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# Talking Points for Kids™

## Living In Zoos

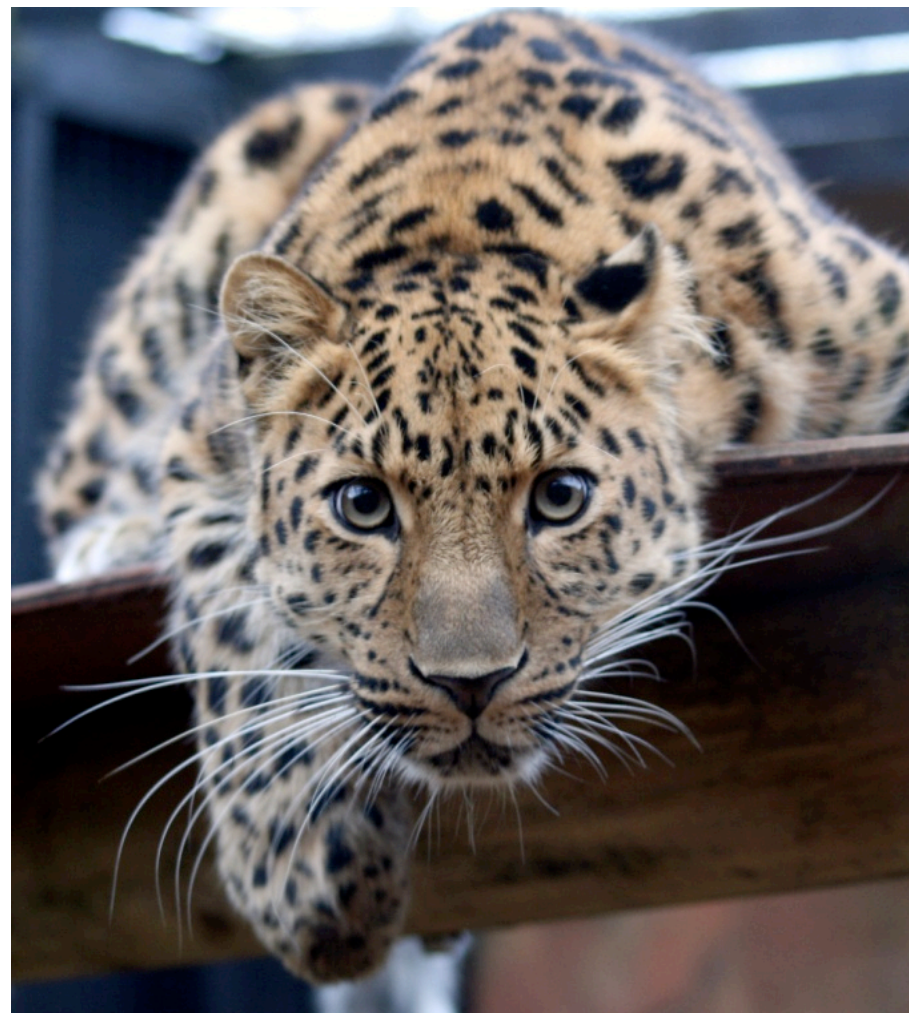


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## Living in Zoos

For many people, a trip to a zoo is the only time to see animals from faraway places. After a day at the zoo, people remember the gold-hair monkeys jumping across the limbs of trees or a polar bear putting its paw in water. After these experiences, people often become interested in the future of animals in the wild.

Like people, animals need certain things to stay healthy and content. It can be hard to give every animal everything it needs when they live in zoos that are far from their usual home. Zoos can have cold caves in which polar bears rest but polar bears in a zoo cannot walk over an ice-covered ocean. Because animals in zoos cannot live as they would in the wild, some people believe that there shouldn’t be zoos.

In this book, you will read about ways in which different zoos have created places where people can learn about animals and where animals can be healthy and content. As you read, you will need to establish your view about what is best for animals and what is best for many of the people whose only experiences with certain animals is in zoos.

## Spotlight on San Diego Zoos

San Diego, California is the perfect place to see some of the most unusual animals on Earth. The San Diego Zoo was one of the first zoos in the United States where there were no fences or cages between the animals and the zoo visitors. You can safely see lions while they move and rest much like they would in their native homes. Between you and the lions is a huge ditch filled with water. The ditches have been designed to protect you from the animals.

Not far from the San Diego Zoo is the San Diego Safari Park where animals such as lions and giraffes live. The way in which the animals live and the way in which people experience the animals is quite different at the Safari Park than at the zoo. In the African Plains part of the Safari Park, there are no cages or ditches. The animals that eat only plants live together, while the animals that are meat eaters live in another part of the park. People get to see the animals from trucks that travel through the park.





