

However, one could argue that our collections are the core business. Can we articulate the philosophy that happily accommodates these seemingly disparate elements? Does food service generate the revenue, or the collection, or both?

3. Finally, the oft forgotten species in discussions of animal collections provided a wealth of curious conundrums.

Public Attitudes and Messages:

1. Research indicates that people who visit zoological gardens want a positive, meaningful experience with wildlife and also want to be entertained. This was most recently affirmed by audience research for the National Awareness Campaign. While we collectively have more than 140 million visitors to our zoos and parks, that number has remained unchanged for a decade. This indicates loss of market share and a trend about which we should all be concerned. Can we accept our roles as entertainers and tailor our entertainment to our own special nature? Strong institutions, better animal care and increased resources for conservation may hang in the balance.
2. There is increased focus by the public concerning accountability as it relates to animal care and collection management. As previously stated, our guests expect us to provide the best possible care for our collections. As we rely on our accreditation process, we must also make sure that it is continually reviewed and evaluated to insure the highest possible standards. Can we communicate our constant vigilance to animal care?
3. Our critics are already working effectively in the arenas of regulation and public opinion. The animal rights community has focused its efforts in recent years on changing the legislation governing our policies and procedures. In addition, there is a great deal of confusion in the general public's mind between animal welfare and animal rights. The increased focus of the animal rights community on our industry is a trend showing little signs of weakening. Can we answer our critics and detractors? Can we transport potential visitors with positive messages about living animals or will our low-level efforts concede the issue to potential new visitors who do not hear our point of view? Should a child in North America be able to see a living rhinoceros or elephant, or should that be forbidden?



Shima and baby at the Brookfield Zoo.

© Jim Schultz, Brookfield Zoo

The Collections Trends group will do its best to verify and report on both true trends and red herrings. Further research outside our industry holds the answers. The group did note that while collection issues are one charge of many committees tasked with conservation, no committee or group within AZA oversees collection-related issues or trends mentioned in this article. To that end, we suggest the establishment of a Board-level committee focusing on collection-related issues, similar to WCMC's oversight responsibilities on our science-based programs.

This positive experience encourages us to continue and broaden the discussion. Predicting the future can be fun, and ultimately our findings will provide a better future for both our industry and our animals. ■

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