

ANIMAL THEME PARKS: AN INVESTIGATION OF
BEST PRACTICES IN SELECTED THEME PARKS

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ABSTRACT

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BEST PRACTICES IN SELECTED THEME PARKS

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Animal theme parks are on the rise in the tourism industry. As a result, it is essential to examine the treatment procedures used for theme park animals. The purpose of this study was to investigate the best practices related to the use of animals in parks at Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom. Data were collected from each company's website and compared in a best practices matrix. Training practices in each park centered around positive reinforcement. Theme parks provided opportunities to learn about natural habitats of animals. Feeding practices for animals focused on guest enjoyment and interaction with animals. While some information was readily accessible, each park would benefit from offering more educational information about their practices regarding training, habitat, and feeding.

Keywords: animal theme park, animal training, treatment, animal exhibit, animal feeding

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

The domestication of animals has long been a fascination of humans. Over the years, animals have been used for human recreation and increasingly, animals have become an important facet in tourism. As the tourism industry constantly changes, the introduction of animals in theme parks has brought about a new type of tourism. Swindle (2007) stated, “Adrenaline-fueled rides will always be the mainstay of theme parks, but animal attractions are increasingly being incorporated too” (para. 1). The increase in animal tourism is further solidified as Disney’s Animal Kingdom accounted for 8.2 million visitors in 2012 (Richard K. Miller and Associates, 2012). Animal attractions have resulted in tourism success, drawing many visitors to various theme parks. Along with this success, animal attractions have provoked numerous disputed issues.

Animal care and practices have been a controversial topic for years with the use of animals in theme parks. Some argue that using animals as a part of recreation introduces education and advocates for animal awareness and conservation. The opposing argument claims that using animals in theme parks is a form of animal abuse, in terms of training, habitat, and lifestyle. The real struggle is the balancing act many parks endure to create a recreational, profitable, and environmentally responsible theme park. Levin (2012) attests, “Finding a balance between maintaining attractions that spotlight these poetic, winged creatures, as well as promoting them, can be a practice in all things

Mother Nature” (p. 1). In order to further delve into this controversial topic, the treatment and training of animals in theme parks must be investigated. The purpose of this study was to investigate the best practices related to the use of animals in parks at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Premier, CAB Abstracts, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, ABI/INFORM, Business Source Premier, and AGRICOLA. In this review of literature, numerous best practices for captive animals were discussed. Among these, the training, habitat, and feeding methods of animals were examined.

The training of animals has long been debated and continues to be a disputed topic. It is no mystery that humans have a great deal of effect on the behaviors and habits of animals (Shay, 2003). As a result, it is extremely important to positively shape and influence animals, especially captive animals that are constantly exposed to humans through recreation. One of the most notable and significant elements to consider in animal training is that every animal is different (Underwood, 2004). Animal training has become an adaptive process with the use of animals in theme parks. Animals are now used as one of the main points of attractions for theme parks. Understanding the diverse characteristics and individually looking at each animal are necessary to successful

training. Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus Lion Tamer, Jason Peters, notes:

You don't really 'tame' lions. You just train them. It's repetition, 15 to 20 times a day. Every animal is different. Some are quick learners and some are slow. You bring them up and study them to see what they're going to be good at and what they're not. (Underwood, 2004, para. 2)

Training order is also essential to successful animal training. With the behavior differences in individual species, there are certain behaviors that can be trained first (Colahan & Breder, 2003). Once trainers realize the significance of treating each animal individually, training practices come into play. Though many trainers may want to immediately start teaching impressive tricks, the smallest training practices must first be understood in order to successfully train an animal. According to Shay (2003), "There is a big difference between being able to observe a pet's behavior and understanding what that behavior means" (p. 30). Above all, trainers must first be able to communicate with animals they train, by reading body language and expression. The first step to successful training is usually to teach the animal and trainer to listen to each other (Shay).

Beyond this essential step, training stems from research, planning, and continual practice. According to Colahan and Breder (2003), "A successful training program is proactive, not reactive. In other words, planning is an important part of a successful training program" (p. 237). To understand and listen to animals, trainers must be well-versed in animal behaviors and mannerisms. For a successful training and caring process, keepers must be informed and understand an animal's natural and individual history

(Colahan & Breder). With this increased knowledge of an animal species, trainers begin to become equipped to handle and train captive animals.

