

# We're on the same side\_ How to...talk to those who are anti-zoo

Mon, Oct 02, 2023 12:32PM 57:26

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

animals, zoos, zoo, aza, talking, people, empathy, great, hear, question, aquariums, tiger, wild, chat, eggs, species, feel, explaining, volunteers, situation

## SPEAKERS

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo), Aszya Summers

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### **E** Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 00:06

Hey, folks. Hi, everybody, thank you for joining. You will not be hearing from me for a very long time, I will turn it over to Aszya shortly. Just want to make sure we get the majority of folks in the waiting room into the meeting before I do. So. Feel free to have your camera on or off, whatever is most comfortable for you. Awesome, still letting in some folks. So if you want to drop in the chat, your name and where you're joining us from today, that would be awesome. And it looks like folks have slowed down in terms of arrival from the waiting room. So Aszya, I'll go ahead and pass it over to you. Take it away.

### **A** Aszya Summers 01:07

Awesome. Hopefully everyone can hear me and see the screen. If at any point you can't let me know. And I'm also going to just start off by saying I have four cats and a bird. So if any chaos occurs, it'll just make it more fun. So thank you so much to everyone for joining us for this learning group today. My name is Aszya summers. I've been with the empathy network since it became a network. And I currently work at Lincoln Park Zoo in the development department. But the presentation I'm going to show today actually originated as a training that I used to do for my staff when I oversaw education and animal care at Racine Zoo. So parts of it we're going to talk about the training and then I kind of tweaked it a little bit for obviously you guys since this is a zoo audience, a little more advanced than an intern group coming in, which is the typical audience I originally did this for. So this is we're on the same side: how to talk to those who are anti-zoo. So what is zoo negativity or anti-zoo? I kind of wanted to start there. When I'm talking about this today, I'm talking about a really wide range of different things that can be zoo negativity. So this can be everything from I hate zoos, zoos are horrible. Let all the animals run free in the jungles of Illinois, I don't know. Or it could be the this animal sad. I hate what you do, that kind of negativity, anyone who's just kind of generally against zoos. And there's obviously a wide variety of different views and opinions that kind of fall under this bigger umbrella. But the question I really want to think about is why do people feel this way? I know everyone's still popping introductions in the chat. But if anyone feels comfortable or wants to

either unmute or pop in the chat, why you think people might feel anti Zoo? Or negative about zoos? What are some reasons? And I know some of you guys have been through my training so you guys should be experts. So a couple names that have done this before. Zoos history that's a big one zoo started off as menageries they weren't always for conservation. They used to be for entertainment, that can be huge one. Misinformation, I'm seeing different things like believing animals are taken from the wild. They feel bad because animals are locked up. Yeah, a lot of how they look some of the empathy related things for sure. misplaced empathy, small enclosures, things, you know, sometimes they see one enclosure, and they don't realize that that's not the only place that animals spends their whole time. So there's a lot of different categories here. But a lot of it is empathy. A lot of it is misinformation, right? So when I think why do people feel this way? I go even a little bit deeper than that. I think anyone who's anti zoo feels that way at its core for all of these different reasons. Because they care about the animals, right? If you are putting energy for us to be against zoos, it is probably because you're an animal lover, which is why I have the used to be more controversial less so as time goes on opinion that they're on the same side as us. Empathy goes for people to they might be dealing with a different set of information. And that's probably why they are coming in with that negative zoo feeling. But they are on the same team. They care about animals if we can get the same information to everybody, and they actually listen and understand what we're doing. They're probably going to be presumed right I'm talking to a roomful of people. Obviously there's a lot of bias here. But they are pro zoo, or they could be pro Zoo. So when you're having these conversations, the most important thing, and the thing I want to emphasize first is being positive. And remember that both you and them want what's best for the animals. We are not on opposite sides, right. So I think that's a really, really important thing to keep in mind. Especially you guys, your zoo experts, your empathy experts, is difficult as it can be, as this dog is showing, try to keep that positivity when you go into these situations. So there's a lot of things you can do when you're going into any kind of polarizing, emotional political issue. So this framework really works for any of these types of things. The number one thing to do, is listen, when people have opposing viewpoints, and people are very entrenched in their beliefs, one of the things that a lot of Social Research Institute's have found FrameWorks Institute as the one I'm thinking of right now, they don't listen to the other person. And even just in an argument with a friend or a significant other, you've probably experienced this, where everyone just is trying so hard to get their own perspective across. They don't understand the other side's perspective. And again, if the core issue here is different information that we're going in with different thought processes, listening and understanding their perspective is huge. Show them you understand what they're saying. I've found this to be really helpful when you have someone who is not good at this and everything you say they have no, no, no, you cannot flip that conversation positive. If they're just going no, no, no, right? sure a lot of you guys have experienced this. Repeat what they said back to them. The Tiger looks bored. Oh, you think our Tiger looks bored? I'm sorry to hear that. Right? Can they say no to that? No. They have to say, Oh, now we're on the same page. They're hearing me they're understanding me. And that's a really great way to kind of defuse a situation and begin to be able to redirect something like that. Remember, you don't know someone else's experiences background knowledge. So some of you guys are popping into the chat over here with things like the history of zoos or backgrounds. Not all zoos are the same. First off conservation as a concept didn't even really come to the public forefront until the 70s. That's not that long ago, that is 50 years ago. So any guest who is above 50. Remember remembers a time when conservation wasn't even a thought when the idea that human actions could impact wild animal populations was not widely accepted. So zoos were certainly not about that. We all know that zoos were about someplace to go for entertainment. Before that they were even a place to show how rich you were, look, I have enough meat for my family and the tiger chained up in the backyard. Right. And that might be all they know about zoos. They might know somebody that worked at a zoo

