

Learning Group_ Empathy and biofacts Part II

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo), Austin Reich (Zoo Boise), Laurel Abbotts



Laurel Abbotts



Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 04:42

Okay, all right, hello, everybody. Welcome, welcome. I'm just gonna share my screen really quick for some little intro announcements. We'll wait a couple seconds for folks to get started. Can you all see, like, a really big blue slide on your screen? Okay, amazing. Glad that still worked, even though I didn't have everything all ready. And while we're waiting, if you just want to pop your name in the chat and the organization that you are joining from so we get a sense of who is all here today. That'll be great. And then I will go ahead and get us started in about 30 seconds or so, You Hi Annie, hi Shannon, hi Jean, hello. Liz, hello, hello, everybody, amazing. All right, we are going to be recording this, so I want to go ahead and hit record before I officially get started. Amazing. All right, welcome everybody to our empathy and biofacts learning group. This is kind of part two, a follow up to a learning group we hosted earlier this year on the similar topic. My name is Emily burnhardt. I am the empathy network specialist over at Woodland Park Zoo, and I use she her pronouns, and I'm super excited to be facilitating this event for y'all today. And for those of you, if you are new to the network, or maybe this is your first event of ours that you have attended, we are the advancing conservation through empathy for wildlife network, or the ACE for Wildlife network. And we are a network of primarily zoo of Maryam educators, and we facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experiences and data to drive conservation change through fostering empathy for animals in the environment that sustains them. So we operate off of this shared definition of empathy that you see on the screen here, that empathy is a stimulated emotional state that relies on the ability to perceive, understand and care about the perspectives of another person or animal. We currently have about 27 AZA accredited organizations that are a part of our network as partner organizations. So that means a whole kind of organization participates in the network, but we also have individuals worldwide that participate in our network as well. So between those affiliates and the staff members at our partner organizations, we have over 500 members and affiliates in the network today. Now we are going to do things a little bit differently in our learning group today than we've done in the past. So we have three folks that we'll be hearing

from. We've got Christine Austin and Bridget and usually with these we have done more like a presentation style learning group, where each person would talk for about 10 or so minutes, use usually a PowerPoint accompanied with that. And then after everybody presents, we open it for Q and A. But today we're going to switch it up a little bit and try and get a little bit more discussion focused. And so I have some questions that I want to ask our three main folks today. But of course, these questions are open to anybody. So if folks want to contribute in the chat, if you want to come off mute at any time and add to the discussion, you are more than welcome to after I have those four questions or so, and I run through those, we can open it up for larger discussion. Folks can ask questions of each other and other people in the room. So I highly encourage folks, if you're comfortable, to have your cameras on, feel free to come off mute or raise your hand, and I will be monitoring the chat the entire time, in case anybody would rather participate that way, and I can kind of be the voice from the chat. Does anybody have any questions about that before we kick it off. All right, Austin Bridget and Christine, I will leave it to y'all to introduce yourselves whenever you want to kind of hop in and answer the questions, but I'm going to go ahead and pop our first one in the chat and ask it so just to kind of get on a level playing field of understanding kind of what we're talking about at your organizations, how are biofacts utilized for what and by whom?



I'm happy to start. Hi everybody. My name is Bridget Cardenas. I'm a learning coordinator who works at Woodland Park Zoo. I primarily work with our volunteers, and I've been teaming up with our guest engagement team. We've been overhauling our biofact collection. Our biofact collection is mainly utilized by two groups. I would say the biggest ones are guest engagement team and volunteers, hence the partnership. But it's also utilized by keepers, by camp instructors, by a lot of different departments. Curators sometimes check these things out when they're doing special events, and we typically use them for different public programs. We have ones that are focused on different biomes, and then we also have ones that are more focused on some of our conservation partners. So our biofacts are utilized quite heavily by a lot of different teams.



Laurel Abbotts

And can you guys hear me? Okay, good, new equipment, figuring it out. My name is Chris Ness. I'm at the Minnesota Zoo. I have been working with our biofact collection for about 18 years, but just the last three years as kind of biofact coordinator, as being a significant part of my job for us, the two biggest groups that use them, our education team and our volunteer team. We have when we talk about biofacts at our zoo, we we don't include replicas or teaching tools or anything like that. We simply talk about biological remains of animals, and we have about 3000 pieces in the collection, and we've had some fun uses of them. The animal care or the animal health staff have used them to calibrate X ray machines and things like that. We had our behavior team use raccoon pelts to try and, I guess scare or train are soon to be rehabilitated wood turtles back into the wild. They tried to use that as, like a kind of adverse thing. So instead of like, seeing people good, they saw raccoon, scary runway type of stuff. But yeah, we've had stuff on site since 1978 so we have a long history of collecting.



