

Visitor Studies at

CHESTER ZOO

the zoo:

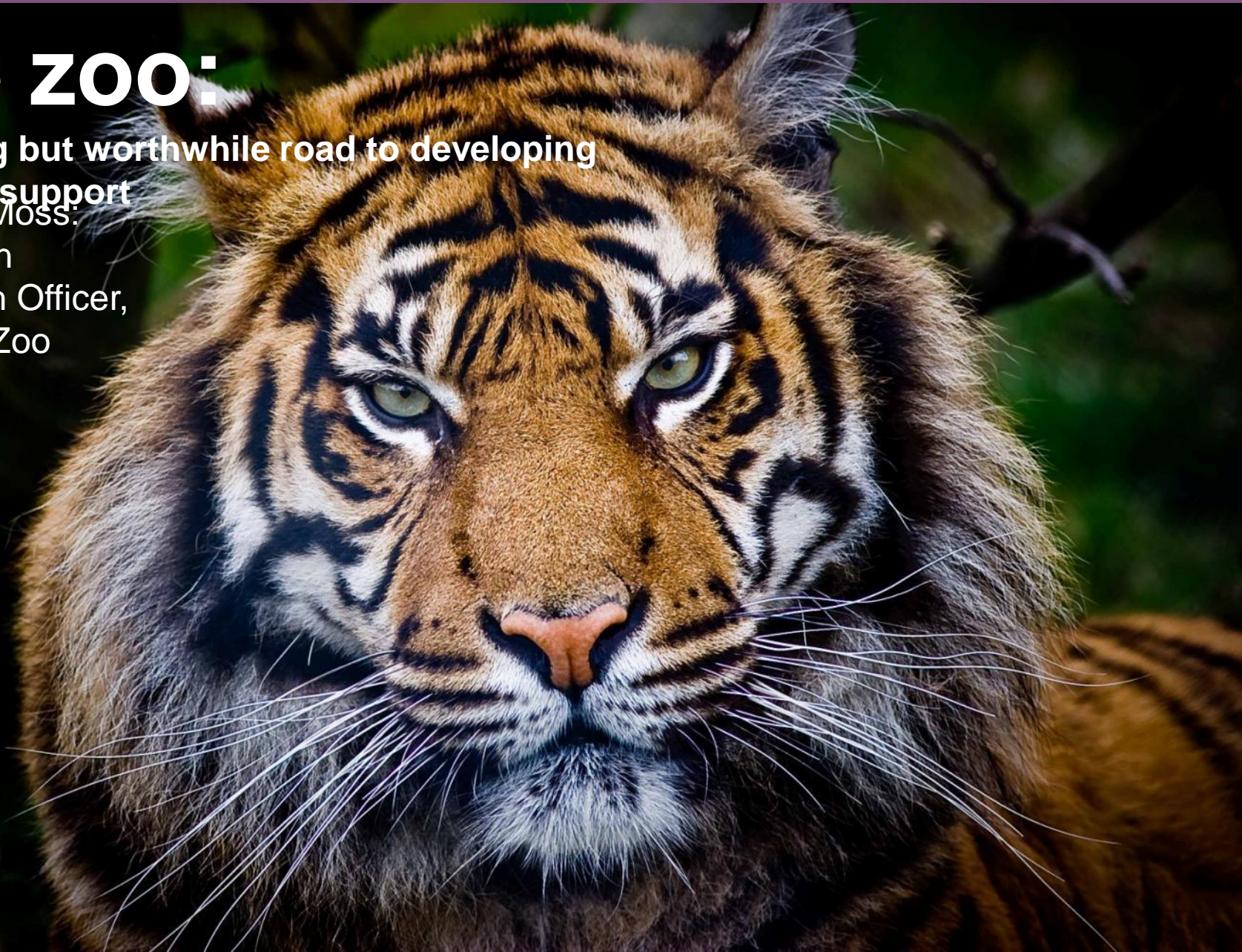
The long but worthwhile road to developing
internal support

Andrew Moss:

