



Wild Animals in Captivity

Rob Laidlaw

Fitzhenry and Whiteside (May 26, 2008)

\$19.95 (48pp)

978-1-55455-025-8

Animals in the wild frolic lustily, romping over rocks and traipsing through the woods. Zoo animals, especially those in too-small spaces, pace endlessly out of boredom, tracing the same path inside a fence.

These were the images that motivated biologist Rob Laidlaw to study and, in turn, work for the improvement of the lives of animals in captivity as part of Zoocheck, a wildlife protection organization. He saw a brown lizard in the wild (in Kuala Lumpur) that scampered and zipped about a garden. Later that same day, he saw the same kind of lizard in an aquarium, where it sat motionless the whole fifteen minutes he watched it.

Wild Animals in Captivity will cause readers to wonder about the reason behind zoos. According to Laidlaw, there aren't many good reasons. He says breeding programs are "not an effective or useful conservation tool" and only two species (Arabian oryx and California condor) have been successfully released into the wild.

His arguments, bolstered by numerous photos taken at actual zoos and featuring real animals, while not totally anti-zoo, are definitely not pro-zoo. He's in favor of making zoo habitats resemble natural habitats as closely as possible if releasing animals into the wild isn't a choice. He speaks highly of "sanctuaries," where an animal can roam for days without seeing a fence.

The scariest parts for some children may be the descriptions and pictures of antiquated zoos, with "concrete cages and grottos" that were "designed for visitors and zookeepers, not wild animals." Bored bears trying to peer over giant cement walls are shown opposite images of bears playing "follow the leader" on a log.

A useful section with "10 Ways You Can Help Animals in Captivity" continues to tout sanctuaries and wildlife parks over zoos and also encourages research and fundraising.

JODEE TAYLOR (October 13, 2008)

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