Austin Reich (Zoo Boise) 12:10

And my name is Austin, and I'm sitting in for our Director of Education, who is ill today, but I'm the interpretation coordinator at Zoo, Boise, and part of that job is in is managing the biofacts that we have on site, and just trying to figure out how best to use and things like that. So it's nothing. So the main, it's not the main part of my job, but it's anybody's job. It's mine. So the people who use it are typically our education programs and our volunteers, however, they're open and available to be used by any staff as long as they can check them out. So we have had keepers who have maybe a nocturnal animal that they're going to talk about that's just asleep and isn't doing anything or covered by blankets. And they so they might bring a biofact out to kind of help have something to show people who are there to listen to them when you can't see the animal themselves. And for us, biofacts are not just biological remains in this and as it comes from animals, it also includes replicas and things like that.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 13:31

Awesome, and I see that Jessica put it in the chat. Biofacts are utilized by their education staff volunteers, including adult docents and zoo teens, and then used in programming like conservation stations, formal programs for groups and camps, as well as supplements for animal ambassador encounters, especially for animals that aren't able to be touched by guests. But they most recently had a request from our vet staff to use biofacts calls to practice new X ray techniques, which is so cool, and I didn't even think about that as a like use for biofacts Until now, but that's makes total sense, and thank you for adding that in the chat. Our next question for folks, what does it mean to apply empathy practices or an empathy informed mindset to your biofact collections. And something I want to add to this, if Austin or Tierney or Austin or Christine want to elaborate on this, is like, does that look different with your replicas versus your animal specimens?

A

Austin Reich (Zoo Boise) 14:38

I can go first, since I went last, time. So for us, it's it's honest, it's most often reminding people that to kind of treat the biofacts, or volunteers, especially, and staff, to kind of treat the biofacts with a lot of respect. We really don't have that issue with staff for the most part, because oftentimes they may not have known the animal that it came from, but they know the story of it, whereas zoo teams or nationals volunteers, or this is their first year, or they're fairly new, it's just another it's another object. So kind of explaining those stories and infusing empathy with those with the biofacts helps kind of instill a sense of perspective, and then how they format, talking about it becomes a little bit more formalized. And that's a good caveat. I'm not sure. I think there is subconsciously a difference. When they're like, Oh, this is plastic, whether it's I think they're a little bit more they like. They allow the kids with maybe the sticky hands to touch the replicas, rather than, if it's a pelt, they're like, you gotta clean your hands first. So I think subconsciously there's a difference. But I haven't thought about that specifically before. That's a good question.



Laurel Abbotts

Um, for us, we have been working extremely hard to create that kind of that empathy with our volunteers and staff. But more than anything, I think talking about when we when we collect from our collection on site, working with the staff, we are blessed here at the Minnesota zoo

that our staff, animal care staff, animal health behavior, everybody is pretty on board with collecting from our from our own collection with very few restrictions. And we kind of go about that with, you know, we are very transparent in our process, you know, we actually, we have a list, and it's, you know, we need to, we want to collect from the following species. And here is why. It's either an animal that's in the collection that we have no physical way. Let's say somebody who is blind comes to the zoo. We have no way of physically showing them how big this is, and so we take it that way. Or it's an animal that was extremely important to the history of the zoo in general. Or there are some species where, you know, I look at our Bali, Myna, we have no intention of saving them for us. But if somebody else in the scientific community, you know, since they're so endangered, they're critically endangered, is that a scientific get for somebody else? And so we've talked about that, you know, we tell them why we're collecting, we also say why we're not collecting something. I have a lot of keepers who get a little upset. They feel like maybe we've wasted, wasted an animal by not collecting. And, you know, we only need so many Tiger pelts. We only need so many, you know, things and so being really transparent and having a plan so people are you're not making those emotional decisions the morning of the worst morning of somebody's zoo career, right? You're kind of planning ahead. I invite all the keepers up whenever they want to come in to see a piece or just see the space. Yep, bring it in. Come on in and see it. We'll bring it out. I probably over communicate with the staff, because I don't want anybody to go. I didn't know that. I'd rather have them go. Oh god, there's another email from Chris. I'd rather have that happen 100 times, and most of I guess, for like for us with the empathy, just mindset, at least with me when I'm collecting pieces, you know, it's private messages to the staff, I'm so sorry. Or it's, you know, you're thankful, you're thoughtful, you're professional. I make sure that when I pick something up at Animal Health to take it to the taxidermist, I don't go on the radio saying, Hey, I'm here for, you know, blah, blah, blah. I don't want anybody to know that I'm doing that. I want it to just be on the down low. And you know, you honor the loss of your coworkers. And I think the biggest change for us through this whole empathy process is we have been empowered to honor the life of the animal. And so we tell the entire story of that animal, if we know it from, you know, looking up like, hey on December 3, 1992 he ate three pounds of whatever, you know. And just we have, actually, I just recently refused. We had a sea otter that passed, and we're going to have his skull prepared. But I actually refused and took and refused to have done his pelt, because they only took a small section of it, and he didn't live his life in a section. He was a full animal. And so we can get US Fish and Wildlife pelts that are full. And I didn't want him to be a piece, because he wasn't a piece. And so talking with your keepers on that level, like I said, we're blessed. I've had animals pass away, and I've had keepers call me at home before the vets even let me know what's going on. So empathy for our staff has been, I think, first and foremost for us when we talk about biofacts and empathy.