Education

Research Officer,

Chester Zoo



1. Conservation (both in-situ and ex-situ)

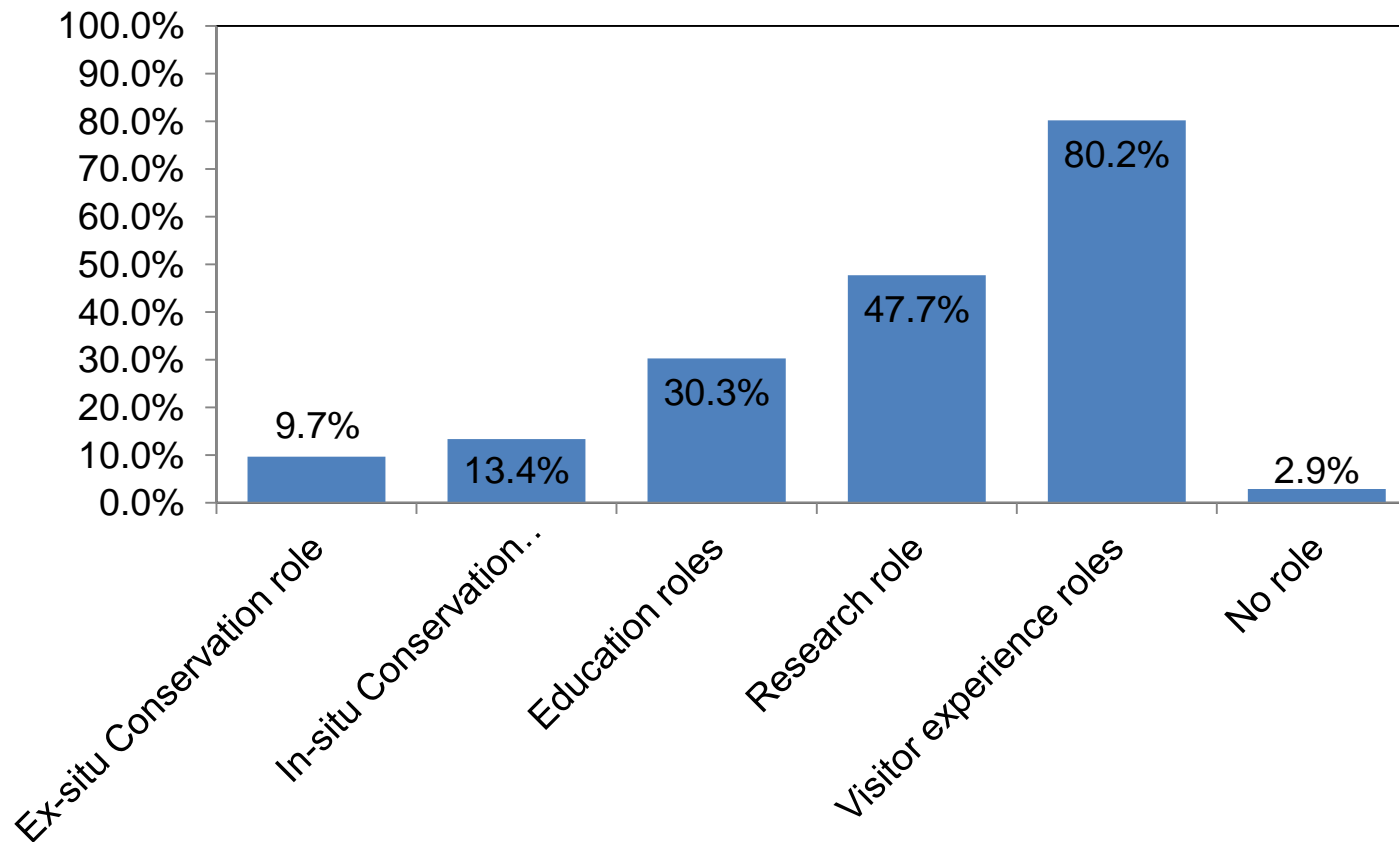
2. Science

3. Education

4. Recreation



Species roles at Chester Zoo (as of January 2014)

