

Paige Florek
Prof. Amundson
English Comp. II
Persuasive Research Essay

Rehabilitation, Not Just A Show

Many people have grown up visiting zoos during their childhood. It has become a family activity that encourages families to spend time outside and learn about animals from around the world. It is a great way for children to become interested in wildlife and begin to desire to help with conservation efforts. Although zoos and aquariums have played a major role in the education of civilians and preservation of wildlife, it is not the best and most effective way to conserve endangered and at risk animals. There are some benefits to zoos and aquariums, but the negative aspects far surpass the positive aspects. Animal rehabilitation centers should be more prominent than zoos and aquariums because they allow animals to return to their natural environment, do not permanently displace species, and allow there to be a balanced ecosystem in a natural setting.

A prime example of how zoos and aquariums are detrimental to animal health is the orcas in SeaWorld. Orcas typically live to be 50 to 80 years old (Ebenheck). Sadly, the orcas that live in SeaWorld typically live to only be around 30 years old (Ebenheck). Their life expectancy is nearly cut in half! These majestic animals live much longer and healthier lives in the wild. Typically, orcas die from things such as pneumonia in the wild. But when in captivity, orcas are more likely to die from infections (Ebenheck). The life expectancy of orcas being decreased is caused by many complications that are a result of living in captivity.

Orcas typically swim 40 miles every day (Ebenheck). This is not because they desire to, but because they have to. They need to swim this distance to maintain their diet and get regular exercise (Ebenheck). Phelan Ebenheck quotes Naomi Rose saying “You put [orcas] in a box that is 150 feet long by 90 feet wide by 30 feet deep and you’re basically turning them into a couch potato” (Ebenheck). Ebenheck also continues to say, “The broader their natural range, the less likely they are to thrive in confinement. This is the same reason some zoos have been phasing out elephant exhibits” (Ebenheck). Specifically, large animals suffer extremely when in captivity. They struggle both physically and mentally.

In the wild, orcas, much like many other species, travel and live in groups. A group of orcas, known as a pod, has special qualities that are not shared by other species. Each pod is extremely tight knit and develop their own languages and cultures (Ebenheck). When in captivity, orcas are unable to experience this naturally. They are in artificial social groupings (Ebenheck). Also, captive-born orcas are often separated from their mothers very early in their lives. The young orcas are often transferred to other facilities following their separation (Ebenheck). This causes orcas to feel extremely stressed and even feel anxiety.

As a result of stress and anxiety, orcas may begin to display stress-induced behavior (Ebenheck). An example of this behavior included self-mutilation, often seen in the form of grinding their teeth on tanks. This often results in nerves being exposed and infection (Ebenheck). Stress induced behavior is typical for animals that live in captivity that experience “little or no enrichment and live in too-small enclosures” (Ebenheck). Seeing these beautiful animals experience such struggles at the expense of human entertainment is devastating.

There are many efforts being made to end the captivity of orcas. As of March, 2019 there are 22 orcas in captivity in the United States and Canada (Ebenheck). Unfortunately, the orcas that are currently in captivity could not be released into the wild. They do not know how to hunt and would not be able to survive (Ebenheck). They are too dependent on humans feeding them to survive on their own. Because of this, the Whale Sanctuary Projects is working towards creating sanctuaries for retired or reduced whales (Ebenheck). These sanctuaries would allow animals to become more familiar with ocean life and they would still be maintained by humans in hopes to help protect them. Heather Rally says, “We have sanctuaries for every other species. It’s absolutely time for a marine mammal sanctuary. It’s long overdue” (Ebenheck). Seaworld has opposed this idea. They claim that “environmental hazards and a radically new habitat would likely cause tremendous stress to their orcas and do more harm than good” (Ebenheck). This may be true, but the orcas being in the small tanks at SeaWorld poses more threats to orca health than sea life does.

