



Wild Welfare Position Statement on Animal-Visitor Interactions (AVIs)

August 2019

Wild Welfare believes that zoos and aquariums should provide high standards of animal welfare in every aspect of their management. Such standards should encompass any form of Animal-visitor interaction (AVI), always giving due consideration to, and prioritisation of the animal's welfare.

Animal-visitor interactions in zoos and aquariums are a common practice across the globe. They vary in content, but can be described as an interaction between people and wild animals in human care that can involve both direct and indirect contact with a variety of different species. Wild Welfare's key standpoints on animal-visitor interactions are set out below.

- If carried out appropriately, AVIs can potentially be a source of education, inspiration and enrichment, helping create a positive connection between people and animals.
- Where welfare considerations are not taken into account, AVIs are carried out for public entertainment and/or revenue generation, and can result in animal suffering.

We therefore recommend that:

- All AVIs currently on offer within the zoo and aquarium community need further ethical review and consideration in regard to their impact on animal welfare.
- Increased research effort is undertaken to establish the impact of AVIs on visitor attitudes and behaviour towards animal protection and conservation.
- All current AVIs are regularly assessed by applying relevant and ongoing welfare monitoring.
- Zoos and aquaria should always aim to explain the animal welfare and management considerations to visitors taking part in AVIs.
- All such institutions should support association or other guidelines which state that zoos and aquariums should not undertake, contribute to or participate in animal shows, displays or interactive experiences where animals perform unnatural behaviours.
- Clear and precise definitions and guidelines for what does and does not constitute unnatural wild animal behaviour need to be established.
- Any member of the public offered an AVI consider Wild Welfare's standpoint on what we consider good and bad AVIs as set out below.

Wild Welfare supports AVIs that:

- Are conducted by appropriately trained staff only. These staff should have a deep understanding of species-specific behaviours as well as knowledge and trust of the individual animal being used.
- Use positive reinforcement training.
- Involve solely positive interactions for the animals pre, during and after interaction.
- Always give the animal the choice as to whether to participate or not.
- Only encourage behaviours which would be found in their natural behavioural repertoire, and are mindful of the social needs of that species and individual.
- Are conducted in the animal's own enclosure or an area that the individuals are comfortable with. This area should have the same opportunities for positive welfare outcomes as the enclosure itself.

- Have a demonstrable educational value, particularly pertaining to the plight of the species *in situ* and actions by which participants can help, as well as explaining to visitors the welfare and management considerations in looking after such animals.
- Take reasonable precautions against zoonotic disease transmission such as providing hand-washing facilities and foot dips both before and immediately after the AVI.
- Are not too frequent and are appropriate in length so as not to place the animal in a biological state where the stress response has a negative effect on welfare.
- Are undertaken only by people who have the capacity to comply with all instructions given by staff, to ensure appropriate interaction with animals at all times. Rules regarding the appropriate age and the number of participants should be established and applied.
- Are part of a program that is regularly assessed and monitored in terms of both the physical and psychological impact on the animals involved in the AVIs.
- Only involve species and individual animals that are comfortable with human interaction, that do not give a false impression of their suitability as 'pets' and where that interaction will not impact long-term conservation goals for the species.

Wild Welfare does not support AVIs that:

- Are conducted by staff who have insufficient training or knowledge of the species or individual animals being used, and do not understand appropriate safety procedures or welfare standards.
- Primarily use aversive or punishment training techniques.
- Involve any form of negative interaction whereby the individual experiences fear, pain, hunger or restrictive confinement before, during or after an interaction.
- Demean and reduce human respect for the animal and its species or encourage an incorrect impression of the relationship between humans and animals.
- Confine an animal in inappropriate environments before, during or after interaction.
- Do not allow the animal choice as to whether to participate or not, or do not give them the option to move away if distressed.
- Rely on chemical or physical restraint of animals to facilitate AVIs.
- Involve the performance of behaviours found outside of the natural behavioural repertoire, such as repetitive movements, circus-style tricks or the use of inappropriate theatrical props.
- Are conducted in unsuitable or unsafe holding areas which could result in fear or injury to both animals and people.
- Are for entertainment or revenue generating purposes only. All AVIs should have an animal care, welfare or conservation messaging.
- Do not provide reasonable precautions against zoonotic diseases through the provision of hand washing facilities and foot dips where appropriate.
- Are too frequent in occurrence and/or long in duration, placing the animal under undue acute or chronic distress.
- Do not regularly monitor and regulate participant behaviour in order to prevent any negative welfare experience for the animal.
- Are not part of a regular welfare monitoring programme that is authorised by the facility and using an external independent body for frequent assessments of the psychological and physical impacts of the participant animals.
- Involve species or individuals that are vulnerable to or intolerant of human contact, involve social species that may be subject to stress if isolated and species where, if used, give the wrong impression as to their suitability as 'pets'.