Uh, so I think for us, uh, since we're in the middle of kind of rethinking biofacts as a whole, so we've been approaching this whole process by incorporating empathy into every part of it. So even an obvious part of this process is we were evaluating, what should we even keep? What is our evaluation criteria? What stays, what goes, and we were thinking about the different nuance messaging of all the different pieces. So like, it's really interesting to hear how some of you guys are kind of using these almost for, like pathology, because we primarily, almost exclusively, use ours for guest engagement, or, I would say, training other staff and volunteers. So we actually had a gray wolf skull. It was an older gray wolf had two fruit abscess and a lot of bone degradation along the jaw. But we decided that we would de accession that piece, because a guest might look at that and think, Is that how you care for your animals? Do you

allow them to get that sick? We don't know the origin of that particular piece, but we don't want a guest walking away, we've realized that how we take care of our animals after they pass, if we use them as part of our Education Collection, is also a reflection of how we care for our animals today, in the here and now. So if or for example, some pelts, some pelts were we actually it was really interesting, Christine, what you were saying about the pieces. We've actually taken some of our some of our whole pelts, and turned them into pieces because the hole was in such poor repair. But there were good sections that we felt the empathy value was actually better with it as a section rather than as a whole. And part because some of them, I don't know, some of them almost look like they weren't, but it looked like if I was a guest cigarette, holes in them, things like that. Admittedly, our collection is only about 1000 pieces, and since we're overhauling we're not looking to add right now. So some of our decision making is based on that. We're not really adding too much, so much as making sure everything that we have is cataloged correctly and has a new labeling system. But So first it's even in just the evaluation criteria, what are we keeping? We've put a ton of emphasis on, how are you presenting it? I've seen and heard from volunteers in the past that sometimes and they didn't mean anything by this, but it has it gives the wrong message to guests. So people may be putting things over their shoulder like a pelt, which kind of gives the impression of your wearing for whereas instead, you can present it across your arm like that, which is much more respectful and empathetic, or even just, you know, making sure you're not goofing off with the bio. Fact, if there's children, you know, I've seen kids try to stick their fingers and where the nose is and like and so it's, how do you guide that experience to keep it empathetic? How are, what are the subconscious messages people are taking away from that encounter, whether it's the quality of the piece or how you're presenting it. And then also, I would say, we've been looking at everything. I feel like biofacts is tricky because in a lot of ways, it's inherently inaccessible, because sometimes you're working with a really heavy object or something that not everybody can transport. But we've been working really hard to find ways to make our collection more accessible to more people, so we've also trying to then be more empathetic towards our different users of that space as we rethink how it's utilized. So since we've had the pleasure of overhauling we've just been incorporating it everywhere. We teach everybody. We treat it like a library, and every person's a librarian, and you and these are really incredible teaching tools that we have the privilege to use. And you need to make sure that things are returned in good condition where they're supposed to be returned, and that even the packaging of how everything is packed up is a show of your care for that animal, and you should treat it with the same respect as if that animal was alive and in front of you. And that's across the board, whether it's a bone clone or an actual skull.



Laurel Abbotts

Yeah, and I should say that we have pieces. It's just the, I guess the in house collection stuff going forward, we've made that decision to keep their essence, I guess. But yeah, and yeah, and we have bone clones here too. I just, I don't have time to manage all of the clones as well as all of the real stuff. So that's where I drew my line in the sand because I don't need a permit for plastic so, but yeah, I agree, like we had volunteer training where, you know, you don't snap the skulls of any kind at the kids, and you don't wear the skunk as a puppet, and you just, you know, you make better choices. And it's been an uphill battle, but we're getting there.



Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 25:27

Awesome. Thanks, y'all, I'm just gonna chat. Don't see anything else in here, but Christine and

Bridget both of you all kind of alluded to this in your answers a little bit, but one of the topics that we really want to talk about in our event today is the use of biofacts that come from animals that used to live at your organization, and the kind of inherent challenges, but also like potential, really deep rewards that come from doing so and so to kind of start getting into that a little bit deeper, what percentage of biofacts come from the animals that used to live at your organization, as opposed to being bone clones or donations that you've received? And does that impact how staff or volunteers use them.