that is less respectable, right, they might have gone to a zoo that is less credible, they might have a friend who worked at one, they might only have a memory this is from a professor I had in college, her only memory was going to use as a kid where her and her grandma would throw popcorn at the animals. And that might be all they know. So you don't know where they're coming from or where they're maybe getting these opinions. So keeping that in mind, doing what you can to resolve the issue, which I'm going to talk about in a minute. But I do want to point out again, this started as a training. If someone's being aggressive, get someone else involved, if you're uncomfortable, get someone else involved. It is even if you're at a higher level where you don't have a supervisor to bring in still bringing in a second person can be really helpful. So you don't end up in any he said she said situations, getting an extra party involved can always be a good thing. So what are some of the resolutions that I find work really well. There's some reading the audience and for anyone who's an educator, you know, not the same direction is going to work for every person or every topic, but giving information about the exhibit, giving species specific traits, contextualizing what they're talking about with examples from the wild, personifying or empathy and perspective taking to me are all really great ways to defuse some of these negative zoo comments. So to put that into context, one that anyone who's had Tigers or a lot of different species have probably heard, it's the quintessential the tiger must be so bored. She's pacing so much. you overhear that you go, Oh, I don't like that they think that they off they care about the tiger. How do we get them to understand that this is actually a well cared for Tiger, you can use all of these different ways to explain that. So exhibit information. Talking about enrichment. Right? This is one that we go to a lot. Oh, they look so hot, they actually have access to a place to shade. One of the issues we used to have is all of our water features in the 90s when they were trying to make everything look naturalistic, they hid all the liquids. So now guests think all of our animals don't have water and are dehydrated all summer and just a simple thing, actually, can you see that weird pipe over there? That's water. So giving information about the exhibit, it can be that it's that simple. Species specific natural behaviors. So I would quite often address this comment. This is one of my favorites was saying, well, she is pacing. That's what Tigers do in the wild tigers are independent. And they actually spend the majority of their day pacing their area pacing their territory. If my tiger is walking in circles, I'm not worried. Now, if an Orangutan is walking in circles around their exhibit, that is probably a stereotypical behavior because they tend to wander they don't have defined territories. So explaining zookeepers know their animals know what's normal for that animal or what's not normal for that animal. And this is normal, it's not a sign of boredom can be helpful. You can also contextualize, that one was kind of a wild example, with more specific wild examples, like their habitats in the wild, there is a study and I can definitely find it and send it out, I probably should have found it in advance. In areas with greater prey abundance, Tiger habitats tend to be smaller. So what that says is that Tigers want a habitat that is a size, that is enough to get enough food, no bigger, which makes a lot of sense when you think about energy budgets and things like that, right? They don't want to patrol a huge area if they don't have to. Because in a zoo, we are giving them all the food that they need. They don't need a bigger territory, as long as they have enough to exhibit their natural behaviors play patrol, they are good to go. Personification talking about this tiger, had a great morning, and now she's taking a nap. She's an old lady, she deserves to have her naptime, right? She is, you know, a baby, and he was playing all morning, or whatever it is just explaining whatever your animal's personality is, we had a very senior Tiger at my last facility. And that was often what I would say, is yeah, if I'm 90, I'm taking naps all day to she gets up. She was just out, you know, two hours ago, playing with her chewing on her bone. today. It's bone day today. And right now she's just relaxing and taking a nap. And then the last one empathy and perspective taking in this example, would look, I would say the grocery store example. So yes, she is sitting. Humans could also potentially hunt for their food. But when I get all my food from the grocery store, and that's what I'm used to day in, day out. I'm much