Since the animals used in theme parks come from many walks of life, consistency is key to training, by having all trainers use the same techniques when teaching a new behavior (Colahan & Breder, 2003). Keepers must constantly work together to refine an animal's behavior, discuss strengths and weakness, any problems or progress they are witnessing, and ultimately work together as a team. Working as a team is crucial in the training process, with the goal being each animal can successfully perform a completed learned behavior with any member of the team (Colahan & Breder).

This team behavior goes beyond training actions but also to smaller, finer details. Trainers are encouraged to constantly keep records of the animals they train. Along with this, trainers must review past training records for patterns as a part of their routine (Colahan & Breder, 2003). Since animals in theme parks are constantly on display, trainers face the challenge of training animals not only for special shows, but also for being seen by the public eye. Trainers often stage-manage animal behaviors or train them to act a certain way while on display (Corliss & Drummond, 1998).

Many different training methods have been tested, with most using reinforcement to teach animal behaviors. Common trainings according to Shay (2003) are:

Traditional training, in which punishments are used to startle the animal into obeying or food is used to reward the desired response; the lure/reward method, in which a treat is being used to help the animal figure out what behavior is wanted; and a method that focuses on teaching the animal to make good choices. (p. 32)

While these basic training methods are tested, along with countless others, the acceptance of animal emotions has brought about many trends in animal training. The most significant training progressions have been an increase in positive reinforcement in training animal behavior and a decrease in punishments used in training (Shay). Training a captive animal presents many challenges; but with the proper planning, significant research, patience, listening, and consistency, animals used for recreation in theme parks can be safely and properly trained.

One of the most debatable topics in relation to the use of animals in theme parks is their habitat. Captive animals often do not have the space, resources, or native environments they would in the wild when in theme parks. Habitats for theme park animals are an extremely controversial topic, becoming the fuel to animal activists' fire when discussing habitat size. According to Burnett (2001), "It is estimated that there are several hundred zoos in the world still displaying some 600-900 polar bears in totally inadequate conditions" (para. 4). In poor conditions, animals revert to poor behaviors and exhibit few natural behaviors (Burnett). For this reason, it is vital that habitats are built well and as close to the native environment animals thrive in, meeting requirements for space and naturalness. The smallest factors need to be considered in order to ensure the well-being of animals. An example with an orca whale's tank can be taken into consideration here. According to president of In Defense of Animals, Elliot Katz, "In solid concrete tanks, their sound waves bounce off the walls, comparable to what we'd experience if confined to a tiny room of mirrors" ("Abusement parks," 2003, para. 3). The materials of construction used makes all the difference, either causing an

environment of stress or enjoyment. This has been a notable change throughout the years, according to Lemonick, McDowell, and Bjerklie (2006):

For zookeepers, it's a continuation of a reform movement that began a generation ago and swept through most major U.S. Zoos. The old concrete-and-steel cages that resembled prisons for animals are mostly gone. In fact, the cages themselves are mostly gone. The barriers between people and animals today consist largely of moats and unobtrusive ramparts that give the exhibits the feel of miniature wild habitats. (para. 4)

This reformation continues today by looking at natural animal behaviors. Though many changes have occurred to better the habitats and lives of captive animals, many debate that animal exhibits are not a natural or ethical way to accommodate animals. However, there has been research to say that some animals are able to live peacefully in captivity. According to Lemonick et al. (2006) though an, "Exhibit has drawn fire from animal activists, many experts believe that those animals can do fine in captivity, since even in the wild they spend much of their time sitting around digesting their last meal" (para. 10). For this reason, it is crucial to consider what natural behaviors the animal would exhibit in the wild, when building an animal habitat.

Another practice for captive animals is adopting animals that will be sustainable in local conditions of the theme park. This is shown at the San Diego Zoo as the zoo's deputy director of collections, Larry Killmar states, "Bringing cold-weather animals into the warm Southern California climate is a bad business decision and a waste of precious resources" (Lemonick et al., 2006, para. 7). In fact, this is becoming a growing trend, as

species who are unable to thrive in the local environment are withdrawn by zoo directors (Lemonick et al., 2006). An Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum provides a key example of this, not even attempting to take on species that don't exist naturally in the area. In fact, the museum's mission is to give the full story of a single ecology, rather than snapshots of wildlife everywhere (Lemonick et al., 2006).