I'm happy to start this one off. It's actually a little hard for us to gage right now, in part, part of the reason for our overhaul we used, I think a lot of places have used museum numbering for their different collection. But what we noticed is that during the pandemic, obviously most places were working on skeleton crews, is that the numbering wasn't kept up, and so it some of them even rubbed off, and it was or parts of them did. So it made it incredibly hard for us to look at old inventories and match up which was which, which was a shame. So we've really rethought just even that piece, and we also made it more accessible. Because what we talked about with our different users was that sometimes even that really small writing, you know, six digit ID number, was not the most accessible to people. So now, and also, frankly, our collection is not that large. If we're talking about like a lion piece, we don't need six digits to talk about or to denote each of our different line pieces. So now we do lion oh one, Lion oh two, or B, L, i, o, 04, so it's more accessible. Things are ID to more places. But what I will say is that our percentage is relatively small at the moment of things that were sourced from our own in part because mainly the sourcing was mainly done at least a decade ago, and then it petered off for quite a while. And so a lot of those biofacts just degraded over time and weren't as high quality. And so we use a relatively small collection, I would say. We also have a large percentage of things, from Fish and Wildlife, from wildlife trafficked items. And then we have a really robust we're very lucky to have, we had a really robust relationship with the Burke Museum, which is a natural history museum in the Seattle area, and so we actually used to essentially trade pieces depending on what our different collections needed. So we have quite a few things from the Burke as well, and that does so I've actually been doing some different informal interviews with both staff and volunteers, and I haven't heard a single person say that they were uncomfortable with the concept of using biofacts from our specific animals. One of my favorite things that I heard because I was asking them, are you, if you knew a biofact came from our animal, are you more likely to use it? Less likely to use it, or same? And I had one person said, oh, yeah, more likely they're friends. And they even told me this was from a volunteer who's been with us 56 years, so she actually knew some of these animals personally. And she told me that she encountered she shares this information with guests and with guests who been here a long time, they'll get so excited and joyful like, oh my god, I remember so and so. Every person I've spoken to has said that knowing that a piece comes from one of our animals enhances the experience that then they get to talk about the individual and the level of care that our specific animals get, rather than about a vague this animal was poached kind of conversation, and everybody it was either neutral or positive. It was I was shocked. I was expecting at least one negative response somewhere. Nearly everybody said that they had one or two animals that they wouldn't be comfortable using a biofact from because that animal was too dear to them, but as long as it was done respectfully by others, they were very comfortable with the



Austin Reish (Zoo Reish) 20:18



AUSTIN REICH (ZOO BOISE) 30:18

practice. Is actually a fairly similar story to Zoo. Boise, so damn to the first question, what percentage of our biofacts come from animals that used to live at the zoo? We are not nearly as organized as we should be like I said my position is kind of the first position that part of their job was managing the biofac collection. Historically, it's just been whoever has time, which, as you all know at the zoo, is nobody. But if I was to guess, I would wager that I maybe 30 to 40% of the biofacts we have are from animals, and maybe half of those are from animals that used to live here at the zoo. And the Boise zoo is Whose over 100 years old and has always been, Tiny. I have a quote here, actually talking about talking to one of our staff, our keepers, who took care of an animal that we were thinking about utilizing this biofact, and I asked, because she's the one who had taken care of the animal the most. And she said, I think it'd be hard to see initially if you knew her the animal, but more so, it's an important and unique way for people to learn about their about her species. So there might be some reminders that you need to give people, but I would hope everyone sees the bigger picture and how we can still teach people about the species even after she's gone. So I think that is kind of the typical reaction we get from keeper staff. On the flip side, before I started working here, there's a story of cautionary tale I can tell you of we had a volunteer who long time worked with a tortoise that lived here, but it was also one of our naturals and engaged guests. And that tortoise shell had been turned into a biofact for people to utilize, but that was not communicated to volunteers. It was just give put into the collection and says, You can use this. And that tortoise had a pink on the front of her shell to identify her from the other tortoises in the area from 50 years ago, or something like that. And she was in the middle of talking about the tortoise when she noticed that there was a pink dot, and was just taken aback. And since nobody had told her that this was that tortoise, she obviously, and rightfully so, was was upset about that. So that kind of caution. Christina, I really like how you talked about how intentionally you're interacting with Huber staff when it comes to these animals, and that's what we're kind of trying to do moving forward and having those one on one conversations and kind of being honest. So I think that answers the question,



actual, if I can jump in Austin, we had not quite the same, but with our relationship with the Burke, we don't, right now, we're not currently getting biofacts back from this natural history museum, but we do still send quite a few specimens their way. And a couple of the volunteers I talked to, I haven't been at Woodland Park Zoo for too long. I started in 2022 so it's hard for me sometimes to know what historical knowledge people have. But not all of our volunteers were aware of this partnership, and a couple of them, who all said that they were fine with the idea and were comfortable using biofacts from our animals, accidentally saw some of our animals that were at the Burke. And one woman actually shared with me that she burst into tears because it was one of our our brown bear boys who passed away, that everybody were, they were adored, and that they just weren't ready to see that. And it was the fact that it hadn't been communicated, and that they didn't have time to, I guess, process the idea before they saw it. So, yeah, I think it's it all has to do with how those decisions are communicated out.