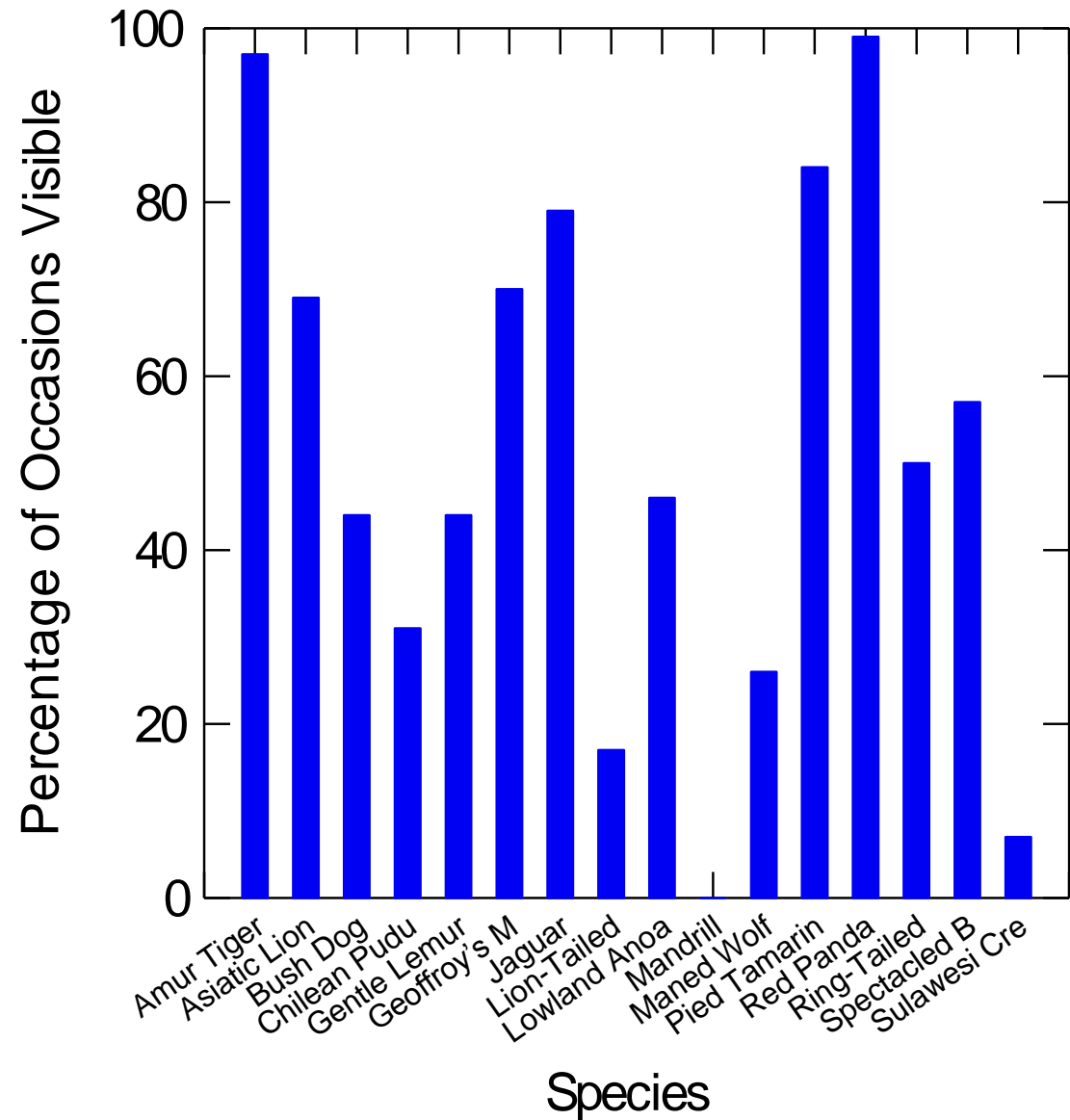


455 species in total

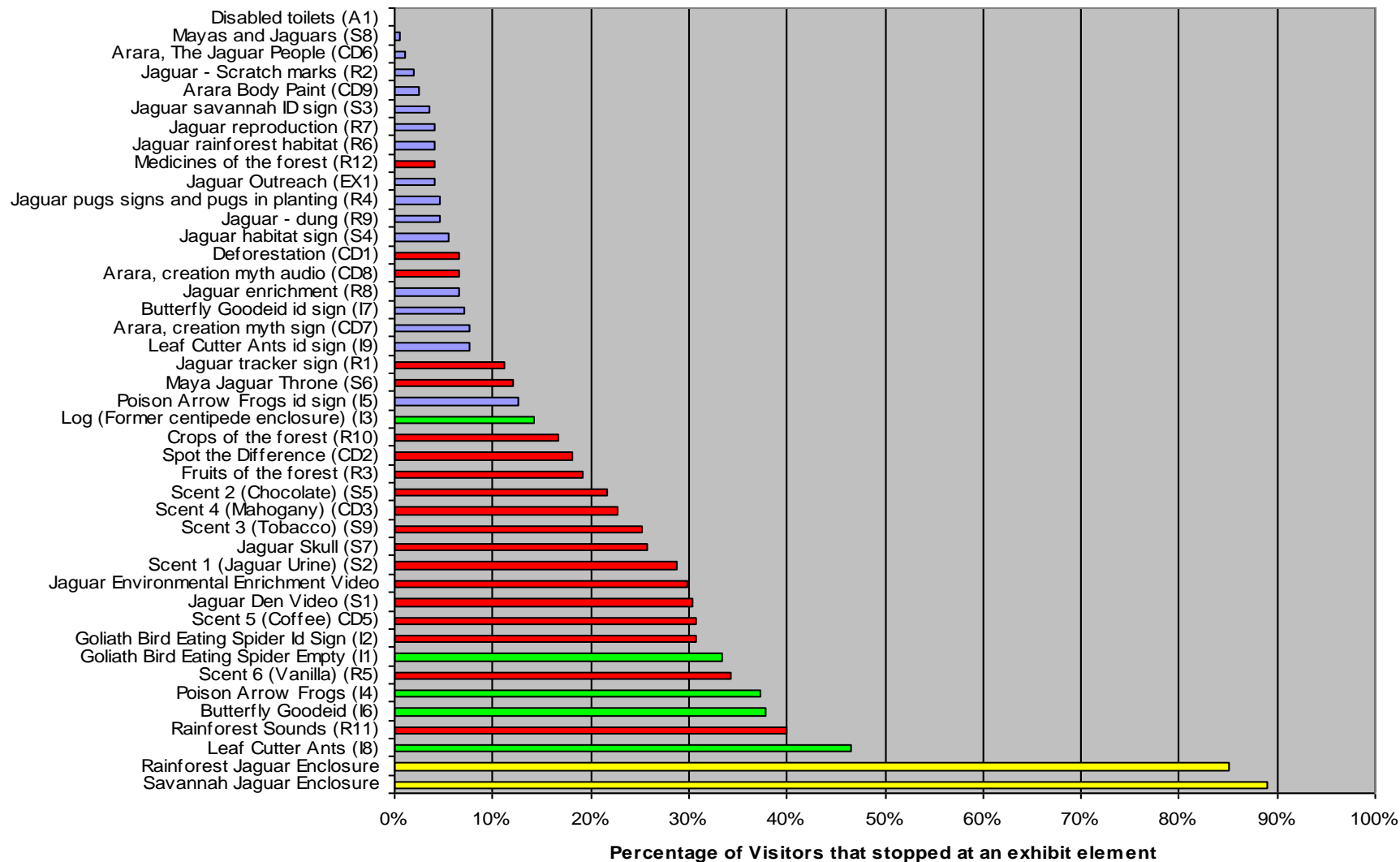
Our first forays into the murky world of visitor studies...

...did not go well

Animal visibility – 2004/5



Visitor Tracking - 2006



**But thankfully
things have
changed since
then....**

acceptance

SAVE ENDANGERED ANIMALS

ACT NOW and help us save endangered animals in the wild. You don't have to be a research scientist working in the wild to make a massive difference.

[Find out more ►](#)

FIELD CONSERVATION

From protecting threatened UK species to reducing conflict between humans and elephants in India, we support a huge range of work out in the wild.