A further example of staying sustainable to the local environment is shown at California's CuriOdyssey, which showcases butterflies. According to Levin (2012), "Philosophically, living in California in an often arid environment, we believe that our gardens should be primarily comprised of low-maintenance, low-water plants. We are trying to minimize the number of non-native plants and the vast majority of our plants are perennials so we don't have to switch out plants seasonally" (p. 92). Climates and environments that come closest to the animal's natural habitat proves to be the best surroundings for captive animals. Though captive animals will never live the same as in the wild, by specifically choosing animals that thrive in local environments and choosing low maintenance environments, theme parks can give animals a thriving and healthy life.

With so many considerations for a proper habitat for captive animals, large teams are needed in order to sustain the cleanliness, maintenance, and existence of each exhibit. According to the Butterfly Pavilion's vice president of resource development in Colorado, Leandra Lipson states, "Maintaining the conservatory is quote an endeavor. We have a full-time horticulture and curatorial team to maintain the plants, animals and structure" (Levin, 2012, p. 94). Having a dedicated team is critical to the survival of animals and in maintaining an established and correct environment for captive animals.

Animal habitats are often debated, but through constant researching and updating, large teams, and proper local environment choices, theme parks can successfully sustain captive animals.

Animal nutrition and feeding also plays an important part of animal satisfaction and well-being. Nutrition and feeding have an abundant amount of factors that relate to animal health and welfare. Animals in captivity face many changes when coming from the wild. According to Kawata (2008), “Wild animals are forced to make considerable adjustments to captivity in all aspects of life, and limitations of domesticated animal models should be recognized and examined” (p. 17). In fact, once animals make the shift from the wild to captivity, feeding differences are prominent. Kawata (2008) notes this occurrence stating, “While baboons spend 65 to 70% of the time walking and feeding in the wild, in captivity such activities occupy only 10 to 20% of the day even in large enclosures or small islands, and involve nothing more than picking prepared food pellets out of a hopper” (p. 18). Animals learn quickly that they will receive food on schedule, and their lifestyle becomes more sedentary and inactive. According to a group of herpetologists, “When such animals are maintained in captivity, with presentation of food or other valuable resources no longer contingent upon their foraging efforts, a phenomenon called learned laziness is known to occur...It is as if animals learn that their behaviors are no longer instrumental in bringing about biologically significant outcomes, so the animals quit trying” (Chiszar, Murphy, & Smith, 1993, p. 18).

Depending on the species, animals have extremely diverse feeding schedules. The time of day animals are expected to eat is an important aspect relating to feeding habits

(Kawata, 2008). Dittrich (1976) states, “Compared to domesticated counterparts, wild animals exhibit a broader scope in feeding behavior. In zoos, ungulates are fed highly concentrated diets for livestock which are eaten in a short time in comparison with the time consuming feeding of free-living animals, leaving animals with nothing to do and unnaturally long delays between feeds” (p. 20). The time of day animals feed changes when it comes to seasons changing. Fluctuations in seasonal feeding should not be overlooked, as seasonal food changes affect reproductive systems along with quantity of food consumed (Kawata, 2008). By accounting for varying feeding schedules, keepers can successfully comply with the feeding habits animals exhibit in the wild.

Since each animal has a different feeding schedule, the frequency of feeding also differs between each species. According to Kawata (2008), “The frequency of feeding affects the life of zoo animals, since some of them cannot time their feeding bouts to an artificially prescribed schedule” (p. 20). While some animals consume all the nutrients they need in one feeding period, other animals need to feed continuously to satisfy their nourishment. As a result, it is important to fluctuate the frequency of feeding according to each species. While humans tend to eat three meals a day, animals differ greatly according to each individual animal, which needs to be taken into account when feeding.

In regards to animal nutrition, the food being consumed plays a major part to the health and success of animals kept in theme parks. Burnett (2001) states that, “Much has been written about the food and foraging requirements of polar bears, both in the wild and in captivity and current practices throughout the world tend, on the whole, to be inimical to the dietary needs of the animals” (para. 10). Much of what trainers know

about animal nutrition and feeding comes from livestock nutrition. Though much research has been done, livestock research cannot be replicated for theme park animals. Dierenfeld (1996) attests to this saying, “We recognize that although the basis of nutritional requirements can be found in domestic models, our production goals in zoo populations differ distinctly from those of the pet or livestock industries. Furthermore, the unique metabolisms, behaviors, and physiologies of numerous species are simply not duplicated in domestic animal models” (p. 19). Again, treating animals as individuals, not only by individual species, but also each animal individual specifically is shown to be an essential practice for animals. Kawata (2008) states that, “Livestock industry provides the basics for zoo animal nutrition, yet it comprises a narrow band of necessary knowledge and we must extend our search for answers into nature” (p. 22). While the livestock industry creates a base for nutrition knowledge, there is still much to learn for theme park animal nutrition and feeding practices.