happier sitting on my couch than chasing a chicken down the street. And so that always gets a chuckle from someone if you have someone more lighthearted. And then they go, oh, yeah, okay, I get it. Maybe she's not not bored. That's why she's napping. That's why she's pacing, things like that. She's just relaxed. So hopefully that makes some sense. Words is another thing I want everyone to kind of keep in mind. And I know the empathy network has a great resource of words to avoid. And a lot of times we avoid that to avoid some of those negative connotations. But also thinking about buzzwords, again, from the FrameWorks Institute, this actually came from climate change. But if you think about climate change what it used to be called global warming, or that change to climate change why? Now, global warming is a little misleading. But it also had a lot of quote unquote, brand recognition, if you think about it. So it wasn't just to make it more accurate that it changed. It changed because there was so much anti global warming in the 90s out there put out by entities, we don't need to get political here. But it became such a politically charged buzzword, that when people hear that term, their brain would immediately snap into preconceived notions. They, when you hear words that you've already heard and made an opinion about you're, you're less open to thinking of new ideas related to that term. That's why they change it to climate change. And actually now, best practices for teaching climate change. Some of you might know Minnesota says this, you don't actually use the term climate change at all. You just talk about the science and the facts. Because when you bring up those words that triggers those preconceived notions, the same can go for zoo negativity. It was so hard for me to avoid saying the word captivity for a very long time because it's a scientific term. And it just means the animals in human care. That's what it means. Why can't we use it? Because the second use captivity people snap back into some of those preconceived notions. When you talk about cage, they can snap back into those preconceived notions. So keeping in mind, you know, all of those words that we avoid in language and I'm not perfect about it. Say animals that live in the zoo instead of collection, animals, all of that great empathy language also can feed into building more positive associations when you're dealing with someone who maybe doesn't love zoos as much. So all of these work well for specific complaints when you have someone coming up to you saying XYZ about this animal, or the dreaded email with six of them that someone sends in after a day at the zoo. But what about just a general hatred of zoos? I have a few talking points that I would use in training for new staff, especially interns, volunteers and teens who might come in with wildly different knowledge bases than someone who comes in with a zoology degree and or internships under their belt. And I really think these are good things to think about and kind of list out and contextualize some of the ways to talk about why is these are important. So again, you can tell I have an education background, so I love when you guys give me answers in the chat or unmute. Why do zoos matter at their core? Not a rhetorical question, but why do they matter? Got some thinking, hopefully. Connecting people to green spaces, wildlife wild places, connections, access connections. Maybe provide a home the animals that can't live in the wild, conservation initiatives. Yup Lots and lots of connections, see an animal you might not otherwise get a chance to see. Teaching education, different styles, ensuring genetic diversity and survival of species. Yes. Absolutely inspiring action. Yes. I was hoping someone would say that. Conservation funds. I know I have a zoo audience here because I think we hit everything on my list. But a lot of people don't think about some of these things when they think about zoos, right? Zoo professionals, we live and breathe this day in day out. So these come to us pretty easily. But it is amazing how many volunteers never thought about anything outside of connection. So talking about breeding programs, what is an SSP? What is the population management center? You know, how, how are zoos impacting those wild populations? I always like to ask, name and animal that would be that would likely be extinct if not for zoo intervention. And I'm sure all of you can think of one or two that your institution likes to talk about all the time. So everything from the whooping crane, black footed ferrets Arabian oryx, there's so many examples. You guys know this right? I also like to talk about things like African

penguins. When I talk about breeding programs and conservation. And the nest building project. I always asked you know, okay, the guano issue they nest in guano, guano is being harvested growing populations, they need food to understandable. So who knows how to build a perfect next nest box to maximize reproductive success of African penguins? No one did. So they actually piloted that project in zoos and funfact. Zoos paid to put a bunch of nest boxes out there. Let's say encounter, a lot of you are familiar with that story. But stories like that I know there's many other examples that I'm sure you guys can come up with. Really make people understand how important zoos are because in the wild, you can't really use birds that are already struggling to get enough calcium to lay eggs to test these nests. Now they did later but those first drafts doing it in zoos. That's huge. That's a benefit of zoos that people don't think about the research that people do in zoos, both being able to tie, you know, fecal samples to blood and endocrine samples so that you can do more impactful non invasive research in the wild. Research on breeding in zoos. Breeding is obviously really important for species survival. I always like to give the sample of white-naped cranes who they could not figure out what conditions would make them breed. Why they weren't breeding in certain places, or certain years in the wild why they weren't breeding in zoos. And someone made the connection that they had more breeding success with sprinklers on. So they actually did a study and figured out that if you put sprinklers in with white-naped crane, suddenly they start laying fertilized eggs, because they lay eggs when the rains come, suddenly, not only do they know how to better propagate the species in zoos, they also had a better idea of what habitats in the wild to protect. marine mammals are another great example of this because they are so tricky to study in the wild. And we don't know so much about their habits. What we learn from research done in zoos can then connect to that field research. So those are all things that a lot of people don't even think about beyond the actual research, where you know, they're safe programs and zoos that have researchers working out in the field connecting people to nature. You guys all know this, it's more impactful to see an animal than see a picture in a book, not going to harp on that one. I think everyone here is an expert at that. Similarly, education and I do consider these two different things because the connection to me is the empathy and the emotional and the inspiration, but then the education that we do talking about All school programs curriculum based work, how people will retain more information. There was a study I read, where people will retain more information about history, if there's a cheetah in the room versus not. And just small things like that it gets people's attention. It's memorable again, most of you guys are experts on this. Conservation, funding work and expertise. I always love to point out how much money it comes from zoos. You know, this is one of those places where you say more people visit AZA institutions every year, then all professional sporting events combined when AZA put that out, and why zoos and aquariums matter? I think three. We all love that fact we all say that. But that also means that there is money coming in and while zoos are expensive, zoos also are committed to field research, conservation funding, and the majority of field funding does come from zoos, and work and expertise. This is another one that people don't think about a lot. Yes, and specifically, why zoos and aquariums matter? I can definitely find someone just asked in the chat. Sorry. If we could share some of these studies, I will definitely try to look for some of these and send them out after this. But the work and expertise for conservation funding is something a lot of volunteers, interns, teens coming in, don't think about things like the Australian brush fires and everyone in the world wanted to go volunteer who had the money to do so. But they said we really only want people with marsupial burn experience. Who has that zoos, talking about the orangutan rehabilitation center in Borneo where a lot of the staffing comes from AZA zoos and safe sending keepers out in rotation, talking about oil spills and SANCCOB pulling volunteers and from New England Aquarium and other aquariums across the country who had the experience to feeding penguins who could help in that. So all of these are reasons, zoos matter that you may not think about when you're having these conversations. And all of these are different talking points you can bring up that