[Find out more ►](#)

OUR RESEARCH

We carry out world-renowned scientific research relating to animals, plants and people, in areas from animal behaviour to nutrition and environmental education.

[Find out more ►](#)

YOUR RESEARCH

Find out how you can join the many researchers, academics and students who come to Chester Zoo every year, or collaborate with us on research.

[Find out more ►](#)

"We carry out world renowned scientific research relating to animals, plants and people, in areas from animal behaviour, nutrition and environmental education."

Chester Zoo Science Review (2012)

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

Education is a core component of Chester Zoo's mission, both within the zoo and as part of our *in situ* programmes. Within the animal collection, around two-thirds of species are kept for educational or other visitor-related reasons. It is therefore imperative that robust research evidence can be provided to support or refute the educational claims that we make as an institution, and to allow us to implement evidence-based decision making into the continual improvement of our education programmes. Research within this area requires the use of methodologies and theoretical frameworks from a number of social science disciplines, such as Sociology, Psychology and Education Research. The majority of Discovery and Learning Division staff contribute to research projects. During the reporting period, key scientific achievements in education and social research have included the following:

Assessment and analysis of species roles

Implementation of an on-going auditing procedure for evaluating visitor-related species collection plan roles. This audit allows us to track changes in species-use within our education programmes, and for us to assess areas where we can improve; for example, are we providing an equal education focus to all of the taxonomic groups in our collection? During 2013, we hope to widen the scope of this, using animal visibility as performance indicator for species that hold a visitor-related role within the collection.




Investigating the impact of presenter talks


During 2011/12, one member of the Division led a research project that investigated the impact of Presenter talks on visitor perception of chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*). Visitors to conservation-focused talks perceived chimpanzees as significantly more endangered than visitors viewing chimpanzees without a talk. The findings from the project were presented at the 21st International Zoo Educators Association conference.



CHESTERZOO ISLANDS


CATEGORIES  ABOUT ISLANDS MEDIA GET INVOLVED

[BACK TO CHESTER ZOO SITE](#)




Welcome to CHESTERZOO ISLANDS

In summer 2015 we're opening *Islands*, a brand new experience at Chester Zoo.
Embark on a unique expedition to discover six different South east Asian island habitats.
[View the latest 3D fly-through video of Islands](#)



Plants with an appetite

DECEMBER 11 2013

 (1) Comments

Islands will feature a fascinating and diverse ranges of plants, including some carnivorous plants that are among the rarest in the world.

External credibility

CHESTER ZOO

THE JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION, 44(2), 79–96, 2013
Copyright © Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
ISSN: 0095-8964 print/1940-1892 online
DOI: 10.1080/00958964.2012.695408



EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The Risk of Delivering Disturbing Messages to Zoo Family Audiences

Maggie Esson and Andrew Moss

North of England Zoological Society, Chester Zoo, Chester, UK

One of the roles of the modern zoo is to provide environmental education. Zoo visitation comprises primarily family groups seeking to spend time together. There is potential for tension between message and audience expectation as zoos seek to raise awareness of the effects of irresponsible human behavior on the environment. This may unsettle family visitors. This study explored levels of tolerance of the zoo audience to a disturbing exhibition covering broad environmental themes. Results showed that participants were prepared to reflect on the content and at times feelings were sufficiently strong for zoo visitors to challenge one another's beliefs. The delicate positioning of zoos as environmental education providers is discussed.

Keywords: behavior, conservation, education, environment, visitor, zoos

Zoo Biology 32: 13–18 (2013)

COMMENTARY

The Educational Claims of Zoos: Where Do We Go from Here?

