

APES Intensive Final

I think that zoos are very much a double-edged sword. They help to educate the public, and remind them why we should be buying green products, and why we should stop deforestation. However, they also (in a way) frequently exploit animals, like we saw in Blackfish. Also, seeing animals in a zoo, can give the impression that we don't need nature to have animals, because they'll still be alive in zoos. That is not to say that zoos can't do good, because they can. They have brought several species back from near extinction, and have helped to increase populations of others. Though, when you look at the numbers, zoos really haven't released as many animals back into the wild as you think they would have. In the zoo talk, we learned that at Brookfield Zoo only two golden lion tamarins have been released into the wild, but more than that live in the zoo. They had even been soft-released into the zoo for a period of time. Other than that, no other species has been released back into the wild. The Micronesian kingfisher, according to the Chicago Zoological Society website, is now only alive in captivity, and is extinct in the wild. This is because of an invasive species of snake that has completely decimated the kingfisher populations. Thanks to zoos, their population has doubled, but there are still less than a hundred of these birds. The other side of the kingfishers' story is that many of the eggs and young have to be looked after by zoo staff, because the adult birds can be aggressive towards them. This is good because the population is increasing. This is bad, because it is taking away the birds' skills to rear young. So, by the time these birds have a large enough population to be put back into the wild, how are they supposed to know how to continue the population?

The ethics of conservation are a whole other ball game. According to Brookfield zoo, the criteria to be a SSP (Species Survival Plan) species (ultimately decided upon by the AZA Wildlife Conservation and Management Committee) are as follows: they are threatened or endangered in the wild, and they are a recognizable species. This means that half the reason species are being selected to be "preserved" is because they are a well-known animal, like a polar bear, or a zebra. They do that, because it makes the public want to help them. Unfortunately, so many other animals on the planet need help, but they're not being helped because they're not "marketable" enough. According to Chicago Zoological Society's website for the Center for the Science of Animal Welfare, "every aspect of Brookfield Zoo's operations respects, protects, and promotes the well-being of all of the animals in our care." After seeing Blackfish, and knowing that institutions like Seaworld who are supposed to help research and study animals, are pretty much lying to our faces, this comment makes me a little skeptical. They are protecting and promoting the well-being of all the animals in their care, but not all of them have a SSP. They're saying that they're promoting all of them, when their website actually says on another page that they are only promoting animals that will gain the sympathy of the public. This brings into question the

reason why we're preserving the species. Are we preserving them because they need our help, or because we want to exhibit them (and get people to pay to go to zoos)?

Guest speakers Juli Crane and Glenn Westman (both principal wetland specialists) from the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission explained how economic value is applied to an ecosystem. It really all depends on where the ecosystem is, and what is in it. If it is a huge forest, and it is needed for lumber, then it'll probably be worth more than a plot of land in the desert (where there's nothing). Sadly, value is placed on ecosystems because of their commercial value to humans, and not their ecological value to the earth. They also talked about how there are wetland credits, which means that a developer can disrupt an area of wetland, and then just pay for credits or the restoration of a wetland somewhere else. However, there are a few places on the earth that are valued for their ecological wealth. These places are biodiversity hotspots, which are largely decided by Conservation International. According to the article Science Applied (species diversity), they have recognized 34 biodiversity hotspots all over the world. However, these only add up to about 2.3 percent of the earth's land area. Also, who's to say that the forest of Maine, for example, aren't more important than the forests in another country? What if there are more trees in a forest that's not a biodiversity hotspot, and those trees help to clean our air. So, again, it's a double-edged sword. Places that need their biodiversity protected are recognized, but some places that need attention are ignored.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) defined what "conserving biodiversity" means in 1980. To summarize its main points, we are a part of nature, everyone is responsible for protecting nature, we need to be more sustainable, and we need to protect the earth for future generations. I agree with all of these points whole-heartedly. I think that it is not a single person or organization that needs to be worried about protecting the earth, and taking care of it, it is every person on this planet. Things like wind power and solar panels should be used to be more sustainable, we should stop deforestation so animal species don't go extinct, and the human race (quite frankly) is crazy if it thinks it's above nature.