are really important. But that's great. But anti-zoo person might say, Okay, so these are doing some good. But none of that matters if the animals in your care are suffering. I agree. And that's then when you can go into some of those more general things that people might not think about when it comes to individual animal care. And again, I'm not going to dive into these deep with you guys. But just going through concepts like AZA standards, and enrichment. But also, choice choice is a big one that a lot of people don't talk about, that really changes people's perspectives when you talk about voluntary blood draws, you know, and again, empathy and having people picture you know, what does it feel like when you go to the doctor to get a shot? What is it like when you bring your dog to the vet, and a lot of people go, Oh, yeah, that's pretty bad. Now imagine how would you do that for a rhino and you get the boy, no, you just say step up, poke Good girl. That's all there is to it. Because there's a relationship built between keepers and animals, you know, them having the choice of where to go the the movement with Ambassador animals, for everything to be voluntary. All of these things also can be really great talking points. And again, you all know how to talk about these things. But they really can change perspectives, because there are things we take for granted a lot of keepers. In particular, don't think about people not knowing that the animals have choice. And when you get people who have that mindset that the animals are, quote, unquote, imprisoned, or, you know, the captive thought, knowing that those animals have choice and backing it up, again, some of the studies by Temple Grandin and some of the work by Temple Grandin while it was on livestock, it's a really good scientific basis for this. So you can play to the scientific, you can play to the emotional, there's many different directions that you can go when explaining that also, the individual animals have quality care. So I'm, oh, I did great on time. Amazing. I want to hear from some of you guys. So again, education background, I don't like just talking at a screen. So if you're not comfortable raising your hand, you can pop it into the chat. Or you can raise your hand and Emily or I will or I might pass it to Emily so only one of us is trying to pull people up and call on them. But feel free to put your little hand raise emoji of what have you heard and just had no idea what to say to that. And do you have a technique that works really well for you or something that I did that said that didn't work really well for you? Any of that kind of stuff to share? I know we mentioned we would love for people to come with thoughts, ideas, questions, feel free to pop those in the chat or raise hands and share out and if other people have answers to I would love to hear those The awkward moment where people gather their thoughts

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 25:06

Not a hand raised, but we do have one clapping emoji happening

A

Aszya Summers 25:10

Have you ever had that comment that just makes you go? Oh boy, what do I even say to that? Good chance to kind of brainstorm Oh, we got one in the chat. All right. Oh, and we got a raised hand. I'll do the one in the chat and then we'll move to Brian, I think. So I've had people who exist who shouldn't exist in animals should go to a sanctuary instead, how do I convince them this, it's essentially the same thing, even if they insist sanctuaries are different or better. That is a really good one, a common one that I'm sure a lot of us have heard are trying to push animals to move to sanctuaries. One of the things that I will encourage, especially if you have someone who's really passionate and wants to do research, is explaining USDA requirements versus accreditation requirements for zoos and aquariums. I never want to say that if you're not

AZA, you're bad. But there are really good standards for AZA zoos, and just generally standards that are above USDA. So when you're looking at a sanctuary, explaining they only have to meet a bar that's maybe this high. And you could be meeting a bar that is this high or this high for the animals and that every place is different. Talking about how zoos have ways to make sure that the public don't have as huge of a negative impact on welfare. Talking about all of the animal welfare or animal well being work that AZA zoos are doing can be huge. And just asking them sometimes if they don't want to go down the science road, or they're talking over your you can't get into that more detailed thing. Just saying, hey, in your brain, what is the difference between a sanctuary and a zoo? Because in my brain, they're essentially the same thing. And it's just each individual one that's different, but what do you think? And that might also help you kind of hone in on what that might be what that difference might be.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 27:06

Awesome. Brian, did you want to ask your question?



27:20

All right.

A

Aszya Summers 27:24

Maybe circle back to Brian. And go, I think there's another hand raised.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 27:30

Yeah, Camoya go ahead,



27:31

Can y'all hear me? Yep. Okay, great. Um, I do programming in my day to day job. And so that just means I talk to a lot of different people. And one of the techniques that I think really works is just validating people's criticism of the zoo, because zoos have a long history. And it's kind of muddled with not so great things. And what's nice is that we've been evolving. And maybe those folks don't necessarily know what ways that we've evolved. And so like, one of the things that I just do is like, great, you should be critical of institutions that have live animals. And most zoos are like Staples in communities. So that's another reason to be critical of the institution. And so I feel like when I immediately do that, people automatically, like, put down their, like, super defensive guard, because I think they expect me to go Wait, no, but zoos are this or this, and this, and this. But I just I think acknowledging that zoos are consistently evolving and adapting to be better. is, I think, really helpful to like, kind of break down those barriers for people who might just think a lot about like, what zoos are like in the 60s? You know, like something like that. So that's a technique that I tend to use when folks come to me, just, yeah, a little bit frustrated about zoos.

