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Abstract

Animal welfare, education, conservation, research, and entertainment are major goals of modern zoos, but they can be in conflict. For example, visitors enjoy learning about and observing natural behavior in captive animals, but visitors often want to observe and interact with the animals in close proximity. Unfortunately, proximity to and social interactions with humans induce stress for many species, particularly primates. We review two general classes of research examining animal–visitor interactions in zoos: (1) effects of exhibit design and the behavior of the animals on zoo visitors, and (2) effects of zoo visitors on the behavior of exhibited animals. We suggest that interventions based on careful attention to exhibit design, species characteristics, and visitor education can increase positive animal–visitor interactions and facilitate the multiple goals of modern zoos.

Keywords: Human–animal interactions; Zoo visitors; Zoo research; Visitor education; Social behavior; Exhibit design

Article Outline

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Effects of the presentation and behavior of animals on visitor attitudes and behaviors](#)
 - 2.1. [Exhibit design and visitor perception of captive animals](#)
 - 2.2. [Exhibit design and education effects on visitors](#)
 - 2.3. [Effects of exhibit presentation on visitor behavior](#)
 - 2.3.1. [Exhibit design](#)
 - 2.3.2. [Animal activity, number of visitors, and visit length](#)
3. [Visitor effects on animals](#)
 - 3.1. [Visitor effects on non-primates](#)
 - 3.2. [Visitor effects on primates](#)
 - 3.2.1. [Effects of visitor frequency and crowd size on animals](#)

- 3.2.2. [Effects of visitor behavior on animals](#)
- 3.3. [Visitor effects on animals: summing up](#)
- 4. [Possible interventions for negative animal–visitor interactions](#)
- 4.1. [Visitor control and education](#)
- 4.2. [Exhibit design and animal sensitivity to perceived observation](#)
- 5. [Conclusions](#)

[Author Note](#)

[References](#)

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