

Assessing efforts to increase conservation awareness at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo



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INTRODUCTION

Good zoos and aquariums prioritize conservation, education, research, and recreation. Yet there is often a disconnect between stakeholder perspectives and the zoo's mission, particularly with respect to conservation (Fraser & Stickler, 2009).

To measure awareness of conservation initiatives at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo (CMZ), we surveyed five stakeholder groups before and after implementing an initiative intended to raise conservation awareness.

We investigated perceptions of the Zoo's role in wildlife conservation, assessed characterization of other conservation organizations, and solicited input on a variety of approaches for improving communication about the Zoo's programs.

Creating public awareness of zoo and aquarium conservation efforts is important for building and sustaining long-term support for *in situ* conservation programs and advancing educational goals.

METHODS - Subjects

Five stakeholder groups were surveyed before and after a conservation awareness campaign – as outlined in Table 1. Respondent demographics are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. A description of stakeholder groups and sampling methodology

Stakeholder Group	Stakeholder Group Description	Brief Description of Sampling Methodology	Assessment 1 Timeframe	Assessment 2 Timeframe
Members	"Individual/Plus" and "Family/Plus" Members of the Zoological Society® (ZS)	Emailed request to participate in on-line survey to list of members provided by the ZS	Jun-Jul 2006	June-Sep 2008
Donors	"Sustaining" Members and "Zookeepers' Circle" Members of the ZS	Emailed request to participate in on-line survey to list of donors provided by the ZS	Jun - Jul 2006	Jul-Oct 2008
Staff	Full- and part-time employees of Cleveland Metroparks Zoo ("the Zoo") and CZS	Surveys distributed at a bi-monthly general employee meeting	Dec 2005	Jun-Jul 2008
Visitors	Zoo guests in the waiting for transportation at the tram stops, in the Rainforest Scientist Hut, or in the Rainforest R.A.I.N. Station.	Approached every 5th adult and invited guest to participate in the survey. Guests with children were offered a coloring book with crayons. Guests who completed the survey were offered a pin or pencil as token of appreciation for participation.	Aug 2005 - Jun 2006	Jul-Dec 2008
Volunteers	Members of the Zoo's Conservation Education volunteer program	Surveys distributed at a monthly volunteer meeting (2008 only) and provided in the volunteer office for a limited time	Feb 2005	Jun 2008

Table 2. Respondent demographics

Stakeholder Group	N	Gender		Age Category				Education Level		
		Male	Female	18-25	26-40	41-60	61+	High School or Less	Undergrad/ Degree	Graduate/ Degree
Assessment 1: 2005/6										
Members	1380	303	942	14	637	531	63	91	678	476
Donors	304	102	184	27	106	139	39	21	140	125
Visitors	575	172	345	96	249	150	32	111	298	124
Staff	109	30	62	7	37	47	1	12	64	20
Volunteers	62	14	48	0	4	27	30	6	29	27
2005/6 TOTAL	2430	621	1581	119	1033	894	165	241	1209	772
		26.2%	73.8%	5.4%	40.2%	51.3%	1.1%	12.5%	66.7%	20.8%
Assessment 2: 2008										
Members	1920	395	1313	25	975	611	97	145	947	616
Donors	295	84	185	1	100	122	46	27	147	96
Visitors	507	150	339	150	186	111	32	118	223	132
Staff	111	33	66	14	33	51	1	8	61	32
Volunteers	123	33.7%	67.3%	14.3%	33.7%	52.0%	1.0%	7.9%	60.4%	31.7%
2008 TOTAL	2956	688	1994	193	1300	945	238	313	1440	921
GRAND TOTAL	5386	1309	3575	312	2333	1839	403	554	2649	1693
		26.8%	73.2%	6.4%	47.7%	37.6%	8.2%	11.3%	54.1%	34.6%

METHODS - Survey Design

Surveys consisted of 10 items as well as demographic questions. The questions asked respondents to rate the importance of four roles of zoos, whether or not they considered 15 organizations to be "conservation organizations", to indicate whether or not they knew of CMZ's conservation efforts, and to indicate how and where CMZ should communicate information about their conservation efforts.

