

RECOMMENDED VOCABULARY

Words That Matter

OUR WORDS SHAPE GUEST PERCEPTIONS

The way we refer to the animals in our care directly shapes the way guests perceive animal wellness.

This list provides alternatives for some more commonly used words in the zoo lexicon that have become outdated or do not fully express the thoughtfulness and professionalism of our care program. The list also targets alternatives for jargon terms so that we can make our work accessible and understandable for all. These alternatives are preferable when talking with guests or writing materials for signs, social media or other communications to the public.

Instead of:	Use:	Because:
Cage, enclosure, exhibit	Habitat, home, indoor space, bedroom, den	“Cage” and “enclosure” have very negative connotations. “Exhibit” implies that the animals are here for our enjoyment/viewing pleasure instead of contributing to conservation.
Captivity, captive	In human care, managed care, conservation care, zoo-housed	“Captivity” doesn’t capture the thoughtfulness of how we care for animals. It can connote deprivation and punishment, which we do not do.
Captive breeding programs	Conservation breeding programs	Our breeding programs contribute to the conservation of threatened and endangered species.
Caught, captured	Received, rescued, wild born	It’s important to explain more accurately how animals come into our care.
Collection	Animals in our care, animal residents	“Collection” implies inanimate objects and doesn’t reflect the true relationship we have with the animals.
Commands	Cues	Our animals always have a choice as to whether they want to participate in training. We don’t “command” them to do anything.
Industry	Zoo community, Zoo friends, Zoo family	“Industry” can have an impersonal or negative connotation that implies a business without care.
Institution	Zoo/Aquarium, campus, organization	
Knockdown	Immobilization*	We do not “knock down” our animals. *Note: This word can present as jargon which might make its meaning inaccessible to some audiences. Consider the age and background of your audience, and explain the meaning behind this and other medical terms when necessary.
Lifespan	Life expectancy	Life expectancy is a more accurate reflection of a natural life’s course. Lifespan can refer to the maximum number of years of life possible.
Shipping	Transporting, transfer, move	“Transporting” or “transferring” is a more accurate reflection of the ways we move animals within and between facilities. “Shipping” sounds like UPS.
Shows or performances	Animal experiences or training demonstrations	The animals in our care are not here for our entertainment. We share animal experiences with our guests to both help them understand our role in conservation as well as what actions they can take. It’s OK to use the term “show” to refer to an entire program, like we do at Wildlife Theater.
The wild	Natural range or natural habitat	Natural range/habitat speaks more directly to the animal and their natural state. Can include specific geographies, e.g. “Lemurs in Madagascar” rather than “Lemurs in the wild.”
Tricks	Behaviors, behavioral training	Tricks don’t serve a purpose whereas the behavioral training we do allows the animals to take an active role in their care.
Visitors, customers	Guests	A guest is someone you want to welcome and with whom you want to build a relationship.

Words That Matter, *cont..*

VOCABULARY THAT NEEDS CONTEXT

This smaller group of words is not necessarily problematic on their own but they do require context and we should be careful how they are used.

Cute, Fun

We can find joy in the wonders of wildlife while still setting a tone that we revere animals and are committed to their conservation. Where possible, use more engaging words that celebrate those connections or provide context so that people can connect beyond surface level descriptions.

Diet

As guests often associate the term “diet” with weight loss, “nutrition” speaks more clearly to the thought that goes into the array of foods we give animals in our care. Alternatively, use words such as food, breakfast, dinner or snack.

Intelligence

Animals are often compared to humans on the “intelligence” scale, which is inappropriate. All species are as intelligent as they need to be and in ways that support their success in their environment. Like in humans, there are some individuals that are “smarter” than others, but not at the species level.

Toys

The objects given to our animals serve a specific purpose: they help enrich them, allowing them to use their minds and bodies to stay physically and mentally healthy, although play is also important. As “enrichment” can come across as a jargon term, it’s OK to refer to “toys” within the context of how they are used to enhance an animal’s wellness.