A

**Aszya Summers 29:11**

Yeah, Camoya thank you so much for sharing that. And that hits on a really good point that I didn't cover, which is, you know, I talked about listening, but I didn't say you might not be the one who's right. You know, there are valid arguments. There's zoos are changing and evolving, and not just like you were talking about, which is a great point from the 60s to today. But even in the last few years, if you look at the changes that have been made in elephant and chimpanzee regulations, where we are moving them to larger spaces with more social groups, because we learned that that improves their welfare, right? So listening and hearing them out and also being humble enough to know we don't know everything either and we are constantly reevaluating, and figuring out how to do best for our animals. One example I once had someone tell me I can't see the zebras, it's so overgrown up there. And like, while we keep some stuff a little overgrown to make sure that you know, they feel comfortable and you know what? They're like I couldn't see them at all. So I'll go take a look up there. And yeah, we've had some training issues and a recent baby zebra and things are chaotic. And the keeper had let them brush go, we didn't have a horticulture team. And I Oh, you know, you were right, we will go cut a couple of our windows up there. Thank you so much for letting me know. So those points, and I think that kind of ties in really well, to a great question, Joanne put in the chat, too, about how do you address situations where the zoo is making changes, because it's a poor situation for the species. So facing a species out because there isn't adequate space, like sometimes chimpanzees, elephants, habitat options, progress is good, but it may not mean it's an ideal solution. Joanne that is also a really good point. And one that I like to address. A lot of times, you just have to be honest. And you know, so yes, this animal, you know, has all their welfare needs met, they have this great diet, they have all these things. But you're right, we are wrong on that one, you know, this elephant should be in a bigger space with other elephants. And we are working towards him moving in two years we are a nonprofit working to do what we can for the animals, and that will be happening blank, you know, and just just being honest, and explaining because they know that we are people too, and they know that things aren't perfect. And if we constantly just puff out our chests and pretend that everything is always perfect and hunky dory in the zoo world, which it is not we know this, we lose that authenticity, and we're going to lose that trust with the public. If we can't admit where our faults are, and why we're trying to improve or say, you know, that's a really great point. So I think in those situations, honesty is really good. And I think that's something that's been happening a lot more with the new generation who are coming into the zoo field post, you know, black fish, and some of that is we are a lot more transparent in what we're doing. And I think that is huge. All right, maybe go back to another hand, raise another chat question.

E

**Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 32:02**

Yeah, we have a chat question that kind of ties to that honesty one, from Kira and if I'm pronouncing your name, right. It says we have a decent amount of guests who are frustrated by animal choice and feel like what's the point of seeing a zoo if they can't be seen um they being the animals? I struggle with answering that well.

A

**Aszya Summers 32:20**

Yeah, and that is one, that's probably the biggest complaint that zoos get for that, I mean, there's there's only so much you can say to that particular one other than explaining that they

have choice. And just saying, you know, we're doing our best because we put our animals first you are coming here, I know to have a good time, but you're also supporting a conservation organization. And we really appreciate your support. Also, did you see, you know, and you can kind of redirect. And that's more of an educator hat. What else is interesting that they might be able to see, what is an interesting fact? Is there a time that you know that that animal might be more active? You know, are there ways that you can resolve it with some of those customer service education things, but I mean, that's a hard one. And it's a good problem to have, because we know that the animals are getting those choices now. And we're not locking animals on exhibit or restricting exhibits, just for guests entertainment anymore. And then sometimes that history angle on that one can be good, too. And then we aren't just for entertainment anymore. Welfare comes first.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 33:24

Angelica looks like you've got your hand up.



33:28

Yeah, thanks. So basically, like, just sorry, my radio is on Um, basically, this this chat has also gotten me thinking about people that I know that are, again, like genuinely good people, just misplaced empathy, or they are fans of peta or they get their information about the zoos, zoos from these organizations. And the general thing that I've heard is that these words tend to somehow speak louder than zoos in terms of what's really going on in zoos like in AZA zoos at least and like, do you feel like that's true? And if so, I'm would you think that there's some ways we need to like brainstorm to speak louder, or do you think it's, yeah,

A

Aszya Summers 34:28

it's a really good point. So louder is is an interesting word. And this is my personal opinion. I always I should have done it, at this time I'd like to preface that I have a bias because I wanted to work in zoos since I was three. So I like zoos. I've worked in zoos for 15 years. But louder is a weird term in today's world, in my personal opinion, with social media and algorithms the way they are. I feel like if you already have people in your circles, or predisposition to thinking In PETA's direction or in an animal rights direction, you're going to see more animal rights content, you're going to hear it more from your peer group from those internet sources. And if you have more of an animal welfare perspective, and you're, you know, into zoos or that's more in your circle, that's probably what's going to be louder. And that question is a massive societal question that we don't I think have time to fully address today. I do think that zoos are doing a lot better job of trying to be louder. I mean, working at Lincoln Park Zoo louder and prouder is our current PR strategy. internally. This really started with the zoo on Animal Planet that Bronx Zoo put out. And I think that was a fantastic start. More zoos are showing behind the scenes, videos, training demonstrations, that was my first big Empathy Project was public training demonstrations at the zoo I was working at because I feel like that is the strategy to exactly what you're saying, being louder, we have this great work that's being done. That's interesting, that's engaging. And so letting people see behind the scenes instead of what it was when I started in zoos, which was no one ever sees behind the scenes. No one ever gets to know what goes on back there. We keep it quiet, because they might twist it and put it the wrong way. And

then we'd know just tell people stop hiding it. Because when we're hiding it, we look fishy. And people think we are fishy. So to me, I think that's the biggest strategy to trying to drown out some of the other things. But the other piece is just what we're doing as educators building scientific literacy. I don't want anyone to listen to my talk. And just think zoos are great now, any more than I want them to listen to a PETA talk and thinks these are horrible. The more people who are thinking critically and doing their own research, the less that problem is going to be. So keep educating. All right.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 36:46

All right. Next question from the chat. From Katie, what do you say if somebody gives an example? You don't know if it's true or not? Here's a made up example. Quote at such and such AZA zoo, I heard that the primates are not given any enrichment at all, my friend is a volunteer there.