Andrew Moss* and Maggie Esson

Discovery and Learning Division, North of England Zoological Society, Chester Zoo, Upton-by-Chester, Chester, United Kingdom

Zoos exude a certain self-confidence regarding their roles as education providers. Indeed, the education outputs of zoos are, at face value, pretty impressive, with most investing in learning opportunities for leisure visitors, education groups and in some cases, as part of their in situ programs. However, these outputs are not necessarily reliable indicators of the educational achievements of zoos. Quantity does not necessarily equate to quality, just as outputs do not necessarily lead to outcomes. Zoo-accreditation organizations such as the AZA and EAZA offer us clear insight into the strategic vision underpinning the education goals for zoo visitors; a heightened appreciation of the value of biodiversity and a connectedness with the natural world. Unsurprisingly, most zoos have educational goals that ally neatly with the vision of their respective accreditation body. Consequently, we are left with fairly narrow, top-down educational goals. This does not necessarily sit well with what we know about the unpredictability of “free choice” learning in environments such as zoos and aquariums, or what is known about public science communication. Research that seeks to explore the impacts of zoo visits often focuses on evaluating performance based on educational goals and the findings are used as a means of providing evidence of institutional achievement. However, any visitor outcome that falls outside of this narrow range could be unexpected outcome.

Keywords: conservation

Zoo Biology 29:715–731 (2010)



Research article

Zoos as a context for reinforcing environmentally responsible behaviour: the dual challenges that zoo educators have set themselves

Maggie Esson and Andrew Moss*

The North of England Zoological Society, Discovery and Learning Division, Chester Zoo, Chester, UK

*Correspondence: Andrew Moss, The North of England Zoological Society, Discovery and Learning Division, Chester Zoo, Chester, UK; e-mail: a.moss@chesterzoo.org

Keywords:
environment, education, sustainable
behaviour

Article history:

Received: 1 October 2013

Accepted: 19 January 2014

Published online: 31 January 2014

Abstract

A strong focus for zoo education is inspiring visitors to care for the environment and this inevitably means reinforcing messages that relate to the adoption of sustainable lifestyles. Since lifestyle changes are likely to involve some level of personal cost or sacrifice, zoo educators are faced with the challenge of aligning this objective with the visitor expectation of a recreational day out to see the animals with the family. In order to evidence their effectiveness as education providers, zoos must also evaluate their educational activities and this represents a second challenge. The Learning Together intervention was devised specifically to address these two challenges as single parent families participated in zoo-based workshops with themes that related to environmentally responsible lifestyles. Results from focus groups in the zoo and semi-structured interviews in the community several weeks later showed that parents had gained a new understanding of the role of zoos and were motivated to make lifestyle changes that persisted over the lifetime of the project.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Visitor Interest in Zoo Animals and the Implications for Collection Planning and Zoo Education Programmes

Andrew Moss¹* and Maggie Esson²

¹Education Research Officer, North of England Zoological Society, Chester Zoo, Chester, United Kingdom

²Education Programmes Manager, North of England Zoological Society, Chester Zoo, Chester, United Kingdom

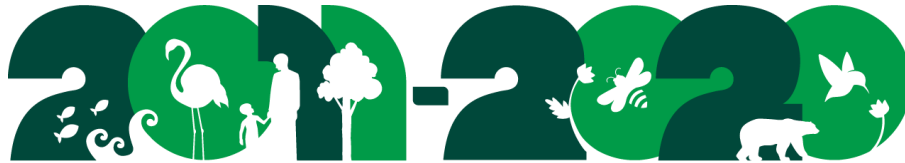
As zoos have sought to further their conservation missions, they have become powerful providers of environmental education. Outside of “formal” education initiatives, such as those designed for school and other organized groups, or structured public talks programmes, much of the learning potential that the zoo has to offer is around the viewing of animals and the response of visitors to them. In this, zoo learning is a very personal construct, develops from the previous knowledge, and experiences and motivations of each individual. In this article, we make the assertion that learning potential, although difficult to quantify, is very much related to the attractiveness of animal species and the interest that visitors show in them. Using standard behaviorist measures of attraction and interest (the proportion of visitors that stop and for how long), we analyzed the relative interest in 40 zoo species held in a modern UK zoo and the variables that are significant in predicting that popularity. Further to this, the suggestion is made that the zoo collection planning process could use such information to make more informed decisions about which species should be housed for their educational value. Taxonomic grouping was found to be the most significant predictor of visitor interest—that is, visitors were far more interested in mammals than any other group—although body size (length), increasing animal activity and whether the species was the primary or “flagship” species in an exhibit or not, were all found to have a significant bearing on visitor interest. Zoo Biol 29:715–731, 2010. © 2010 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