METHODS - The Conservation Awareness Campaign

- Occurred in 2008 in conjunction with the Association of Zoos and Aquarium's (AZA's) Year of the Frog campaign
- Leap Into Action <http://www.clemetzoo.com/forfrogs/> engaged the public and more than 25 local partners in taking conservation action
 - o Raised \$10,000 for local vernal pool restoration project
 - o Created "Frog Blog" so people could share action stories
- Public awareness campaign leveraged media coverage, radio, TV, print, websites, lectures, special events, and materials, including:
 - o Large frog art sculptures designed by community groups
 - o "Cans for Conservation" drive to raise money
 - o Articles on the Zoo's support of hellbender and golden frog conservation initiative
 - o Educational materials about the amphibian crisis
 - o Leap Frog Day at the Zoo,
 - o Interactive Amphibian Maze
 - o More than 10 new amphibian displays and educational exhibits



Leap Into Action mascot, "Vern" Al Pool



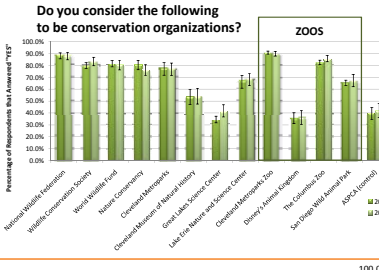
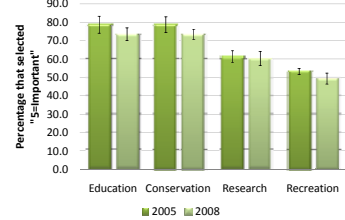
2008 also marked the beginning of the Zoo's fundraising campaign for a new African elephant exhibit

RESULTS

Stakeholders consistently gave Conservation and Education the highest rating of importance.

When both years are combined, Conservation and Education were exactly tied as the top two roles of a zoo, with an average 76.1% (SE_{conservation}=4.0% and SE_{education}=3.3%) of respondents designating both as "5=Important" on a scale of 1 to 5 ("1=Unimportant"). Fewer respondents rated Research as "5=Important" (X=60.8%, SE=3.4%) and only about half of respondents rated Recreation as "5=Important" (X=51.3%, SE=2.2%).

How important are the following roles of a zoo?



Stakeholders considered CMZ – but not all zoos – to be a conservation organization.

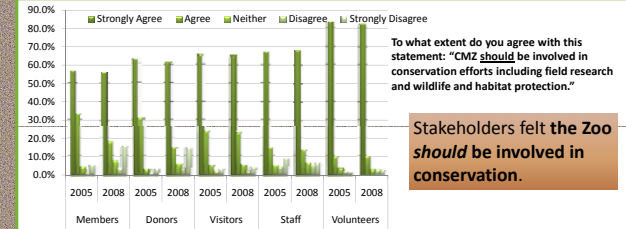
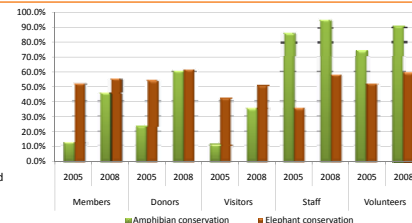
On average, 90.3% (SE=1.3%) of respondents considered Cleveland Metroparks Zoo to be a conservation organization.

Stakeholder assessment of CMZ was stable across both years:



Which of the following CMZ conservation and/or research initiatives have you been made aware of? All stakeholder groups were more aware of Zoo conservation efforts for amphibians (and elephants?) after The Conservation Awareness Campaign.

We found no change in awareness for the following CMZ-supported initiatives: the bushmeat crisis, Asian turtles, orangutans, Andean condors, Trumpeter swans, or Blanding's turtles.



Stakeholders felt the Zoo should be involved in conservation.

DISCUSSION

CMZ stakeholders believe conservation and education are primary zoo functions. National surveys conducted by Fraser, et al. (cited in Fraser & Sickler, 2009) similarly found people believe zoos should be conservation organizations. Despite this, the primary reason people come to zoos is for recreation or entertainment (Clayton, et al. 2009; Puan & Zakaria, 2007).

Why people come to the zoo (i.e., recreation), what people gain while at the zoo (i.e., informal education), and how people expect the zoo to be functioning in the wider world (i.e., conservation) are different but complementary concepts.

Fraser & Sickler (2009) challenge zoos to better reconcile these perspectives with improved interpretation strategies. Institutional conservation and communication strategies that include animal programs, research, marketing, education, events, and fundraising can effectively raise visitor awareness of conservation.

In conjunction with comprehensive conservation programming, these efforts can legitimately brand a zoo as a conservation organization.

Conservation is a complex issue requiring skilled interpretation to visitors. A comprehensive marketing, education, and events plan can increase visitor awareness of conservation issues and what they can do to help.



CONCLUSIONS

When comparing the primary roles of our zoo, stakeholders indicate conservation and education are of utmost importance and believe zoos are and should be conservation organizations.

Why people come to the zoo (for fun and recreation), what they get from the zoo (informal education), and what they expect from the zoo (to be a conservation organization) may be entirely different things. To sustain long-term support, zoos should attend to these roles equally.

Stakeholders might assume that if a zoo exhibits or advertises a species (i.e., elephants in this case), it is actively conserving that species in nature.

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