A

Aszya Summers 37:04

So with these sometimes the first thing I always say and this is if it's that, or I heard hippos have no teeth, you know any of those weird stuff, saying, never just going out with a no, because again, then you're being the polarizing voice of just shutting everything down, saying, Hmm, that's interesting. I have never heard that. And in that specific example, I might then give some evidence why it would be unlikely like, that would be really crazy to me, because AZA requires enrichment. And actually, USDA requires enrichment for some animals like primates. So I would imagine that they would probably not just lose their accreditation, but get shut down for something like that. That's really interesting. There's regular inspections and things like that. So I'd be surprised if that were true. But definitely something that I will read up on and learn more about, you know, because then you're not putting them down. You're not saying you're wrong, but you're still giving them reasons that they're probably wrong, right? Because they have firsthand experience or thoughts in their head. And you're not going to be able to just say no, that's that's not going to be functional, but giving them reasons why that would be shocking, that can then tie into some of those talking points is usually how I like to personally handle that. And I'm answering all these questions that if other people have other answers, there's a lot of talented educators in this room. So feel free to pop in chat or raise your hand if you have an alternative strategy to some of these too

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 38:27

Yeah, definitely. Um, there's been a lot of good questions in the chat and a lot of good answers both from folks in the chat and from you Aszya, And so what I'm planning on doing after this is going back through the recording, and like writing these things down, and people can reference those afterwards, as well. So yeah, this information will not be lost. Rin, I see that your hand is up?

i

38:50

Can you hear me? At our zoo we have a few animal species that are solitary animals, And I get a lot of questions from people who struggle seeing animals maybe like by themselves or alone

a lot of questions from people who struggle seeing animals maybe like by themselves or alone in an exhibit. And they don't necessarily respond well to the answer that well, this animal just likes to be alone. Is there any, like further information or better ways to communicate that?

A

Aszya Summers 39:22

That's a really good question. And sometimes, too, it depends on why is that animal alone? Because there's usually one of two reasons. It's, well, one of them could be you're waiting on a rack and someone passed away, which is an easy one. I think most people accept that as an answer. It's usually either that species is solitary, or that individual prefers to be solitary. So those can be a little bit different. If it is the individual. There's probably a reason your institution knows that. And that's pretty easy. You can give that example again, transparency. Now, I know some people might have a reason that your institution is not willing to share with the public. And that can be a trickier situation. But if there's any way you can talk around it or allude to it without violating institutional policy, but I think what you're probably getting at Rin is more the species specific being solitary. So something like a tiger, great example. If just saying, you know, they prefer being alone doesn't work, talking about, you know, you never find these living in a group, you know, moms will live with their offspring for a few years, and then they tend to go off can be a good one or even, you know, sometimes you get that you gotta go to their level and kind of be a little less professional guy, you know, the big gruff guy, or someone who's joking with me, and seems jovial, but not about it saying, like, yeah, if I put another tiger in there, they kill each other. What? And then they're, like, interested in interacting with you. And it's a little less professional. But it's, it's a true fact. Right? And explaining that I'm talking about it from that direction can be another strategy. It's a tricky one. But those are some things that have worked for me.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 40:56

All right, going back down through that chat. Question from Jesse, which I think is an interesting one. When it comes to giving examples of animal care and well being Do you ever use comparisons to domestic animals or pets to help people understand? Or do you try to draw clear distinctions between wild animals and domestics? And since a bunch of us in this org all come from different sizes and have different visitors to our zoos, I think Aszya if you haven't answered this question, and then if other folks have ways that they do it as well, because I'm imagining it's going to differ from org to org. Definitely feel free to raise your hand or puppet put it in the chat as well.

A

Aszya Summers 41:37

Yeah, for me on this one, yes. And no, it depends. And again, some of it comes from reading the audience. If it's someone who's like, Oh, he's so cute, I want one, I'm not gonna probably use domestic animals with that person. But they're also probably not going to be the one who are anti Zoo. When I'm talking about anti zoo, for me, personally, I will use comparisons to domestic animals. Because that's something relatable to people in a lot of cases. Now, obviously, then there's the general captive, and people who think you shouldn't even have pets because of animal rights. And in that situation, you can use domestic animal things, you're probably not going to get very far and on that extreme opinion, but things like I was I was even using a domestic example earlier with voluntary blood draws and how animals have choice.

And how the animals at the zoo have fantastic vet caring and if your pet sees about once a year, and that is a great pet owner by the book, you're doing amazing. Ours see the vet at minimum once a year, and they're seen by an experienced tech who's basically a vet tech keepers are pretty close, every single day, you know, comparing the diets to the diets of yourself or your pets at home. So I do use those in these cases. If someone's anti-zoo they're probably not someone who's going to get a pet chimpanzee at home. So a little bit of reading the audience for me on that one, but I'd be interested. I know we have a lot of questions. Also, I'd be interested to hear of other people have thoughts on that one, like Emily said. While we're waiting, I'll just address Trinity's comment adding to animal choice, also talking about keepers working to find preference preference studies supporting animal well being. I'll even tie into that, you know, though the welfare assessments and animals have yearly as a great talking point. So it's a really good point on that one Trinity. Anyone come up with other thoughts on domestics before we move on to the next question? Oh, you're muted.