External credibility

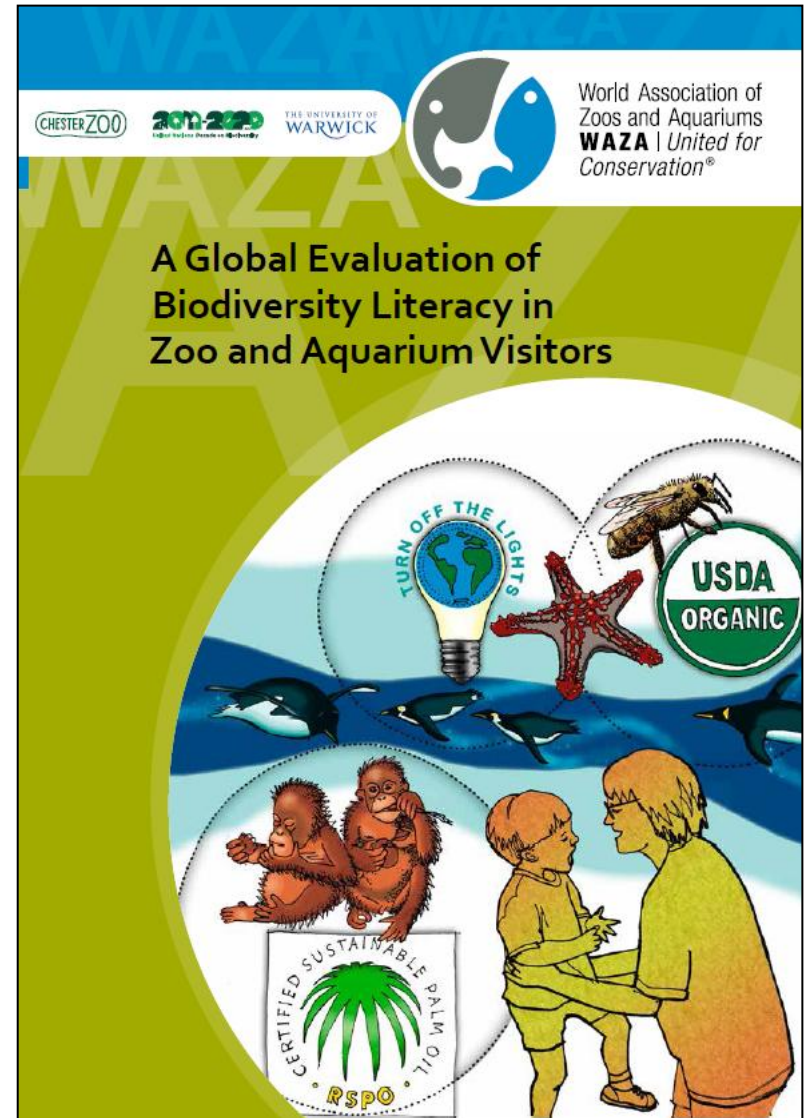
CHESTERZOO



World Association of Zoos and Aquariums | **WAZA**
United for Conservation



United Nations Decade on Biodiversity



**5 lessons we
have learned (the
hard way)...**

1. External credibility often comes before internal acceptance

“Only in his home town, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honour” (Mark 6:1-6).

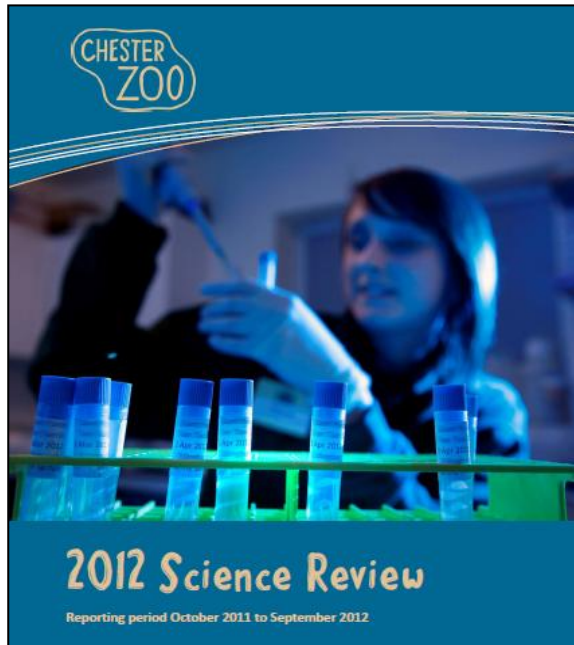
2. Don't expect people to care...