## Zoos and the Rescue of the California Condors

The California condor is not a very pretty bird but is an important part of the food web. Condors are birds that eat dead animals that, if left to rot, can spread diseases to other animals. By the late 1980s, there were very few California condors. They had been hunted and their homes had been lost to towns and cities.

In 1987, zookeepers from the San Diego Safari Park and the Los Angeles Zoo captured the 22 condors that remained in the world. Within the safety of the two zoos, the hope was that condors would mate, lay eggs and produce healthy chicks. The plan was to release condors to the wild as adults. But zookeepers had a problem. Condors do not lay eggs until they are 6 to 8 years old and, even then, they lay only one egg a year. It took several years but, in 1991, the first condors were released into the wild. Now there are several hundred California condors and almost half of them are living in the wild.

None of this would have happened without the zookeepers at the San Diego Safari Park and the Los Angeles Zoo. There are reasons why some people are against keeping animals in zoos, but here is one example of how zoos can help save animals from becoming extinct.



## How to Tell if a Zoo Takes Good Care of its Animals

There are several important ways to tell if a zoo is taking good care of its animals. First, check the exhibits. An exhibit is what zookeepers call the places where zoo visitors see the animals. There should not be too many animals in a single exhibit. Animals should also have room to move, whether it is jumping, running, flying, or swimming.

Next, watch what happens at feeding time. In the wild, many animals spend much of their time searching for food. In good zoos, zookeepers make sure that animals use their skills to find food. Zookeepers do clever things, like hiding food in a tree or bush so that animals have to find it.

Finally, watch how the animals act in their exhibits. Animals that are not content will do strange things, like pace back and forth for long periods of time. Or they may sit and not even get up to eat. But before you make a conclusion, be certain that you know about an animal's habits. Some animals are most active at night and rest during the day.



## A Zookeeper's Opinion: The Benefits of Animals in Zoos

It is hard to keep animals in zoos. Each kind of animal has special needs. With all of the problems that can arise in a zoo, why keep animals in zoos? Here are a few reasons.

First, zoos allow many people to see animals, such as lions and tigers, that people are unlikely to see in their own backyard. Second, people can study animals in zoos and, in some cases, use their knowledge to improve conditions for wild animals.

Third, zoos help protect some animals from extinction. In many parts of the world, the wilderness is shrinking because people need land to live, making less space for wild animals. Zoos protect at least a few animals from possible extinction.



Photo: A blue-and-yellow Macaw with a zookeeper in Atlanta Zoo, GA. October 2004 © 2004 by Rob Wynne in en:Wikimedia. Some rights reserved: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I believe that our city zoo should be closed. Last month, two elephants died in our zoo. It is still not quite clear how they died, but they were much younger than the average age of elephants that die in the wild. This seems to be a common problem in zoos: animals die younger than they should.

The zoo exhibit where the elephants lived was too small for them to move around. Our zoo cannot afford to build large enough exhibits for elephants and many other animals. This is another reason why I think our zoo should be closed.

It is cruel to keep animals in zoos. I believe we should either send them back to their native countries, or send them to large wild animal parks where they can roam.

Sincerely,  
Morgan Levi



## The Story of Knut

In 2006, twin polar cubs were born at a zoo in Germany. For unknown reasons, the cubs' mother couldn't take care of them. The zookeepers stepped in and took care of the cubs. But one cub died. The other cub they named him Knut. Zookeepers fed, bathed, played, and even slept next to him.

Visitors to the zoo fell in love with Knut. Because of Knut, people became interested in polar bears. They learned that ice and snow are slowly melting in the northern homes of the polar bears. This change makes it difficult for polar bears to survive. The interest in Knut led people to ask for laws to save wild polar bears.

When he was only four years old, Knut suddenly died. His unexpected death stunned people around the world. Doctors found that Knut had been sick for weeks. Many questions were asked about whether Knut would have lived longer in the wild, even if his mother had not cared for him. These are hard questions without easy answers. But many believe that Knut's story has helped many people care about wild polar bears and the places they live.



## What do you think?

Is there a zoo near where you live? Have you visited a zoo before? Did you like going to the zoo?

What are some things you could learn about when you go to a zoo?

How do zoos help their animals?

If there were no zoos, what would you miss the most?

Why do some people think zoos are not the best place for wild animals?

Do you think zoos are healthy and safe environments for animals?

## Should wild animals live in zoos?

Yes, I think wild animals should be kept in zoos because...	No, I don't think wild animals should be kept in zoos because...
Explain what zoos must improve or give their animals to make it safe for them to live.	Explain where we could learn about wild animals if they don't live in zoos.