



Zookeeper Resource Video Development

Support for Network Participants

The Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife (ACE for Wildlife®) Network is sharing a new resource in 2026: a video that engages zookeepers and enhances their understanding of empathy for wildlife practices.

We anticipate that some Network participants may wish to create their own resource videos for zookeepers at their organization. This document provides practical guidance and elements to consider when developing a similar video resource.

Background

Many Network participants want to expand the use of empathy for wildlife practices at their own organization, mainstreaming how staff foster empathy for wildlife throughout different departments that engage guests in wildlife conservation awareness and action. Zookeepers have a key role to play, as they often participate in public, guest-facing programs; they also are passionate about animal wellbeing and important sources of knowledge and storytelling about animal needs and perspectives.

Over the years, the Network has learned that zookeepers face common barriers to effectively onboarding into the work of fostering empathy for wildlife. These include uncertainty about the efficacy of using empathy practices with guests, as well as confusion about how to use empathy practices. In response, we aligned resource video goals with common zookeeper barriers:

Video Goals

- Enhance keeper understanding of empathy practices: what they are, and why they should be used to engage guests.
- Support keepers' use of empathy practices: help keepers more easily and effectively foster empathy during guest interactions and build their own knowledge and confidence in how to do so.



Outline of Video Content

- An introduction that provides narrated context about the empathy for wildlife approach that is being shared in this video, and what benefits can come from fostering empathy for wildlife.
- A staged “scene” showing an interaction between a zookeeper and a guest. During the scene, we see that a zookeeper’s engagement with the guest helps move them from uninformed perspective to a more empathetic understanding of a specific animal. The scene also demonstrates how a zookeeper uses research-informed empathy practices during the conversation.
- A closing that provides a narrated summary of what was covered, and where zookeepers can turn for more resources or information to support their work.

Recommendations for Video Creative Development

- Decide on the animal species you will feature in the video based on a mix of factors:
 - Animals who guests commonly struggle to empathize with.
 - Animals with habitats that are suitable for filming – evenly lit if indoors, and in secluded/quieter areas of zoo grounds if outdoors. It’s helpful if the area an animal’s habitat is in can be blocked off from visitor foot traffic or if filming can take place before or after zoo hours.
 - Animals supported by keepers who commonly answer guest questions or deliver public programs. Ideally, find a zookeeper to participate on camera who is familiar with common guest questions and comfortable with fielding Q&A.
- Outline which empathy practices you want to model, in the video. It’s important to discuss this information with the animal care professionals you collaborate with, to assess how zookeepers normally experience guest encounters, and discuss what scenarios or opportunities commonly arise to use empathy practices with guests.
- Consider what call to action the zookeeper will be providing to the guest at the end of the scene. It can be helpful to conclude videos with a clear outcome or ask for the guest, to emphasize that the purpose of fostering empathy for wildlife is to stimulate more caring and conservation behaviors.



- Once you have identified a zookeeper to participate on screen, work with them to plan out common ways that an unplanned encounter with a guest might begin and end. This will help you map the empathy practices you want to cover to common talking points that the zookeeper might use in their guest engagement. Create an outline of the scene together, so that both you and your animal care colleague feel the interaction is authentic to zookeeper experiences, true-to-life in terms of norms at your organization, and covers the empathy for wildlife practices you want to feature.

Recommendations for Video Pre-Production

- Work with facilities staff to confirm a timeframe for video filming that will be least disruptive to operations. You also want to find a day and time with minimal distractions and noise from guests visiting your organization; for that reason we recommend filming before or after open hours if possible.
- In coordination with the person/people who are filming, discuss the scene overall and any planning needed. You may want to discuss with the crew how you will stage the people on camera, whether you will break up filming the scene into smaller sections, and whether special equipment like certain types of microphones or lights may be needed based on the area of the zoo or aquarium where you are filming.
- Recruit a participant to “play” the guest in the scene, from staff, volunteers, or others. We suggest having a preparatory meeting with the guest and the zookeeper on screen, either separately or together, to discuss how you will approach the scene and any logistics for the day-of filming.
- Consider whether you have existing b-roll footage or photography of featured animals that could be used in the video editing process, or if new footage may need to be captured on day-of filming.

Recommendations for Video Production

- Consider using multiple cameras or filming the scene from different angles, to allow the edited video to feel more realistic and engaging for viewers.
- If possible within your resources, consider using professional microphones instead of relying on audio captured from the camera’s onboard microphone.
 - Budget-friendly options include wireless lavalier mics like the Rode Wireless Go 2. These can be connected directly to the camera without requiring a dedicated sound mixer in the crew. It is best to only use one set of these styles of wireless mics at a time to avoid Bluetooth signal problems.



- If resources allow, consider using a boom mic (shotgun microphone on a pole) and wireless lavalier microphones when filming, with a dedicated sound mixer on the crew who normally provides a mixer/recorder, a film slate/clapper (marks the scene to assist the editor), and timecode (a digital clock that helps sync audio and video in the editing process).
- Consider filming the zookeeper and guest interaction with both people on screen together, and also filmed 1-on-1, separately (e.g., over the shoulder of one participant, focusing on the other). A variety of visual perspectives can be beneficial in the editing process, in case of any verbal stumbles or disruptions.
- Allow at least 25-50% more active time than you think you will need to film the scene, to create a comfortable buffer in case of noise or other disruptions.
- Do as much as you can to create a quiet environment during filming that is free of distractions and disruptions; remember to ask everyone to silence cell phones and radios and communicate about the day's schedule/steps before you begin.
 - Sounds you may need to pause for include wildlife, planes, vehicles, zoo staff at work, and zoo guests. Microphones are sensitive and will pick up all of these noises loud and clear.
- If you decide to record voiceover narration, make sure you have a quiet spot, pre-planned in advance, to record audio after filming the scene is completed.

Recommendations for Video Post-Production

- As part of the edited video, we recommend using simple text titles on screen to help emphasize and reinforce when a zookeeper is actually using a specific empathy for wildlife practice during the conversation. This helps video viewers understand when and how peers intervene to foster empathy with a guest.
- We suggest using animal b-roll footage or photos to provide cutaway moments for the viewer to refocus on the animal who is at the center of the on-screen discussion. This video editing approach can also help solve any errors in how people on screen delivered their message, or disruptions like unanticipated background noise.