaviour and interest.

Filipa had also the opportunity to get acquainted with the reactions of the animals so that she could easily and more adequately explain them later to the public.

All the steps mentioned above proved to be of tremendous importance since various factors could influence the duration of the activity (which

shouldn't exceed 15 minutes) and lower the interest of the public. Ideally, it should neither be too short, nor too long!

It was in this way our "Zoo Talks" programme was born.

### "Zoo Talks" programme

During these days Lisbon Zoo was a very animated place.

For Animal Day itself we had a very special party prepared: all the "godfathers" (people that have adopted an animal) of the four species chosen for the event were invited, as well as the companies that have given support to Lisbon Zoo in the pursuit of its goals.

At the entrance visitors were received by several animators dressed up as animals. They were handed an informative leaflet about environmental enrichment, explaining why it was we were doing these activities and with pictures of everyday tasks at the zoo.

During the "Zoo Talks" the audience were invited to participate in the enrichment activities and they became more elaborate, giving the visitors a real insight into the kind of work going on daily.

a keeper hangs food (apples, lettuce, carrots) for Bennet's wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus*) on enclosure furniture



Animal Day had an enormous impact in the media who, from an early stage, took great interest in it. It received wide coverage in the papers, magazines and even on television, attracting a larger number of people and allowing us to go even further in the pursuit of our goals.

### Always recycle

Whenever it's possible, in the environmental enrichment programmes we recycle items of everyday use, effectively increasing the materials' useful life.

With media collaboration, we asked our visitors to participate in the "three Rs" policy – Reduce, Re-use and Recycle – by bringing cardboard tubes from kitchen rolls, cardboard egg boxes and old socks (these are some of the materials used in our environmental enrichment activities).

The response was so great that we are still receiving phone calls and e-mails from students, families and individuals who have collected materials and want to know how they can deliver them to the zoo and so contribute to the animal welfare project they have heard so much about.

### In the end...

Public feedback from the "Zoo Talks" has indicated a very positive impact, and we believe we have managed to achieve all the goals for which Animal Day was created.

It is always good to feel that the message that zoos are now fundamental to species conservation has reached a wider audience and that each of us, with simple and small gestures, can contribute to a better world.

ring-tailed lemurs being kept busy with their enrichment



ice blocks containing fish and fruit