Why is it relevant to them? Why should they care?

You need these answers.

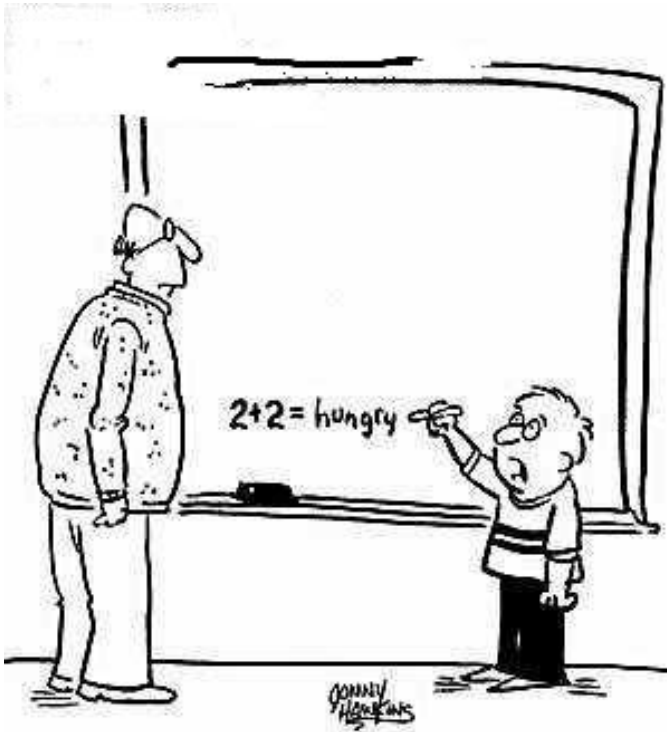
3. Everyone is an expert when it comes to education/learning/social science



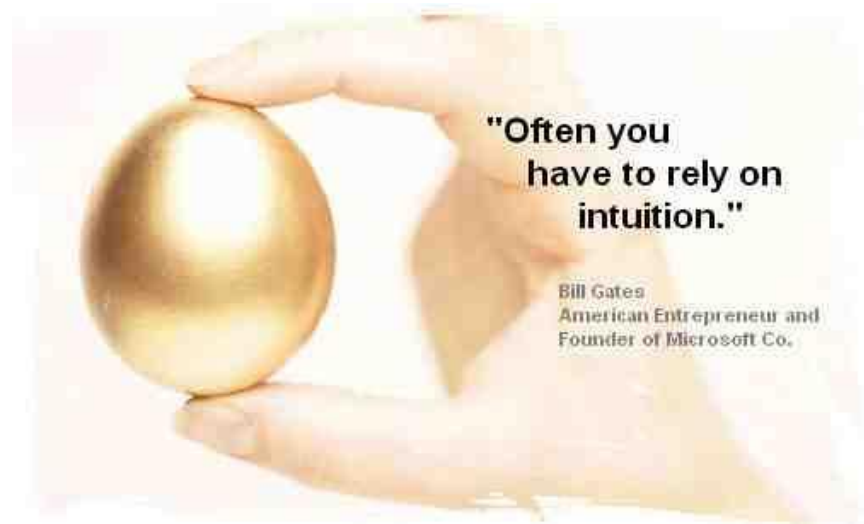
But not necessarily with the 'other' sciences...developing a thick skin is essential!



4. The delicate balance between expertise and evidence – evidence can be threatening to some



"I went with my gut feeling."



5. Nobody likes change...whether it is good for them or not



- No excuses! If you believe visitor studies are important, then it is up to you to persuade others
- Gain external credibility – it helps internally
- Learn from the mistakes of others (e.g. me)

Many thanks
a.moss@chesterzoo.org