

Jane Goodall's Chimanzoo Conference

How Sanctuaries Help...

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*Sanctuary (n.) refuge, asylum, shelter, haven, place of safety
From the Latin "Sanctus" or sacred*

Sanctuaries exist for one reason: to provide life-care for the stolen, kidnapped and, all too often abused, misused and discarded wildlife of other countries, as well as displaced indigenous wildlife and other animals in our country. The American Sanctuary Association exists to help establish standards of care within facilities and raise public awareness of animal related issues.

The difference between domestic animals we live with as companions i.e. cats and dogs, and "wild" animals such as primates, big cats, exotic birds, wolves, large reptiles and such, is that whether a primate or a bird is born in "captivity" it is not domesticated. Domestication takes hundreds if not thousands of years. It requires many generations of carefully selected and bred animals to develop the characteristics we humans wish in the offspring. In domestic farm animals, intelligence and territorialism are exchanged for a docile nature, more meat production and or quicker reproduction. The exotic animal trade has done none of this...the animals in the research facilities, the entertainment venues, and homes are in most respects identical to their free-living brethren.

All "wild" non-domesticated animals, including chimps, have hard wired behaviors which cannot be readily transferred into human home-life. In the case of birds, the keeping of these animals in cages literally handicaps them....removing their ability to fly....much as placing an able-bodied child in a wheelchair and not allowing him to walk or run....With primates, big cats and wolves, while the infant is nurtured by humans and is dependant on humans, it is gentle, loving. But in all too many cases, when adolescence arrives with the hormonal and territorial imperatives, we humans find ourselves unable to continue care for these ill-advised "companions."

With Americans destroying over 6 million domestic cats and dogs annually at shelters due to simple "homelessness" and overpopulation (HSUS and ASPCA statistics,) the future for more endangered and difficult to care for species is even more tenuous.

We recognize that people take wild animals into their homes for a myriad of reasons, ranging from the wish to nurture a “cute” young animal, to the ego boost of living with a “wild” animal.” The very alien-ness of these animals is a great part of their appeal. As the natural world vanishes, and we live in more artificial communities, rarely in touch with the other great animals, while recognizing the inappropriateness, it should not be surprising that the human psyche wishes to bring this “wildness” back into our lives.

In the case of primates, their similarity to us...their close genetics and social behaviors have created a situation where these closest of our relatives are used for research, entertainment and as surrogate children. The vast majority of primates in need of Sanctuary are coming from research facilities when the animal’s usefulness is over. At one sanctuary, of approximately 70 Chimps in residence, 4 or 5 had come from “pet” environments, another 15 had come from entertainment venues, while the rest – 50 animals - came from research facilities. Animals from all three sectors have very differing emotional and physiological needs which have to be addressed.

In some entertainment venues and so-called non-accredited zoos, the trained and or displayed animals are also used for breeding. (By this I do not refer to species preservation or re-release programs at bone fide facilities.) Birds, reptiles, even small mammals and primates are often sold to the public as “pets.” Further, at public displays, baby animals are a public draw. People bring their families to see “baby tigers” and such. Additionally the younger animals can be easier to handle before the hormonal surges of adolescence and adulthood. It is easier and less costly to care for young healthy animals rather than aging animals.

As a result, all too often, there is an underground trade of the “surplus” adults which are sold off to such venues as canned hunts or, increasingly to China and other countries for folk “medicinal” use and other uses up to and including being killed as “exotic” foods. It is especially disturbing to think of “pet” or entertainment animals who are trusting of humans to end up in this way....

Sanctuaries remain the only option for many of animals when their usefulness as entertainment, research, breeding or working animals comes to an end. Primates, large reptiles, wolves, big cats....and many other animals who are pulled from their environments for profit, or taken when their habitats become non-supporting of their freedom, have no other option.

A Sanctuary provides animals with the ability to become themselves. In other words...by putting like species together, and allowing them as naturalistic an environment as humanly possible, the goal is for them to live out their lives in tune with their own natures. Becoming who truly they are, at long last...

All Sanctuaries must provide appropriate space, enrichment and most importantly provide the ability for socializing with others of their kind in order to get back to their own roots, to find their natures as the animals they are. Those in need of human care...due to infirmity or old age or due to over imprinting of human behaviors need the support of an educated staff. Proper diet and appropriate medical care must always be available to the resident animals.

While there are well-meaning individuals calling themselves “sanctuaries”... true Sanctuaries have several things in common:

1- A true Sanctuary does not breed, sell, adopt-out or commercially exploit the animals in their care. (Exceptions, again, are bone fide specialized scientific breeding programs....but most of these do not occur at sanctuaries.)

2- A true Sanctuary is established to outlive the founders. It is a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit corporation, made tax-exempt by the IRS

3- Ideally, the land that the Sanctuary is located on is owned by the organization, i.e. the animals, not the humans who run the facility.

4- A true Sanctuary, while not “open to the public” like zoos or entertainment displays, should be available for viewing by its supporters to insure the funds are appropriately used to care for the animals.

5- A true Sanctuary should become accredited by an independent organization like ASA (American Sanctuary Association) which holds member facilities to a high standard of animal care, financial stability and ethics.

While many people are interested in starting Sanctuaries, the truth is that it takes a diverse number of experiences and skills to create a facility, over and above the love of animals. These include but are not limited to:

- 1- An entrepreneurial drive. Having started your own businesses and run them is advantageous. Ability in hiring/firing of intelligent and trustworthy people is a must.
- 2- People skills. You will need to bring in volunteers, board members, and donors. Success in a non-profit is about the ability to work with others and develop relationships.
- 3- Speaking and writing ability. Especially in the beginning of your venture you, or one of the “founders” you bring in, will be the spokesperson for

your cause. You will need to passionately and intelligently speak and write about the issues and the animals in your care.

- 4- Having working experience with non-profit organizations, in particular animal welfare organizations. Non-profits are completely different than for-profit businesses. You must understand the differences. The IRS holds non-profits to a much “higher standard” in their business practices.
- 5- Fundraising and grant-writing knowledge. On- and off-line classes are available for those interested. Please understand that while most non-profits dealing with human issues receive up to 80% of their income from various grants, animal welfare organizations, at best, receive 10% of their funding from corporate grants. There are a large number of established groups you will be competing with.
- 6- Medical knowledge of the animals you are working with. While a species specific knowledgeable Veterinarian is a necessity, onsite “vet tech” expertise is of utmost importance. You will be the first line of care for these animals.
- 7- Independent income. Last but not least, you need to support yourself. For many years, if not forever, you will be your own sole support with donated funds for salaries going to additional caretaking staff. If you need a salary, this is not a venture for you to begin. In fact, be prepared to liquefy your own assets in order to help the organization.

So, what can most of us do?

- 1- Support Sanctuaries. As much as we hate to admit it, our success, our ability to care for an ever increasing number of animals is predicated on funds. Every little bit helps.
- 2- Visit the Sanctuaries that care for the animals you are most interested in. Become active, either as a volunteer or a donor in the facilities you trust. Become an advocate: speak out and help educate others about the pressing needs of these animals and support of Sanctuaries.
- 3 -If you have “grey area” animals i.e. exotic birds, reptiles etc., prepare your Will and in your Estate provide funds to the facilities of your choice to care for these animals you have shared your life with
- 4- Support Conservation and eco-tourism efforts. Only by saving the habitats of these incredible animals we share our planet with, can we insure their future as the free-living beings they were intended to be.