**E** Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 43:52

Ah, dang it. Okay. Kira, I found comparing and contrasting domestic pets versus farm animals versus zoo animals is really helpful. The farm in comparison really drives things home.

**i** 44:05

Awesome, really good point.

**i** 44:09

and also enrichment. Because we have an enrichment program and I think I talk a lot about just domestic pets and what people are the types of enrichment that people give to their own pets. And just kind of relate that to what our keepers do for our animals. That's a very popular link that I do consistently.

**A** Aszya Summers 44:32

Yeah, and even training, dog training versus training zoo animals, positive reinforcement, a lot of those talking points we all have in our back pockets for sure. Thanks, Camoya.

**E** Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 44:46

All right we have another question in the chat. Moira. How do you respond to criticism that AZA is made up of quote, industry insiders, and thus accreditation isn't as meaningful? It's a good question.

**A** Aszya Summers 44:58

That was a really good question. And I've actually never gotten that one before. Because I feel

like in general, the public does. The public who's anti zoo don't tend to be that knowledgeable about AZA. But you can definitely get the disgruntled ex zookeeper and things like that there too. without getting overly zoo political, there is a lot of politics in the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. There's also a lot of politics in the US government. But we still need laws. You know, that's kind of one of the ways that I think about it. It there is possibility that there are industry insiders, and there is possibility that it isn't as meaningful. But I do think that as is important, I think talking about the fact that there are teams of experts, there's not one person who's making these decisions, some of the transparency to what goes on with AZA, and then also just broadening it to, you could talk all day about AZA, and if it's good or bad, I personally believe that it is overall good, but has its issues like any large organization does. But you don't necessarily have to focus on AZA as the only standard or the only talking point. And frankly, there are fantastic zoos and aquariums that are not part of AZA that are still doing an absolutely fantastic job for their animals. Whenever I talk about AZA and an onboarding, I always say, you know, I've only worked in AZA, I've volunteered at other fantastic places. AZA is not the end all be all, you still have to do your own research on an institution if you want to learn more about it, because not every place is the same. AZA is a stamp that might make you feel that they're better. But you still have to look into it yourself, because every place is different. And then you can also point out that places lose accreditation, it happens it happens frequently. And a lot of them have people that are you know, have held high up positions within the AZA board and things like that. So it is not just a rubber stamp, there definitely are processes and people do lose accreditation for welfare concerns.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 47:04

Awesome. Thank you. Um, next question is from Lindsey. In your opinion, how does one best address questions and concerns about animal escapes? Like bird fly offs? This is especially hard because those situations don't always end well.

A

Aszya Summers 47:20

Yeah, that is a good question. I would again, definitely invite anyone who has good thoughts or spins on that one, because even I'm sitting here thinking a little bit. I mean, I think some of it is just things happen. And it's unfortunate, and it's horrible. Things happen in the wild. And it's unfortunate, and it's horrible. And we do our best and we're not perfect. I think that's kind of the big one there. When it's a sad situation, when it's recent, when it's close to people's hearts, I don't think I would go this direction. But if someone's just asking kind of a more general question, you can also talk about stories where animals have, quote, unquote, escaped, and were found in a tree two feet from their enclosure, or breaches of enclosure, where the animal didn't even bother to leave, because they're so content, and they see it as their territory. So some of those counter examples and like it happens because an animal gets spooked. You know, a lot of times, specifically thinking of a bird fly off on a flight show. A lot of times it's because a raptor flew overhead, and they panicked and not because they hate their life. Right. But if it is, again, more recent, more emotionally sensitive, just being sensitive to that, and like, yeah, you know, I had to think a lot about that too. But these things happen. And he still had a fantastic life. And in the wild, he could have been preyed. And this is just sometimes what happens. And not trying to say, well, we could we were better. We're like, especially if it's a mistake, like we're human, we made a mistake. We messed this one up. And just being honest and open again, is a really good strategy for a lot of these. Hopefully, we all believe what we're doing. And in a lot of these really tricky cases, just being honest, can be the best policy.

**E** Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 49:02

There is a response in the chat to this question too, from Ryan says I like to compare animal escapes to my cat's trying to slip out of the front door when it opens. Their home is my apartment. They aren't intending to escape their home and leave forever. They're just curious and don't know the danger that lies outside their home.

**A** Aszya Summers 49:20

That's good, a great empathy approach to that one, too. I like it.

**E** Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 49:23

Yeah. As an owner of a cat who frequently tries to go exploring. Yeah, that's a good answer.

**A** Aszya Summers 49:30

My cats have double containers for that reason. Just like in a zoo.

**E** Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 49:36

Awesome. Um, we have about 10 minutes left. So there's Oh, I'm Camoya says highlighting the importance of safety that the zoo has for the community. Yeah, we don't want semi dangerous animals walking around to hurt someone. Yeah. Thanks for adding that.

 49:52

Little thumbs up. Awesome.

**E** Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 49:56

We do have about 10 minutes left. We have a couple of time for a couple of extra questions, if anybody has them.

**A** Aszya Summers 50:04

Yeah. And as negative and hard as these conversations are, I always like to point out to you remember why we're here, we're here for them, we're making their lives better. And even if people can be negative about our work, just go look at a rhino. And you'll feel better. Don't worry. Any other questions, questions for me questions in general questions for everyone?