Laurel Abbotts

For us, about 30 to 40% of our collection is from animals that lived here. 40 is probably a little bit high, but we have a lot of stuff that it had to have come from here, but it doesn't have the right documentation, so we're making assumptions on probably a good five to 10% of that. I

have found kind of exactly what you guys have said, that people have a deeper connection to it, and kind of anecdotally, I have found that when education staff, especially sorry for my coworkers that are on the call, they treat things better when they know the name, when they know who it was, when they're taking the tiger out, and it's not just Tiger pelt number 74 it's Ruslan or Nadia or Zara, they tend to pack it up and bring it home in a lot better condition than they used to. And so that's just kind of been a little weird side thing. I wanted to we've had. The only pushback we've really had is with some of the volunteers that have, you know, we've always done it this way and things like that, and it's just kind of retraining. And, you know, everybody's been pretty good with with everything. We've had a couple of volunteers be very open in the fact that they don't like how we're, you know, how we're doing things with collecting from the live collection, but those are so few and far between, and some of them are the you guys all know that that volunteer, that's only there once every six months, but y'all know the day they're there, that type of friend and so yeah, like I said, it's just a lot a lot of communication, and I was going to read for you guys. So when we had a brown bear pass away earlier in the spring, and he was one of the original to our exhibit, and he was 17, and he was just the biggest goofball, and everyone loved him the day I brought his skull back from the tax dermas. I sent this letter to the entire there's 129 people for care, health, conservation and behavior. Staff. It says, Dear staff, we lost a big member of our zoo family with a passing of Ken I, the brown bear. Dr Rivas and her team were able to collect two pieces for the zoo, his skull and a paw. I'm grateful that so many members of the Northern trail and chcb in general were able to visit the biofact collection and see how and why we have these pieces. I never could have imagined a week later, we'd say goodbye to Kenai. This morning, I picked up his finished skull. The PA is not ready yet. You should know that everyone involved said it was the biggest bear skull they had ever seen. When you are ready to see him again, please give me a call or email and I will set everything up for you in the tundra portable classroom. You can come with a group, you can come alone. I can leave so you have your time. It's up to you. It's truly my honor to take care of these pieces in the collection, and Kenai will have a special place in it. All of the Facebook messages along with the newsletter have been added to his digital file. 30 years from now, people will know his story and that we cared for him. Kenai is home and practically crying listen reading it now, but that's just what we do for our staff. That's the right thing to do for them. So

 Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 39:09

there were a lot of like, heart emojis being pop well as you were reading that, Chris and yeah, Laura said that was beautiful. Sarah says, rip can i



Laurel Abbotts

and it does make it makes it a little easier for the next time around too, that the staff are like, Yep, this is how we do it. This is we take care of the staff first. So, and we got that skull back, we haven't used it. We're not going to use it for a program until he's been gone a year, just out of respect for the staff. So he's, he's actually sitting right over there. We're just not gonna we're not gonna use it for a year. We're gonna let everybody just sit with it for

 Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 39:53

a while. Thank you for sharing. I do want to note two things that were said in the chat. Jessica

said, relating back to the percentage of biofacts coming from animals that used to live at a zoo are at the zoo versus donations or bone clones that they had an issue prior to her arrival with an animal that had been part of a long medical process being utilized as a biofact Keeper staff was not notified and found out that the docent was using the item, didn't react well, communication was the issue, similar to Austin's situation, rather than the use but outside of that, but they haven't had any big issues. And then Bridget popped in the chat one of her favorite quotes from keepers about biofacts. Quote, it sort of feels like it's another way to honor the life of the animal in our care. They continue to educate people about their species and about conservation. I remember that biofacts were a huge part of my passion for animals as a child. When I've used animal biofacts from an animal that I have worked with in the past, it allows me to remember them. And I just have one more question, in case folks want to add anything more to what you have said before, we just open it up for larger conversation with the rest of the folks in the room today and other questions. It's very similar to a lot of what's been touched on. But in case there's anything else that you haven't had a chance to mention yet, I hope that this question is kind of the place that allows you to do so for biofacts at your organizations that do come from animals that used to live there, how do you navigate those feelings and conversations with staff and volunteers or even guests? I think Christine, you've gotten to a lot of this. But if there's anything that anybody wants to add, feel free



hard to follow up Christine, to be honest, because I think she handled it so beautifully. But I would say, since we're not currently adding things from our collection, I guess you could, I should clarify things from our animals that you would source after post mortem, we still get eggs and feathers and, you know, different things like that. But for me, what I have learned is that our our volunteers, who obviously have the most access with really want to know more about which specific pieces were from specific animals, because they want desperately to share those stories. And it kind of is just knowledge that's been passed around. And it's kind of like, if you know, you know, which is an interesting concept, but they are hungry to share the individual stories of those animals, which I think is really beautiful when we're just trying to talk about empathy, is that that animal has been gone probably at least a decade, and they're still carrying the torch for them.



