

## Final reflection

During this teaching concept, the students debate about the future of zoo animal husbandry. In this handout, the arguments of the represented perspectives are presented. On this basis, the teacher can assess the research performance and the course of the discussion.

*Note:* The following explanations are not exhaustive. Only the most important aspects are mentioned. The arguments have been assigned to individual actors in each case. However, it is by no means impossible that overlaps may arise in the course of the research.

## Biologists (pro zoo)

- Zoological gardens breed species whose existence is acutely threatened. If necessary, the "reserve populations" of zoos can be released into the wild when the reasons for endangerment have been eliminated - e.g. amphibians that are in danger worldwide due to the spread of a fungal infection (Niekisch [2021](#): 32f; Conde [2011](#): 1390f.).
- Zoos support species conservation in the regions where the zoo animals are native. They support corresponding projects with monetary means or by temporarily sending expert staff (Niekisch 2021: 33f.).
- Zoological gardens offer biologists a wide range of research opportunities. The spectrum of possible research subjects is broad - from behavioural biology and genetics to zoo education. The findings of such studies also help in the development of effective conservation strategies (Niekisch [2021](#): 34, cf. [Goethe](#)-Universität. Opel-Zoo Foundation).
- Scientifically managed zoos care for the welfare of the animals. Conversely, animals are not "free" in the wild - their range of movement is limited by predators, diseases, food availability and other factors. When they do migrate, it often has to do with climatic changes or the search for food. Such migrations are not necessary in the zoo, because the animals are cared for there in the best possible way (Niekisch [2020](#)).



### Biologists (contra zoo)

- Zoos breed not only endangered species but also animals not under threat at all. This illustrates that the corresponding programs primarily serve to breed new zoo animals (Sommer [2021](#): 36f.).
- The conservation of a species is not at all possible by breeding a mere zoo population. Rather, it is necessary to maintain intact communities in the wild (i.e. complex populations with biotic and abiotic environmental factors) (Sommer [2021](#): 38).
- The conservation programs in the wild are funded with relatively little money (Sommer [2021](#): 36f.).
- For some species, reintroduction of animals raised in captivity is almost impossible. It has been shown that the chances of survival of predators raised in the care of humans in the wild are extremely low. The animals lack the ability to hunt. They are also accustomed to humans and therefore not sufficiently shy. They also appear to be more susceptible to disease (Owen [2008](#)).
- Zoos that are not organized in associations (like VdZ) don't necessarily participate in species conservation programs and research projects (Sommer [2021](#): 35f.; Niekisch [2020](#)).



### Environmental politician (pro zoo)

- The global protection of biodiversity is an important goal under international law; various conservation agreements oblige politicians to take action (United Nations [1992](#); European Commission [2020](#)). The breeding and release of endangered species by zoological gardens is a sensible and necessary strategy to meet this requirement.
- The global trade in endangered species is regulated by the CITES convention. This convention guides the trade of zoo animals in responsible ways and ensures that it does not endanger the populations of threatened species ([BMUV 2020](#)). Zoos can also support the implementation of CITES (CITES [2021](#)).
- Zoos perform valuable public relations work and sensitive civil society to the importance of biodiversity conservation ([EAZA: Education](#)); this promotes the acceptance of environmental policy measures in this country.
- Zoos help people to recover, which is why they are of high public value (Niekisch [2020](#)).
- Zoos promote regional projects for the protection of local biodiversity. They are therefore an important player in environmental protection, alongside state institutions and nature conservation associations ([Zoo Krefeld.:Schutzprojekte](#)).
- It is true that some zoos have colonial roots. But it is absolutely possible to work through this past without closing the zoos. The zoo of Berlin, for example, reminds of colonialism with an exhibition (Beinert [2020](#)).



## Environmental politicians from a country of the Global South

- If one considers the speed of global biodiversity loss, it becomes clear that keeping animals in zoos cannot represent a sufficient conservation strategy. After all, zoo animal husbandry alone cannot stop this decline (Sommer [2021](#): 36ff.).
- Despite the CITES agreement, there is a global trade in primates that enter zoos or circuses illegally. Zoos, which are not organized in associations, are therefore causing harm to wild populations (Ehrenberg [2021](#)).
- The protection of species in the regions of origin of the zoo animals is sometimes perceived as neo-colonial paternalism. It is criticized that the prevailing conservation narrative would state that the "original wilderness" of Africa could only be protected by Europeans or Americans. The sustainable livelihoods of the indigenous population would systematically be lost sight of (Evans [2017](#)).
- Zoos are also criticized as Western-dominated institutions. It is claimed that the display of exotic animals in Western cities would contribute to maintaining or renewing a "colonial gaze" (Lukasik [2016](#)).



## Conservationist

- The global biodiversity crisis is a drastic challenge that requires diverse strategies of action. Zoos make an important contribution to species conservation - on the one hand through the targeted breeding of endangered species, and on the other hand by supporting conservation programs in the wild (see above). Several species would already be extinct if zoos did not exist - e.g. the California condor, the European bison or the Oryx antelope (Niekisch [2021](#): 31-34.; Conde [2011](#): 1390f.).
- In many cases, there is no contradiction between species protection and animal welfare. Keeping animals in zoos is not animal cruelty per se. Modern zoos pay attention to a species-appropriate design of the enclosures. The animals are specifically entertained (so-called "enrichment") - e.g. by play equipment, by a targeted hiding of food, by dressage programs or by keeping different species in one and the same enclosure ([VdZ: Enrichment](#)).
- If there is a contradiction between species protection and animal welfare, it is legitimate to give priority to species protection. An example is the case of the giraffe "Marius", which had to be killed at Copenhagen Zoo. The animal was too closely related to the other females. Therefore, it was unsuitable for the breeding program. To avoid inbreeding, it had to be prevented from mating ([Eriksen/Kennedy 2014](#)).



### Animal rights activists

- It is completely unethical to give priority to the protection of species over the protection of animals. Every animal has a right to be treated with respect. It is wrong to objectify an animal for the "good" of the population. More than 27.000 people had signed against the killing of the giraffe "Marius"; this shows that numerous people think so ([Eriksen/Kennedy 2014](#)).
- Lengthy prison terms are the highest penalties of our legal system – but we inflict such infringement on animals with the greatest of our ease (Sommer [2021](#): 38).
- Zoo animals can develop abnormal behavior, so-called stereotypes, in captivity (Wagner/Görzel [2019](#)).
- It is misleading to say that zoos perform valuable educational and public relations work. Encounters with caged animals tend to dull visitors (especially children). It is conveyed that the captivity of wild animals is "normal" (Sommer [2021](#): 35f.).

**The theses in the solution not an expression of the author's opinion. They summarize foreign positions cursory.**

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