

Debate: Are Zoos Bad News?

Tiger Attack Spurs Debate

The phone call reached zoo director Manuel Mollinedo shortly after 5 p.m. as darkness was falling on San Francisco. One of his tigers was on the loose! She had escaped her enclosure and attacked a teenager and two other young men before bounding into the zoo's dense foliage and winding paths.

As Mollinedo rushed to work, police declared the entire zoo a crime scene. After some searching, they found the resting tiger, a 4-year-old, 350-pound Siberian tiger named Tatiana. They shot and killed the animal, but the damage had already been done. One of the men the tiger attacked, 17-year-old Carlos Sousa Jr., later died of his wounds.

No one knows why Tatiana, a favorite among zoo visitors, attacked. Some witnesses say the men were taunting the tiger, although the two survivors deny it. Police are still investigating.

Zoos Deserve Boos

Zoo critics see the attack as another example of why zoos are bad news.

Critics say that zoos are like prisons and that zoos drive many animals crazy by confining them. If the animals don't die of boredom, they snap and revert

to their wild nature, they say. Anti-zoo activists talk about big cats endlessly pacing back and forth in their cages, zoo elephants constantly swaying side to side, polar bears swimming in endless circles, and monkeys and parrots "grooming" themselves until they have no fur or feathers left.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is a leader in the anti-zoo movement. "PETA is firmly opposed to keeping wild animals in captivity," Lisa Wathne, the group's exotic animal specialist, told *Current Events*. "There are some animals, such as tigers and elephants, which roam large areas in the wild, that should never be held captive. Since 1990, there have been at least 220 incidents in 40 states involving big cats. Four children and 15 adults have lost their lives, and more than 50 other people lost limbs or suffered other injuries after being mauled." She points out that the animals are victims too: 75 big cats, including Tatiana, have been killed because of such incidents.

The solution? PETA and others say get rid of zoos.

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Non-fiction: Debate: Are Zoos Bad News?

Good News On Zoos

"Getting rid of zoos would be a tragedy for all animals," says Steve Feldman, senior vice president of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. He says zoos play a major role in educating people about animals and promoting wildlife conservation.

"If visitors never got to see an elephant or a tiger, they would not have that sense of awe and wonder and not be inspired to take action to conserve the wild," he says. "A National Science Foundation study showed that people who visit zoos actually change their behavior towards animals."

Feldman says most modern zoos work hard to keep animals from being bored or becoming neurotic. He rejects PETA's charge that animals in zoos are unhappy.

"Most zoo animals are thriving," he says. "It is animals in the wild who are not happy. Most of the time, they're running for their lives."