Austin Reich (Zoo Boise) 42:58

Yeah, I feel the same way Bridget. I was like, well, just follow what Christine does and what you think you will all be okay. But the kind of mimic what we've kind of been saying is staff often are kind of honored for the most time, for the most part, volunteers will have some issues, but they are also kind of in the same boat, as far as and this is from my experience. And like you were saying, Bridget, they're usually hungry for even if we know that the biofact came from an animal 70 years ago, they're still like, Oh, what happened to this animal? And oftentimes, like, well, our records don't actually go back that far for us, it's guests often. So I'd be curious how you guys operate this but and it might be a result of geographically where we are educating, but our our guests don't seem to have a problem with nameless biofacts. But when they, when guests find out that this was a specific animal that maybe they've seen, they usually have at first, a negative reaction. We train our volunteers and staff to to respond with you know, when what other opportunities do you have to feel a tiger? We're using this as an opportunity to educate, get people these experiences, I mean, all sorts of the different positive reasons why,

but there is something to the degree of us, kind of, in the in the realm or in the industry, having experienced biofacts A lot previously, being like, wow, this is such a awesome experience that I think when When guests who don't get that experience all the time are kind of a little taken back to be like, Oh, this was this was that animal. So typically, guests leave with a kind of a preaching appreciation understanding, and they're not necessarily so jarred. But it never doesn't land quite as smoothly as I would like, personally. So I'd be curious to how guests react to to hearing the stories. For you guys, I



actually noticed Austin, and maybe it has to do with flow in the order they hear things, because every single our volunteers, our keepers, some of them do programs with biofacts, but it's a smaller percentage. So I'm mainly talking about my volunteers here. But every single one of them said that this topic comes up when a volunteer, when a guest, asks, I feel like everyone gets this question, did you kill it? Did you kill it? For this is always when this comes up and our volunteers, they'll usually answer because, like I said, sometimes we don't know the origin, and maybe the volunteer doesn't know the origin, so they'll usually say something to the effect of, some of these are donated. Some of these are from fish and wildlife. Some of these are from our animals that but what they've told me is that it specifically feels like the guest is testing them to make sure that our biofacts were gone ethically. So as long as they say something to this animal passed away and but they still get, you know, essentially, a second life, getting to educate guests. At least when I talk to my volunteers about this topic, I really emphasize that, frankly, biofacts is the perfect representation of these animals. Aren't pets. These animals have a purpose. They are ambassadors to their species. You were talking about the Bali minor birds Christine. That's an a critically endangered species that we will probably witness their extinction in the wild in our lifetime. That is, there's not going to be that many for scientists to even study. And so these animals have a purpose beyond even just being looked at. And it's the difference between a entertainment venue versus a conservation organization. These animals are ambassadors, and they have a higher purpose to serve, beyond even just your emotional connection with them, that's wonderful to have, but it's also not the end of the story. And so I try to really emphasize that when I speak to them, and I don't know if, if there's some sort of flow that's happening there, where they're maybe getting their negative reaction first and then comforted later, whereas ours, I feel like maybe starts with the yes, we absolutely did not kill an animal for biofact, if that makes a difference. Because literally, every single person said, That's how that conversation went. I never had anybody, even if they were using a biofact from an animal, they knew start with that. And I don't know if that's the difference.

A

Austin Reich (Zoo Boise) 48:14

I would say that our presentations usually go about the same way. I don't think, I don't think, well, I'm pretty sure that our volunteers don't start off with, this is the tale of Julius the giraffe. But I think it usually comes up after, you know, they say, oh, did you kill this? And and we, there's a lot of hunters in the area, and so sometimes it's not a kid saying, Did you kill it? They're like, did you kill it? More bluntly, I said, No. So again, I think it's, I think I think that I like what you said about separating that kind of encouraging that these animals are not pets, because I think that might be where some of these people are getting their concern. Because if, I mean, if you, if you said we preserved the pelt of our dog, people would look at you sideways. But it's not for that purpose. It's not a macabre thing. It's more of a, this is a novel experience, and we need to care about these animals. So I do. I like what you said. Said there,



Laurel Abbotts

and yeah, the did you kill it? And, you know, sometimes leading like you said, you don't lead with the this is so and so the giraffe in certain situations. We do have a sign up that literally says, like, Zara, Minnesota zoo number lived here from, you know. And then a quick snippet of her story, you know, she was found in in the wilds of Russia, and she lived, she was a founding member of the genetic pool, you know. And it's, it's always kind of nice, I guess, from an empathetic standpoint, when someone's like, oh, you know, I literally had a person in a tour, like, petting the pelt, and like, Oh, you were such a good kitty. And it's like, you're having an emotional moment with a cat that's been gone 30 years, you know. And kind of like, that's what the power of those pieces. Um, not everybody has a story. You know, not every animal has a story like that. I have, you know, 10 skunk pelts that I wish they had stories, but they don't. Um, yeah, it's and we're kind of the same thing here in Minnesota, there's a lot of hunters and, you know, or my favorite is how much you want for that, especially it seems like our elk antlers and our reindeer antlers, how much you want for that? So yeah, it's depending on where you are. There's definitely a different level of interest on certain pieces.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 50:57

And Brian kind of made the connection, maybe, between this and familiarity with trophy hunting, or where the kind of goal of that might be to harvest the animal for display, or for a biofact We have about, oh, sorry, go ahead.