Have you ever seen this kind of stuff? If not, and this is also to fill space. So don't feel like you can't put in a question. While I'm talking. I do just want to thank everyone, not just for coming, but also for sharing thoughts and your questions and your answers in particular. I know especially with Zoom, we, it's hard to speak up and speak your mind, especially on such a sensitive and difficult topics. So I really, really appreciate how many of you guys jumped in and shared thoughts, shared comments, things like that, and made this a really great interactive conversation rather than me just talking at you all, because I do not know everything. Nobody knows everything. I am far, far from it. So I really, really appreciate that.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 51:17

And I am not seeing anything come through the chat. Oh, I said that. And then question popped in. Stunning. All right. This is from Katherine, how do you respond to conversations about birth control or using dummy eggs for birds? It's important, but a lot of people don't love the idea of us taking eggs or preventing birth.

A

Aszya Summers 51:37

Yeah, and that's a really good question that can even extend to other birth control forms in zoos, and aquariums. Honestly, less so aquariums unless there are mammals and birds. This empathy approach can work, and just kind of saying we don't have space, and it's a humane way to keep things together. But dummy eggs, I think is a great answer to taking the eggs and explaining like they want to go through and have this nest. So we put the dummy eggs in explaining re clutching explaining some of the calcium deficiencies. I think for that one, it's just a lot of again, that honesty and there's so many different situations, right? We don't have space, this is over represented, there's a genetic issue. Whatever the reason, may be, this male certainly pushes the eggs out of the nest and they crack anyway. So we took them to incubate them, whatever the situation is, because there's a trillion different reasons with birds in particular, really any animals that we do that birth control can really help. So just again, that honesty approach for those whatever the circumstances,

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 52:44

oh, I'm not a bird person. I don't know if anybody else in this audience is also like me and not a bird person. Can you explain what re clutching is? Don't think I've heard that before.

A

Aszya Summers 52:53

Yeah, so it's, it's really common in a lot of species of birds, if something happens to their eggs, so a human comes in and takes them or a predator comes in and takes them to lay more eggs. Right? If it's still early enough, in the season, they do that. If things keep happening to their eggs, and they keep laying more eggs in like a zoo situation, the female will start to get, could start to get calcium deficiency issues from the eggshell and having to create that other nutritional deficiencies. And the more eggs laid the higher chance of egg bound birds where the egg kind of gets stuck. And it's a veterinary medical emergency. So they just kind of will re clutch relay eggs.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 53:31

Gotcha. That makes sense. Thank you. I don't know that. All right, I think this may be our last question. This is from Rin. We recently had a musk ox calf born and many people have started asking the question, will the parents stay with? Or will the baby stay here with the parents forever? How do you approach knowing there's a chance that a baby may move for SSP or for breeding, I've heard frustrations from guests surrounding animals moving.

A

Aszya Summers 54:01

That's a good one that I think all of us have probably seen before. This isn't possible for everyone. But for me in my previous role, I was in charge of our PR as well as everything else about the animals. So pushing for those initial press releases to talk about SSPs. And even if, you know they don't want to say that it's leaving or not yet, saying that, you know, this is part of an SSP, where animals are moved around the country and what that is and trying to prep guests for that from the beginning can be really helpful in kind of starting that conversation and prepping because I think a lot of it comes from the shock especially for your your members and volunteers who feel a sense of you know, connection to the offspring, watching them grow up. Some species I don't know a lot about muskox. But for some species, you can also talk about natural dispersal, you know, and that wild type approach, or even just saying like, well, it's time for him to grow up and go, you know, have his own family. He has to leave the nest. You know, he's gonna move on to A bachelor herd, you know, we all have that age, we love our babies when they go out, you know, so there's different empathy approaches to, depending on the species, but because it can be such a shock with those just kind of trying to prep people as early in the baby's life as possible so that they know their baby might have to go away, something can help.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 55:21

Awesome. Well, thank you so much Aszya, for leading this conversation and facilitating the discussion. This was one of our biggest non summit or network meeting learning groups in terms of attendance. So thank you all for coming and contributing to this conversation. And I definitely don't think it's a conversation, that's going to close when this meeting ends. And so we could definitely continue this and other spaces. And like we said, there, this is being recorded. So the recording of this event will go up, we can gather those resources that Aszya mentioned and talked about, as well as share the kind of FAQ document that will make when we'll share all of those in conjunction with this recording being posted on the website. So you can reference anything that we talked about today, after the meeting. And I saw that Aszya, you just dropped your email in the chat. They're gonna go ahead.

A

Aszya Summers 56:21

Yeah, just if you have questions, feel free to reach out or if there was a specific resource I mentioned, because I've read a lot of papers for fun, because I'm that kind of nerd. So I might not remember everything I referenced. If there's one, you're like, oh, I want that for a grant or something like that. Feel free to shoot me an email, and I'll see if I can dig it up.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 56:37

Awesome. Thank you. All right. Well, thank you guys all for attending today. And being a part of this conversation, and you're getting some thank yous pouring in the chat. So great job, Aszya. Round of applause. Awesome. All right. All right, everybody. We will talk to you later. Have a wonderful rest of your day. wonderful rest of your week. And thank you for coming for our first fall earning group. Bye everyone.

A

Aszya Summers 57:06

thanks, everyone.