

The following questions were asked during the learning group. We have included the responses from our chat during this conversation.

Question 1: What are stories you can't or don't tell – why aren't they told?
How does this differ from the stories you do/can tell?

- It can be a challenge to tell some of the more challenging international stories when we don't have the time to provide context and perspectives of others - especially differences in culture and societal norms.
- can't tell the story of animal births and deaths until it is okayed by communications, vets, and animal care. even though guests may notice we have to wait. this is a challenge on what to say in the interim before we are allowed to tell the story
- Beyond our animals, I think it is difficult to share the story of our animal care teams and how much emotion goes into working at a zoo. Their stories are important too!
- I have struggled with the idea that often the "stories" we tell around animal loss are, while caring, and empathetic in the sense of those words, lack the nuance of addressing grief in a meaningful way for processing a very raw and real emotion. Those communications often feel "sanitized" or "PR" and not part of the human and animal experience.
- We have brought grief experts to our campus following significant deaths. the state of MN and one of our larger hospital units offers Psychological First Aid training - I recommend something that looks like both with skilled professionals if you can access any.
 - We have a great thread on the ACE discussion board where different orgs have shared how they honor their animals that have passed if anyone is interested in checking that out:
<https://discussion.aceforwildlife.org/t/honoring-animals-that-have-passed/1542>
 - We've had a lot of discussions about this, and we often share things our keepers or aquarists really enjoyed about working with an animal after their passing. We've noticed this helps create a better connection outside of the "PR announcement" style post.
 - As a self-identified "grief advocate," I have also aimed to intentionally discuss life and loss hand in hand in my education programs. Just yesterday I had a girl begin crying when I told her that the turtle shell she was looking at

is from a turtle who is dead. It's an emotional concept but an unavoidable part of this whole thing we call life.

Question 2: What kinds of stories does your organization prioritize when creating new interpretive for updated or existing habitat areas?

- We often prioritize stories that happen outside of our walls as opposed to ongoing conservation stories and SSPs in-house – especially for animals that guests haven't connected with. (Ex. Sea turtles are cooler to guests than snails)
- If we have time, I have a question for our speakers: I have been thinking a lot lately about the empathy practice of "framing" and how it relates to the concept of storytelling. Do you differentiate between the two? If so, how?
- We haven't gotten there yet, but some of the conversations that we've been having at Auckland Zoo is sharing the stories of our Wild Work which is the on the ground conservation work that we do in partnership with the New Zealand's Department of Conservation as well as the breed and release programmed. It's such a big part of what Auckland Zoo does, but is the hidden work that visitors don't see while they are at the Zoo.
- I am a Horticulture Curator - I talk about death, A LOT, annual plants, like sunflowers, senesce, it is a "natural" part of the developmental life cycle. I incorporate information about creating bioartifacts, compost, reuse of plant materials. Taking trees I cut down to a saw mill, etc. It's helped to connect to guests about the loss of any living thing

Question 3: How are stories you/your organization tells chosen? (we'll have a little less time for this Q so we can give a teaser of next steps)

- We tell birth and death stories but only for a charismatic animals (i.e. don't announce frog births). Our communication's advisor, director, and animal care lead chooses the stories to tell online, the education team chooses the stories to tell to zoo visitors verbally
- This is still an "ongoing discussion" within our zoo/conservatory. We do tell birth and death for largely charismatic animals - we dont agree all the time or often.