Laurel Abbotts

I was just gonna say, and I think we've all done that switch, you know, that quick switch around, like, you know, especially for some of our tigers, you'd be like, actually, no, she died of cancer. And did you know animals can have cancer, and you kind of lead it that way. Or, you know, like we talk about saving the biodiversity. We saved an armor leopard pelt, specifically for the fact that we tell people, like, 20 years from now, friends, unfortunately, might be all you get to see. And so it yeah, when you sometimes, when we science them a little bit, they go, Oh, okay, that makes sense.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 51:57

We do have slightly over 10 ish minutes left, if Christine or Austin or Bridget, if you have questions for the audience that you're curious about, or audience, if you have questions that you want to pitch to anybody, oh my gosh, was already one in the chat. Incredible. You can either come off mute or you can pop it in the chat, and I can read them off. We can go ahead and start with Laurel's question. Give folks some time to think, but yeah, once that one is done, if anybody else has any questions, feel free to come off mute or raise your hand, pop them in the chat. But Laurel's question is, have you noticed any difference in reactions to biofact parts? Pelts versus legs versus skulls? Whoa, that was really long. Pelts versus legs versus skulls, as opposed to whole specimens from guests.

A

Austin Reich (Zoo Boise) 52:53

My quick two cents on that is yes, but it's only if the face is involved. I think legs, wings, etc, get kind of the same, same reaction. But if you, if there's the face fan, I'm like, we have some part biofacts from that were donated from hunters years ago. And it's a it's a rug or a cape, and so it has the face that are usually animated somehow, and that will always get especially children will be like, Tell me about that. Or they'll like, look straight into it, but that's the only difference I've kind of noticed as far as reactions. Yeah,



yeah, I've noticed the same thing with faces. Even some of our volunteers who are more experienced can feel uncomfortable sometimes with the face. And we're never trying to make somebody do anything they're uncomfortable with. So we know we teach them the tactics that you can tuck the face under. And otherwise, I would say, you know, sometimes you'll generate different actions, like somebody's going to interact with the skull differently than something like a pelt versus like a wing, where you can actually, like pet it. So I would say the difference would be how somebody engages with it. You know, if there's something with teeth or talents, people are always going to like, I feel like everyone wants to test to see if it how sharp it is. So I would say what it is just changes how people engage with that item. But, yeah, the faces can make people uncomfortable. I feel like normally, because when I used to do presentations, that would always that would be the thing that would generate people's questions of, oh, is this real? And I'm like, yeah, it's absolutely real. This was from, you know, x, y, z, but the face seemed to be a thing where people realized it was actually a living animal, which I I'm comfortable using it and I and for context, I used to work in Wildlife Rehab, so the biofacts I worked with were likely animals that did not survive from our hospital that potentially I did euthanize and then harvest, and now I'm presenting with them. And when they had asked, I'd be like, Yeah, this animal, I don't know if it was hit by a car or maybe if it was poisoned or attacked by a dog, but it did not survive, and what a waste of a beautiful animal. But here's a little piece of them I can share with you. And so sometimes the faces actually kind of helped. I think them connect with it more. I think it just depends if you're comfortable enough to have those conversations.



Laurel Abbotts

Okay, now you can hear me. New equipment, yeah, the faces. Kids are just enthralled with the faces, and they want to know what happened to the eyes all the time. Where did the eyes go? Why aren't the eyes there? And so, I mean, if that gets their window into the situation, great, but, yeah, faces are the one thing that get them a little bit different. And you're right, sticking the fingers into the nose of the skulls. Yeah,



did you notice? Christine, I've always felt like adults get icked out. Kids just get fascinated. Kids love and do not have that initial discuss factor. Whereas I feel like adults have been trained more that dead things are gross, we don't like them, but children usually do not have that reaction in the slightest. It's adults that you kind of have to intellectualize a



Laurel Abbotts

little bit. Yeah, I totally agree. I had a porcupine pelt out yesterday, which requires a little bit of safety, and the number of kids that are like, I want to try it. And the grown ups are like, No, you can't touch that. And then they scared the kids. So yeah,

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 56:34

our next question that I see in the chat is from Avril. We are currently identifying taxidermy, taxidermized items in our collection that are contaminated with arsenic. Common practice for pest prevention and preservation and taxidermy prior to 1980 when we identify these items and decide what we want to keep, we need to find the best way to safely utilize them. Typically, we don't display taxidermy behind class. However, this is likely the only way to keep items that are contaminated still viable for education. Does anyone have any ideas on the best way to display these items behind class in a way that continues to inspire empathy? And do you have examples that you can share?