Orcas in captivity are a prime example of the negative impact that zoos and aquariums have on animals. Being in captivity has caused far more issues for orcas than benefits. If the reduction of zoo and aquarium existence becomes a reality, the lives of these animals can improve. They will be able to live longer lives and contribute to their ecosystem in an effective manner.

Animal rehabilitation allows animals to return to their natural environment. It is far better for animals to be in areas where they originate. Rehabilitation is far better than removal of an animal. Although some animals may not be able to survive in the wild by themselves because of an injury or birth defect, most animals that are rescued are able to return to the wild. For animals

who are unable to return to the wild, rehabilitation is still important so that the animal may still be healthy and successful in the care of humans.

For animals that are able to return to the wild, it is important that their rehabilitation is done well. It is important that animals are able to survive on their own. Effective rehabilitation can be done by having standards that need to be met before release. Standards will have to be adjusted for each species and each case. By doing this, the success rate of animal rehabilitation may increase.

If an animal is released and does not thrive, the rehabilitation is deemed as unsuccessful. For this reason, it is important that animals are monitored after their release. By doing this, animals have a higher chance of successfully returning to their natural habitat. By monitoring animals, the rehabilitation process can be corrected and fixed to better integrate animals back into the wild. A great example of a successful rehabilitation is the African penguin. After these beautiful animals were reintroduced to their habitat, the once endemic species began to thrive once again (Williams). With proper rehabilitation, animals have a higher success rate when they are in their natural habitat. This leads to many benefits that may not have been possible if animals are not reintroduced and are kept in zoos.

One of the major benefits that animal rehabilitation provides includes the chance for animals to return to an environment that they are supposed to be in. Some animals that are in zoos are far from where they are meant to be. For example, many zoos are primarily outdoors. For animals such as lions and zebras, they are not meant to be in climates where there is snow and below freezing temperatures. When a species is displaced, it can lead to health issues. With animal rehabilitation, animals are not being permanently displaced and they are able to return to

climates that they are meant to be in. They may be displaced for a period of time, but they will not have long standing health issues due to a change of climate and environment.

When an entire species is removed from their natural habitat and placed in zoos and aquariums, the ecosystem they had originated from may be completely altered. A great example of this is when wolves were hunted, caught, and removed from Yellowstone National Park. Starting in 1926, white wolves had been hunted to the point that there were no wolves found in Yellowstone National Park (“History of the Greater...”). After the reduction of the wolf population, there was an increase in many other animals that were hunted by the wolves. Although this was good, it had many other complications, specifically with the environment. With there not being any wolves to hunt elk and other animals, there was an increase in elk population.

Because of this, the shorelines along rivers and streams had begun to deteriorate. The elk grazed along the water and no longer needed to migrate to stay safe and fed. The shorelines had begun to deteriorate to a point that the shorelines were nothing but mud. There was far less brush and grass protecting the shorelines from becoming purely mud and dirt (Farquhar). With the elk no longer migrating as they had in the past, it was harder for beavers to collect wood. The beavers relied on the migration of elk because it allowed them to collect wood so they were able to survive the winter (Farquhar). When a species is removed from where they originate, this causes a great amount of issues for the ecosystem.

Luckily, it can be seen how the reintroduction of a species can benefit an ecosystem. The removal and reintegration of wolves in Yellowstone National Park is a strong example of the importance of maintaining a balanced ecosystem to avoid issues such as erosion and starvation.

When the wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park, the elk population had returned to a manageable level, beavers were able to build dams and survive the winters, and the shorelines had begun to grow grass and other plants again (“Wolves in Yellowstone”).

When animals are removed from their natural environment and the only population of them is in zoos, this causes issues for entire ecosystems. Ecosystems are very delicate and a key species being removed may cause issues that may not be able to be repaired. This can be seen in the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park. With the use of animal rehabilitation centers, this issue can be avoided. It is very important that animals return to their correct climates and habitat. It is not only important for the specific animal, but it is also important that animals return to their natural habitat for the sake of the ecosystem they originated from.

