

## Con Arguments

### Anti-Zoos

#### **Con 1: Zoos don't educate the public enough to justify keeping animals captive.**

A review published in *Animal Studies Repository* concluded that “to date there is no compelling or even particularly suggestive evidence for the claim that zoos and aquariums promote attitude change, education, and interest in conservation in visitors.” Even a study widely cited to justify the argument that zoos educate the public stated that “there was no overall statistically significant change in understanding [of ecological concepts] seen,” because visitors know a lot about ecology before going to the zoo.

TV shows such as *Planet Earth* bring wild animals into living rooms, allowing people to see the animals in their natural habitats without causing harm to animals such as the endangered snow leopard. As British comedian Romesh Ranganathan stated, “It still slightly surprises me that anybody thinks that we should have zoos at all. The animals always look miserable in captivity...The idea that kids only get excited about things they can see in the flesh is ridiculous. My kids are obsessed with dinosaurs that no longer exist, and Skylanders, which have never existed.”

#### **Con 2: Zoos are detrimental to the animals' physical health.**

A study of 35 species of carnivores, including brown bears, cheetahs, and lions, found that zoo enclosures were too small for the animals to carry out their normal routines, which led to problems such as pacing and increased infant deaths. Polar bears, for example, had an infant mortality rate of 65% due to small enclosures.

About 70% of adult male gorillas in North America have heart disease, the leading cause of death among gorillas in captivity, although the condition is almost completely absent in the wild. Other great apes have similar health problems in captivity. [\[4\]](#)

Captive elephants live about half as long as wild elephants—16.9 years versus 35.8 years for African elephants—and about half as long as working elephants—18.9 years versus 41.7 years for Asian elephants. Of 77 elephants in 13 zoos, 71 were overweight and spent 83% of their time indoors, contributing to early death.

### **Con 3: Zoo confinement is psychologically harmful to animals.**

Animal behaviorists often see zoo animals suffering from behavioral problems not seen in the wild, such as [clinical depression](#) in clouded leopards and gibbons, [obsessive-compulsive disorder](#) (OCD) in brown bears, and [anxiety](#) in giraffes. The animals experience these issues due to smaller enclosures, changes in diet and activities, and the introduction of things not seen in the wild, such as medical exams and people with cameras. The Toledo Zoo in Ohio ran a psychiatric program in which a gorilla with premenstrual depression was prescribed [Prozac](#). To ease them into new habitats, an agitated tiger was given [Valium](#), and anxious zebras and wildebeests were given Haldol.

A study of captive chimpanzees found that “abnormal behavior is endemic in the population” and includes behaviors such as eating feces, twitching, rocking back and forth, plucking hair, pacing, vomiting, and self-mutilation. The study concluded that the cause of such behavior could be mental health issues.

Captive whales have exhibited a lot of problems and even dangerous behavior. According to one study, 24% of captive orcas (killer whales) had “major” to “extreme” tooth wear, and 60% had tooth fractures as a result of stress-induced teeth grinding. The 2013 documentary *Blackfish* highlighted the case of Tilikum, a male orca ([killer whale](#)) captured at age two off the coast of Iceland in 1983 and long kept at SeaWorld Orlando in Florida, where he was a star attraction and performer, until his death from a lung infection in 2017. Confined for nearly his whole life, Tilikum became the largest orca in captivity. He also grew increasingly aggressive, eventually killing three people, including two trainers. The deaths led to many ethical discussions about captive animals and even spurred legislation concerning marine mammals in captivity. The breeding of captive orcas was outlawed in certain states, zoos, and theme parks.