

## Do We Really Need Zoos?

*By Liz Gibbons*

I have mixed feelings about zoos. Because of zoos I have been able to see animals that I may never see otherwise such as polar bears, kangaroos, pandas, penquins, beautiful birds, and certain sea creatures. Yet by keeping animals in captivity we are robbing them of living their lives wild and free.

Zoos have evolved over the years to provide a more natural habitat for the animals. Yet they cannot duplicate the grassy savannahs, dense forests and lush jungle environments that are home to many of these animals. A zoo is more like an interment camp, especially for larger animals or for those who naturally roam over a large area daily. They are an unnatural habitat for all animals. The animals have little control over their lives. Zoos often lend animals to other zoos or trade them which removes them from social groups they have formed. Many zoo animals develop neurotic behaviors that are never seen in animals in the wild. Captivity takes a toll on them.

On the positive side, zoos provide a safe refuge for injured animals or those unable to survive on their own. Zoos also perform research and breed endangered animal species. Yet few of the animals bred will be released back into their natural habitat to breed and bolster the population of their species.

My negative attitude toward zoos goes back to my childhood. Our adjoining town, Lafayette, Indiana, had a nice, big city park with a wonderful large circular swimming pool where I spent many a summer afternoon. It also had a small zoo building with about a dozen cages with outdoor access for the animals. Cages had a concrete floor and only a few amenities for the animals' comfort. It was a very unnatural habitat. I felt sorry for the animals.

This topic of zoos raises many questions. Do zoos have a purpose for continuing to exist at this time? Will they evolve into another configuration or just die out? What does man need to do to save endangered species? With modern technology we have drifted away from our natural habitat. Many describe life in large cities as living in a zoo. Are we like the animals in a zoo paying a price for living in an unnatural environment? Lots to think about.