Rehabilitation centers are far more beneficial than zoos because they allow animals to return to their natural environment, they do not displace species, and they allow there to be a balanced ecosystem in a natural setting. Yes, zoos and aquariums do play a role in animal conservation, but they are also part of the problem. They do not encourage natural populations and displace species. For those who are interested in learning about these great animals, many rehabilitation centers are open to the public. They provide educational opportunities while treating animals are returning them to their natural habitats. Animal rehabilitation centers do everything a zoo does, but it is done in ways that are better for animals and ecosystems.

Annotated Bibliography

Ebenhack, Phelan M. "Orcas Don't Do Well in Captivity. Here's Why." *National Geographic*, 9

Apr. 2019, www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2019/03/orcas-captivity-welfare/.

This article depicts the negative aspects of the captivity of orcas. It primarily discusses the impacts it has on the orcas at SeaWorld. The article begins by discussing how the orcas in captivity are being treated and how it is negative for their health. It then continues on by discussing signs of the stress and struggle the orcas are experiencing. The article finishes by discussing how these issues are being handled by various organizations, including SeaWorld and The Whale Sanctuary Project.

I plan to use this article to demonstrate the negative impacts that captivity has on animals. This article can be used to argue for both marine animals and large animals. I will primarily focus on how this affects the animals physically and how these animals can be helped.

Farquhar, Brodie. "Wolf Reintroduction Changes Ecosystem." *My Yellowstone Park*,

Yellowstone National Park, 15 Jan. 2019,

www.yellowstonepark.com/things-to-do/wolf-reintroduction-changes-ecosystem .

This article showcases how the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park. The article walks readers through the different stages of reintroduction, as well as how this impacted other animals in the park. Not only animals are noticed in the impact, but also plants and shorelines.

I will use this article to give an example of what an ecosystem is impacted if a species is removed. This article will be beneficial, but it does not discuss animal rehabilitation. I will use this as detailing, but it will not be the main aspect of the paper.

"History of the Greater Yellowstone Wolf Restoration." *The Wildlife News*, 27 Sept. 2018,

www.thewildlifeneeds.com/wolf-reintroduction-history/ .

In this article, readers are able to observe how wolves were removed from Yellowstone National Park, along with how they were reintroduced. A major aspect of the article is how once the wolves were reintroduced, they were and are still being monitored to insure steady growth and health.

This article will be used because of the way it depicts the monitoring of species once they are reintroduced. This will be beneficial because a key aspect of successful animal rehabilitation is monitoring them. I will avoid using the removal aspect of the article because it was better explained in another article that I will be using.

Williams, Kai “The Essentials of Wildlife Rehabilitation” *Society for Conservation Biology*
conbio.org/groups/sections/africa/act/the-essentials-of-wildlife-rehabilitation .

“The Essentials of Wildlife Rehabilitation” outlines the key aspects of successful animal rehabilitation. Important aspects that are outlined include standards and post release monitoring. It uses examples from two very different parts of the world and discusses how techniques must be adapted to each species, climate, and animal.

I will be using this article because it shows both a successful and nonsuccessful example to animal rehabilitation and release. It gives me a better understanding of the rehabilitation process as well as what needs to happen for it to be successful.

“Wolves in Yellowstone National Park.” *My Yellowstone Park*, Yellowstone National Park, 22
May 2017, www.yellowstonepark.com/things-to-do/wildlife/wolves .

This article gives a depiction of the wolves that were once removed from Yellowstone National Park. It also discusses the presence of wolves currently, as well as maintenance of the wolf population. The article also discusses how the ecosystem was affected by the reintroduction of wolves.

I plan to use this article because it discusses how the return of the wolf population helped the ecosystem return to a state of health. I will be using this article in small amounts because it does not discuss the rehabilitation of wolves, just the reintroduction of the species.