Role Of Zoos In The Conservation: Specific Reference To Chester Zoo

Zoos are often a very controversial subject, however, one thing that most people can agree on is the fact that they are a great way to help conserve species of threatened animals. There are four fundamental roles of a zoo, these are: Conservation, education, research and recreation. Not only is Chester zoo a great example of this, it is both and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) and European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) certified. This means they meet and European guidelines of how a zoological garden should be run.

Chester zoo believes preventing extinction is all about conserving biodiversity; variety among living organisms from all sources1. It's clear that most zoos contribute mainly through ex-situ conservation (zoo based). However, they have recently become a lot more focused on in-situ (in the country of origin.), such as, rehabilitation programmes for endangered species.2. In-situ is Chester's main focus of effort in conservation. One of their projects is reducing human-wildlife conflict in south Asia, working with local communities and providing tools for them to live safely alongside and without harming, species such as tigers.7

At present there are 39 animal species which are currently listed as extinct in the wild by the IUCN. Zoos are vital in breeding and releasing threatened species back into the wild.3 Chester currently consists of 500 different species over 160 acres with 80 different conservation projects over 30 countries8. As you can see in table 2, 29% of their species are classed as endangered according to the IUCN Red list. This list is created to inform and make people aware of the current biodiversity situations10 However, a third are 'least concern' which shows there's still room for improvement from the conservation side.

Currently, the zoo has an act for wildlife campaign, raising awareness of conservation as well as acting to secure the natural worlds future11. They are a fantastic source of information, helping to increase the number of people who understand biodiversity4. The wildlife park has also worked alongside schools and communities to help educate about biodiversity issues both locally and globally12. Andrew Moss, an employee from Chester Zoo, conducted a study to investigate whether or not people are aware of biodiversity, how to conserve and use it sustainably. He concluded that zoos and aquariums increase the number of citizens who understand about conservation and biodiversity.4

Recently winning 3 gold awards for conservation, Chester zoo has amazed the nation. One was for their outstanding research into the Golden mantilla – a critically endangered frog threatened by habitat loss and the pet trade. A team of experts have ongoing work in Madagascar, observing the population number and behaviour of these species as well as working with schools to help explain the importance of this frog and how to look after their environment. By helping to protect forests it enables communities to have a more sustainable future whilst living alongside wildlife.12

In 2015, Chester zoo opened 'the islands', this project was designed to represent one of the most important conservation areas and the incredible diversity within them. Just a small fraction of the animals on display here include Visayan Warty pig, Southern cassowary and the Javan

banteng. In order to appreciate conservation, people need to understand that humans and animals are linked and the relationship between culture and conservation. This has been designed to help make that clear. The £40m development is home to over 50 mammals, 50,000 plants and 30,000 fish; helping the islands make teaching science of conservation captivating as well as memorable.6

Wild animals in captivity enable us to learn about their species and helps us to manage and conserve them in their natural habitat. This includes everything from their behaviour to dietary requirements. Many zoos set up specialist centres, breeding programmes and develop pioneering treatments to help the most vulnerable species, as well as raising money to fund all of this. These together help to prove that we can succeed in conservation. There have been numerous cases to support this: in the 1980s the Scimitar-Horned Oryx became extinct in Africa. However, zoos around the world worked together to save the species and they are now being reintroduced back to where they belong3. Chester zoo, itself, has had many success stories, in particular: Scottish wildcats, babirusa pigs and cheetahs, not forgetting the recent birth of a male Eastern black rhino. There’s only 650 remaining in the wild, making it a very rare and special birth.13

As part of their mission to prevent extinction, Chester zoo have created a 14-acre nature reserve. The reserve is designed to protect UK wildlife with multiple habitats within this area. Already, it’s home to a diverse range of plants and animals, including: Kingfisher, robins, mice, butterflies and meadowsweet. The area provides a protected area for wildlife as well as contributing to conservation strategies. This gives people a great opportunity to study local wildlife and a great training area for trainee conservationists.9

Recent news reports have highlighted the damaging effects caused by extracting palm oil, causing deforestation and threatening many species including the orangutan. In aid of this Chester zoo have created a ‘sustainable palm oil challenge’. Displayed near the Ape house, orangutan artwork made from sustainable palm oil packaging, stresses the negative impact of the unsustainable extraction on the planet. They’ve included a ‘recipe trail’ around the park and created a shopping list with the goal of prompting Chester to be the first sustainable palm oil city.14

The amount of effort, research, time and money Chester zoo has put into conservation proves how much they care about the natural world and the biodiversity within it. With many species declining at a rapid rate, animal organisations need to continue to educate and make society aware of issues that may arise in the near future. Non-government and government organisations need to work together to minimise the negative effects. Ongoing research, fund raising and commitment to conserve biodiversity in-situ and ex-situ is vital to save our natural world.5