A

Austin Reich (Zoo Boise) 57:15

I have a really quick example that is kind of funny, because I just just kind of finished this to see if I can show it off. So this is, this is a model, and it has says model skull on it. On one side, this heavier that I remember. It says it has all these little tags attached to it to show the different adaptations, and on the other side, it's just a blank skull, but that little QR code, which maybe you can see right there, says caring for apex predators, taking a house cat to the vet can be difficult. So what happens when a full grown lion needs to visit the dentist? Scan this QR code to watch a video of a previous resident lion getting a root canal. That's a video that we made when when the line had to get a root canal, and kind of shows that. So it's kind of that showing care. I sure there's the term for it, proving, proving Good, well being. And so that's why I had this, my little empathy infused for a model skull. But that's, that's my idea for that is connecting it to your living collection. Somehow I



Laurel Abbotts

the only taxidermy we have are birds and the amount of chemicals that go into bird mounts, we don't let anybody touch them anymore. And if they're in a classroom, they're tucked up high so they can't be touched. But yeah, we're dealing with the taxidermy issue as well. How do you do it safely? Tell a story, but only looking at it, and

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 59:10

then it looks like AVR I think Bridget responded to your comment in the chat as well. Next question is from Lindsay, while using biofacts from an animal that lived at your center, really helps connect people to those animals. For those of you who have bone clones, how do you utilize them, and are they used in more specific situations, like off site programs due to travel? Or are you moving towards not using bone clones?



I just think sometimes we have such specific animals that's really hard to source things from. And so frankly, a bone clone sometimes is the only thing that you can use to either teach about that animal or teach about that concept. And so I think sometimes you just have to make do with what you have. I think we always would prefer real over a bone clone, but I will say the benefit of the bone clones, those they do, tend to last longer. They can hold up to a bit more wear and tear, and also, you're not quite as heart broken. If they do get damaged or like, you have to get rid of them, you're like, I'll just buy another one. That's easier. So I wouldn't say that we move away from using bone phones, I think they're just another tool, and we actually don't differentiate between the two. The only way we differentiate between the two is we talk about organic versus inorganic, and that usually has to do with how you care for them. So like we have for convenience of different programs, we have a main storage area for biofacts, and we have some satellite sites for different programs and different biomes across the zoo, just because the zoo is big, and some of those storage spaces are, frankly, not suitable for organic material. They're not climate controlled. There's, you know, maybe rodent activity, maybe it's not the most secure. So do we want to leave our organic pieces that also we have specific permits that we need for probably not but a bone clone could be there because it's inorganic. So we differentiate that way. But in terms of, like, the value it has to a guest, to me, the value it has to a guest is, well, most people, I would say, also have real things with them, so not just a bone clone, and it's that they get to touch and manipulate and learn about this animal regardless. So I just use another interpretive tool that you use to flesh out a larger collection.



Laurel Abbotts

I'm going to throw a little wrench into the whole thing, we are looking to 3d scan some of their skulls, like Kenai that I we are not going to let people take outside on grounds to drop. And so can we scan it, 3d print it, and let that go outside. So exploring that idea for some of our fragile bird skulls, because then I can give them to preschoolers and print a new one if they record. So that's kind of you can't scan a bone clone because that's copyright infringement. But if you have something natural in your collection, if you can scan it, you can print as many as you want. So that's kind of what we're looking at for some of our one of a kind, pieces that we want to share, but we need to be safe about



Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 1:02:30

All right, I do want to be mindful of time. Brian said, biofacts seems a little less empathetic of a word for the remains of individuals that we know personal history of does anybody have other words to distinguish known individuals versus donations and replicas? Sarah said that she used the word remains before, similar to how we would talk to humans. But if anybody has alternates to biofacts that you use that you feel are a more empathetic term for those items, I feel like we can end on that.



I've just always seen biofact is like the more internal Term versus whereas, I feel like, if you want to be more emnathetic. talk about what it is. you know. if. if it's a match a great horned

want to be more empathetic, talk about what it is, you know, it, it's a match a great horned owl wing. Then say, this is a great horned owl wing, if it's a, you know, brown bear bone clone, then you say, this is a brown bear bone clone, so a replica, or, like, you know, or, you know, I just that way. So that's just how I, I imagine it. And then if they want to ask, it's like, yes, it falls under the umbrella of the thing called biofacts. But for me, I would see biofacts as something we use internally to so that we all are on the same page about what we're talking about. And I think internally, we all have more empathy and respect because we have the context.



Laurel Abbotts

Yeah, and if I know their name, I use their name you want, so and so's whatever. And then it's real specific.



I always call my friend like this was, this is my friend right here. I'll literally, I refer to them as if they're a person. Sometimes I'll just say this, here's, I don't know this. This is this tiger here. This is a piece of my friend. This is whatever. And I just personalize it that way. And then I can get into specifically what it is, a pelt piece, a feather, an egg, whatever. The individual pieces, I've actually gotten some people confused, because they're like, I thought you were taking me to meet your actual friend. And I'm like, This is my actual friend. How dare you? Some of the kids might just think I'm a weirdo with no friends, but,



Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 1:04:56

all right, I do want to be mindful that we are slightly over time. Thank you, Christine and Austin and Bridget for your time and your insights today, and to everybody who contributed in the chat. I think this was a really interesting conversation to continue. This is our last event for 2024 and I've just dropped the link to our first event in 2025 which is our empathy Summit. If you're unable to join us in person. You can find the virtual registration link in there. Thank you all for coming today, and we'll be posting this recording on our website and to everybody who registered very soon. Talk to you all later. Bye, everybody. You.