



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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CAP: Zoo is an archaic concept in a modern era

The current Covid-19 pandemic has posed a serious challenge to zoo operations because they generally survive on gate collections, rentals, and on support from donors and sponsors. Lockdowns badly affected gate collections and financial aids and these are what many zoos depend on.

Closer to home, the annual operational cost of keeping the two giant pandas from China was RM2.25 million in 2015. This excludes the cost of maintaining about 5,000 animals of different species.

Zoos have been around for a long time, as early as 2,500 BCE. They were created as private collections by the rich to show their ego and power. Gone are the days when you could only see a lion or a polar bear either by going to the zoo or traveling to their habitat. There is a wealth of photographs, videos, and information available on the internet.

Therefore, zoos are things of the past where you can only see and learn about animals at these places. Animals belong to wildlife parks rather than within enclosures even if the enclosures are not surrounded by moats, or barred cages. They should be roaming free in their natural habitat.

It has been found that although the physical needs of animals are met in captivity, the conditions of confinement and exposure to human presence induces physiological stress. The stress affects an animal's ability to metabolise toxic substances, resist infections, and reproduce.

Another feature at many zoos is the animal performance. The crux of animal performance is the propagation of animal cruelty which has been a feature at many zoos, theme parks, and marine parks. It is animal cruelty. Many countries are joining the ban on the use of wild animals in performances besides circuses.

Zoologist Desmond Morris noted in his book *Animal Contract* that “the lessons such menageries teach us are little better than the message we get from the circus: wild animals are to be caught and subdued for our pleasure”.

He also pointed out that television brought wild animals from all over the world into our homes, thereby spawning a whole generation growing up with an awareness of what wild animals really like in their natural habitat.

How many people have the opportunity to visit a zoo to learn about bored ‘wild’ animals in an artificial environment? People can gain more knowledge by watching documentaries such as those presented by Sir David Frederick Attenborough.

If scientists want to study wildlife, they can now track wildlife electronically with devices such as geo positioning system (GPS) trackers, tracking collars, and remote cameras. Scientists do not need to keep them in a zoo to observe them.

It was reported that Zoo Negara's monthly operational costs total about RM1 million and the pandemic woke us to the harsh reality that it is time to do away with zoos. The claim of using zoos for conservation and research doesn't provide a real solution, particularly when there is a wide array of electronic devices and equipment available for the tasks.

Keeping wild animals is a blatant violation of their rights considering that they were abducted and confined against their will. At the same time, attempt to condition them to humans gawking at them. If they are humans, it would be a case of kidnapping and confinement.

We urge the authorities to reconsider the keeping of archaic concepts of zoos in an era where the world is brought to us on our personal electronic devices. On the other hand, zoos have been correctly described by a writer as "relics of past cruel attitudes to wildlife". What is the purpose of protecting and conserving wildlife in zoos when their natural habitat is being raped and exploited? Therefore, we wish to reiterate our stand that it is time for zoos to be phased out.

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