

ANIMAL WELFARE BEST PRACTICES

APPLIED TO EXHIBIT DESIGN

With the 2020 Animal Lives with Purpose Plan and the 2020 Strategic Plan, Toronto Zoo has clearly and forcefully articulated how and why the wellbeing of animals - both in the zoo and in the wild - are the paramount considerations in the zoo's activities. But TZ's commitment to these values is not always apparent to a visitor. This is partly the result of inconsistent presentation and messaging in interpretive exhibits and online. As TZ evaluates future upgrades to its animal environments, exhibits, and online presence, there is a golden opportunity to consolidate and focus Toronto Zoo's presentation around its core values.

The direction set forth in the ALP plan marks an important shift in thinking about animal environments. When animal wellbeing becomes the top consideration, there is no longer an imperative to make an animal's setting look like a faraway or exotic place. The interpretive storylines about conservation and native habitats remain essential, but they may share the stage with interpretation of the many ways a zoo environment responds to animal needs.



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Environmental quality in terms of animal welfare considers how well a setting benefits its inhabitants - does it encourage a repertoire of natural behaviors, does it allow an animal to freely move about, does it impose conditions an animal may perceive as threatening or does it help the occupants feel confident overall and relaxed when at rest.



ENVIRONMENTAL CHOICE

Animals stay healthier when they can make choices about their environments - when to move from warm to cool areas, when to interact with other animals or people vs. finding solitude; what sounds or scents or tactile materials to be near.



ENRICHMENT

Enrichment creates opportunities for animals to express natural behaviors such as hunting, exploring, or problem-solving for food or other rewards. Social Enrichment gives zoo animals opportunities to interact with keepers or, if they choose, with other animals or zoo visitors.

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BRING PEOPLE AND ANIMALS CLOSE

Nose to nose.



CONTAIN PEOPLE / LET ANIMALS MOVE ABOUT

Generally this puts animals in a position of confidence.

Few experiences motivate interest in wildlife and conservation more effectively than close-up, positive encounters with animals. The zoo is one of the only institutions that can provide those experiences. Revealing and interpreting the ways animals are cared for at TZ may imply acceptance of a certain level of artifice. But that acknowledgement in no way limits the zoo's capacity to create places for powerful animal encounters. Indeed, animal welfare considerations are well aligned with fundamentals of zoo environment design, such as...

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BUILD IN KEEPER SPACES

Interactions with zoo staff are integral to the lives of zoo animals. Spaces for keepers should be integral to animal habitats as well.



BEAUTY

Environmental enrichment and best practices include using natural materials, real trees and plants, water features, and soft, interesting substrates - all of which are readily compatible with beautiful environment.

ANIMAL WELFARE

BEHIND THE SCENES

A focus on animal welfare opens possibilities to reveal more of TZ's daily operations, including areas that have traditionally been kept behind the scenes.



ANIMAL HEALTH CENTER

Reveal (selected) healthcare and medical procedures



CONSERVATIONS RESEARCH

Show that research and care for animals at the zoo helps animals in the wild



NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Many visitors are curious about what animals eat and how their food is prepared. This side of zoo operations has traditionally been a behind the scenes operation, but would make a fascinating display.



REPRODUCTIVE LABS

There is a powerful and appealing conservation story to be told about the Reproductive Laboratories at the Wildlife Health Center, and the zoo's efforts to maintain reservoir populations and to re-introduce threatened species into the wild.