

## Conservation and Preservation of Species and Ecosystems

Biodiversity is declining in the world. Species along with their habitats are disappearing, and humans are to blame. We take advantage of the resources around us without thinking of the affect it has on the environment. Forest have been cleared, wetlands destroyed, and habitats demolished. We think that we are only affecting the land, but the animals suffer as well. When we take away an animal's habitat we directly affect their population. When a species goes extinct it changes the whole ecosystem. Plants they may have depended on those animals for pollination can die out. Then other animals that depended on those plants could disappear. Everything is connected and when one thing changes there is a ripple affect. Now we need to protect the ecosystems and species left before they're gone too.

Zoos were one way to preserve animal species, but their time is coming to an end. In the past they were used to show people animals around the world, educate people, and gain apathy for the animals so that people would help protect them. "However, a professional literature search last year found that 'no systematic research has been conducted on the impact of visits to zoos and aquariums on visitors' conservation knowledge, awareness, effect, or behavior'" (Hancocks). As Hancock says, it is quite apparent that the millions who visit zoos make no change to their lifestyle. With little change coming from them, zoos are causing more harm then good. Animas are kept in spaces far too small to accommodate them as well as lacking the terrain found in their natural habitats. Few real plants are included in the exhibits. Research done by David Hancocks reveals that many exhibits may look like a natural habitat, but in fact are made entirely of disguised concrete. Even leaves made of steel. When many animals are forced to live in the barren confinement for several years, it affects their health. Many experience Abnormal Repetitive Behavior (ARB). On top of that, zoos give off a false sense that endangered animals are being taken care of, when really they are being abused and breed. Very few are even released into the wild. If zoos concentrated more on the

animal's health and the public's education then making money, they could help these animals. But as of right now they are only hurting them.

Animals face much greater hardships than zoo captivity. Many are hunted by poachers for their skin, horns, and even fins. As revealed in *Planet in Peril*, protected species of tigers and rhinoceroses are killed and sold on the black market. Rhinoceroses are killed for their horns, and tigers are killed for their pelt and meat. Who is protecting these animals? Right now the government is in charge of protecting endangered species. It's the government's laws and regulations that are supposed to keep these animals from being killed. Unfortunately, as showed in *Planet in Peril*, it is not working. Laws are made and not enforced. Many governments don't give illegal poaching the attention it deserves. Most protection and preservation then falls on organizations and agencies. Conservation International plays a huge role in protecting ecosystems and animals. They identify biodiversity hotspots then work with surrounding governments to protect and preserve them. According to Norman Myers, a hotspot is a small area of land that contains a large percentage of the world's biodiversity. Conservation International focuses on places with many endemic species, and puts all of their effort into keeping those species alive and well, as said in *How Should We Prioritize the Protection of Species Diversity*. After identifying the hotspot. Conservation International works with local governments, international governments, and local people to save the ecosystems.

Many people think that the problems concerning ecosystem preservation and biodiversity are being taken care of, either by zoos, scientists, or the government. There are many efforts, but it is not enough. It is everyone's responsibility to take care of the animals and ecosystems in our world. Often the land around of is taken advantage of with little thought for the repercussions on ecosystems and species. In Europe only 1% of original forest remains, in the United States 90% of the original forests have been exploited by humans, and in Asia only a few forests remain intact according to Liette Vasseur in *Restoration of Deciduous Forests*. Not only deciduous forest, but also all types of forests are clear-cut for agriculture or commercial reasons. These forests are home to many species, some which can't survive anywhere else. Not to mention the mass amount of oxygen they provide. Not only

forests, but also wetlands are taken advantage of. According to Glenn Westman of the Stormwater Management Commission wetland provide flood control, habitats, sites for recreation, and improve water quality by filtering sediment, removing nutrients, and providing groundwater recharge. These important wetlands are being destroyed to build building and malls. Wisconsin alone has lost 47% of its wetlands according to Westman. When these habitats are destroyed, the animals are lost, but also when the animals are lost the habitats are destroyed. If oxygen and water isn't enough motivation to start protecting our environment, think about the thousands of animals lost. We need to stop depending on others to fix this problem and start fixing it ourselves. Everyone is responsible for the quality of our world.

These ecosystems are given economic value, which often trumps its environmental importance. According to the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission, an acre of wetland can be worth up to \$70,000. How they establish that price though is uncertain. There is no way to accurately establish how much fresh water and an ecosystem surrounding it is worth. How much oxygen are the plants in and around it producing? How much of the water is usable? How much is that water worth? How do you put a price on something that is necessary for life? For \$70,000 you can demolish these important wetlands. Eventually if this doesn't stop we will run out of wetlands.

There are many issues with the destruction on our environment, but also with the treatment of the animals. Many ethical issues exist within conservation programs. Zoos and aquariums are often viewed as protecting animals, but they inflict a lot of harm. One of the biggest culprits is Sea World. At Sea World, there are several orca whales, which are kept in confinement and used to perform. One of these was Tilikum. He is notorious for attacking several trainers and several deaths. As told in *Blackfish*, the executives said it was the trainer's fault for the attacks, but a deeper look revealed what provoked the killer whale. He was kept confined in tank far too small for his size. He had very little room to swim around. He also shared this tank with several female whales that attacked him. He was starved, with food used only as a reward. On top of that he was kept in isolation when killer whales are a social group. Although he faced several hardships, other killer whales are put

through similar things. According to Blackfish, some are kept in even smaller tanks at night in the dark. They can spend more time in these small tanks than the large one. Also, if a killer whale has a child while in confinement, the baby is taken away from the mother. In one case the mother cried for days and used special long distance sonar to try to find her baby. Whales are like people in the sense that they form very strong personal relationships with friends and family. Killer whales are treated inhumanly for the viewer's pleasure. Unethical treatment of animals can be seen in zoos as well. According to David Hancocks, an electric cattle prod was used to teach male zoo elephants to show respect for his torturer. Most zoos, although still inhuman, show these ethical issues to a lesser extent. Many animals aren't given the space or nurturance they require to be healthy. At the Brookfield Zoo, many animals are in exhibits far too small and barren. The giraffe exhibit showed six large giraffes in an enclosed room with not enough space for them all to walk around. Many were just lying on the ground or pacing. They showed many signs of ARB including pacing circling, and licking the walls. Their environment consisted of four concrete walls with trees painted on them, and a small bundle of bamboo hanging from the ceiling. "A change in philosophy and attitude here could make a huge difference in the credibility of zoos as conservationists, in their conservation effectiveness, and in their influence upon visitors" (Hancocks). Animals in confinement should be given enough space to live comfortably, and have their environment filled with the plants and even animals of their native habitat.

Change needs to be made to sustain our planet. Ecosystems and species are being destroyed too quickly to save. We need to take responsibility for our planet and stop depending on others to fix it. We depend on these animals and they depend on us. We are all connected through food webs and interdependence and unless something is done we will all suffer. It's time to start protecting biodiversity and the ecosystems around us.