

Emily Parker

January 21, 2014

APES Period 4

Ecosystems are evaluated based on economic and ecologic value. Unfortunately as a culture we value how much money an area makes instead of the value of the vegetation and other living organisms that are found there. People attempt to preserve these ecosystems by looking at the endemic species in an area, but they use this information to take actions that preserve them for personal game –keeping them in enclosures and breeding them to keep more. Even though the state of our planet’s ecosystems are increasing in attention from the public, the kind of preservation of animal species are not those that are actually helping their population. Some of the actions we take to care for these parts of our planet are helpful while others aren’t making things better.

Zoos are neither a thing of the past nor something that will continue in the future. People are becoming more and more aware of their environment, as stated by the article *Why Preserve Biodiversity?* “It is an accepted goal for many people,” they author says. With the increasing concern for our environment and how to preserve our Earth, more people are trying to protect the endangered species that are so important to habitats around the world. Seeing zoos capturing these animals and keeping them in cages in places that they don’t naturally live enrages those who are involved in the survival efforts for them. Most animals being “conserved” are bred to stay in zoos, not released. Many believe that they can’t miss the wild if they’ve never been to it.” Zoos are supposed to be educational for visitors, but instead it has just ended up being people watching the animals walking around in fake enclosures that are too small for them. No one actually goes there to learn about the animals. I think

that needs to be a thing of the past. The future of zoos needs to be built around educating people on animals and preserving species. Some zoos, like the Brookfield Zoo, have already taken steps towards this.

The IUCN and Conservation International which species and ecosystems are worthy of saving. This all depends on a set of criteria they have on deciding. For example, there must be 1500 endemic plant species in the area. Preserving the vegetation of a hot spot will simultaneously conserve the diversity of animals in the area. Characteristics to look at for “hotspots”, which are areas worth saving, are the number of endemic species in an area, the total number of species, and the number of already endangered species in an area (*Science Applied, How Should We Prioritize the Protection of Species Diversity?*). Conservation International adopted the methods so that it had something to guide its conservation priorities. They’re groups that want to help preserve our Earth and are trying their hardest to protect what is most important.

Because the fact that zoos tend to not live up to the high standards they claim they have, saying that they play a large role in conservation for the animals even though they neither provide the animals with what they should have if contained, will not go the extra mile to make the animals comfortable, teach visitors information about their habitats and how important they are, and teach about the world’s ecosystems, not just one animal (*The Future and Ethics of Zoos*). I think it’s the governments and conservation groups’ job to protect species and ecosystems. They can create and enforce laws that protect areas that need help as well as create national parks to preserve the most important hotspots and coldspots as determined by people like Conservation International. Important species and ecosystems can be determined and projects can be created to help conserve these organisms. Some places make this very difficult to do. Certain laws in places like Thailand (market from *Planet In Peril*) state that the police cannot forcibly enter a building that has closed doors. This keeps the government

from doing their jobs when trying to find if these markets are indeed selling endangered and illegal animals.

Environmental issues matter more to people depending on their economic value. The Conservation Reserve Program, for example, evaluates the value of land based on a point system. Points represent its “importance to society” otherwise known as what it does for humans, instead of the fact that it’s part of our planet. Examples of the sorts of things they look at are things like the amount of money people make off of hunting, fishing, wildlife-watching, and recreational activities in the area. These so-called “important” areas are then marked with points, stating its value. Croplands used for agriculture are then bought to add on grasslands and forests to these areas (*Economic Valuation of Environmental Benefits and the Targeting of Conservation Programs*).

Species Conservation Programs have multiple ethical issues with their methods. For example, many endangered species that are taken from their natural habitats are being “conserved” by being kept in cages. They are used for breeding, but then are traded to other places like zoos. When we visited the Brookfield Zoo, we were told about the Golden Tamarins that were put through a soft release, which is on the zoo’s grounds where they can’t escape, and only two were put through this process. This isn’t conservation for the wild, this is for the zoos’ conservation. They’re captured and used for breeding, education and entertainment of the public, and kept in captivity for the entirety of their lifespan. Even when the animals are removed and kept in an area to nurse them back to health, they are usually kept there instead of being returned to the wild. Animals are living in artificial replicas of their habitats, having what would be their natural routines altered by humans.

There are many different interpretations of the terms conservation program, environmentalist, and conservation, however in order to calculate and evaluate efforts a common definition needs to be agreed upon. With one set definition, actions can be developed to help protect our planet and its

numerous endemic species. Conservation efforts are differently defined by places such as zoos and Sea World, Cambodia and Thailand, and the Conservation Reserve System. With a solid definition and actions taking place around the world, there would be hope for people to be better educated about our environment and for them to realize how important it is to preserve it. Having a set plan would produce the best chance for the end of poachers, illegal selling, killing for food, destruction of habitat, and the confining of animals. Just one change is needed to set off a whole new way of thinking and conserving.