An occurring trend seen in feeding is reverting to natural feeding practices. Kurtz’s 2002 study (as cited in Kawata, 2008) found that natural feeding, such as eating carcasses of other animals, promotes the mental and physical well-being of captive animals. Animals are more likely to eat food that appears and smells more natural. Food appearance and sensory factors play a large part in successful feeding. According to the Natural Research Council Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources (1977), “Hunger and recognition of food are important to food acceptance, along with such factors as: color, odor, flavor, form, time of feeding, social factors, methods or presentation, and quantity and frequency of feeding” (p. 33). The results of these sensory factors prove to be

astronomical. Meritt (1980) proves this saying, “In these cases we have added ground, aged fish to the diet. Nearly, without exception, feeding began immediately. Perhaps the odor of this partially decomposed fish stimulated inner feeding mechanisms, mimicking the odor of carrion” (p. 33).

Most importantly, constantly reviewing and changing practices is critical to effective animal nutrition and feeding. To avoid complacency, a good practice for zoo managers is to critique common feeding practices that have been long-accepted (Kawata, 2008). It is always important to be adapting and changing according to animal needs. By doing so, along with the practices mentioned above, animal nutrition and feeding can be healthy and beneficial for animals in theme parks.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the best practices related to the use of animals in parks at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions (include 3-5 Qs):

1. What training practices are being utilized for animals in theme parks?
2. What animal habitat practices are being utilized by the selected animal theme parks?

3. What feeding practices are being utilized by the selected animal theme parks?
(feeding times, nutritional value, etc)

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information was gathered from online resources and reviews of literature.
2. Training practices, habitat practices, and feeding practices were analyzed.
3. Data were collected during fall of 2013.
4. Information for this study was gathered utilizing online resources.

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the best practices related to the use of animals in Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom. This chapter includes the following sections: description of context, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

Description of Context

Best practices of animal use in theme parks were examined for three animal theme parks. The animal theme park industry draws in many tourists by combining elements of zoos and aquariums with roller coasters and theme park attractions. Richard K. Miller and Associates (2012) found that, "Animal amusement parks are dispersed throughout the United States, with the most popular parks residing in California and Florida" (p. 1) . As the tourism industry evolves, animal amusement parks are on the rise with the combination of theme parks and animal attractions. Within the competing market, California accounts for 30 theme parks and 19 zoos and aquariums, while Florida accounts for 14 theme parks and 17 zoos and aquariums (Theme Park City, 2012). With the increased popularity of animal theme parks, it is important to investigate the best practices related to the use of animals in theme parks.

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a best practices matrix developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The researcher originally created the matrix based on training, habitat, and feeding for animal theme parks. To develop the matrix, the researcher utilized the review of literature to draw on basics regarding the three best practices of training, habitat, and feeding. Each section allowed for detailed notes regarding each specific park and practice. This instrument was adaptable, and subjected to change, should the researcher find additional information going forward. The final checklist included six best practices.

The draft matrix was used for a pilot study on October 27th, 2013, by utilizing three websites of animal theme parks that were not used in the study. The researcher systematically reviewed the animal theme park websites to analyze what each park markets to visitors. Based on the pilot study, the researcher found that many animal theme parks market guest-to-animal interactions. The matrix was finalized with an additional four best practices, totaling to ten overall best practices.

Description of Procedures

Best practices of animal use in theme parks were examined for three animal theme parks. The instrument utilized in this study was a best practices matrix developed by the researcher. The three animal theme parks that were systematically examined by the researcher were: Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery

Kingdom. The researcher first included relevant information pertaining to each animal theme park used in the study. The best practices of the selected animal theme parks were accessed by analyzing the company's websites. The researcher examined the three animal theme parks in reference to the matrix, evaluating how each park correlated with each best practice. Notes were written in the matrix, exemplifying to what extent each park utilized each best practice. The analyzation of each best practice, pertaining to each animal theme park, was purely descriptive. Research was conducted over a two week period from October 27th, 2013 through November 10th, 2013.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the best practices related to the use of animals in Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom. A best practices approach was utilized to examine the use of animals in theme parks. This chapter includes the following sections: company overview, training consistency, positive reinforcement, habitat size, habitat authenticity, feeding authenticity, feeding schedules, feeding interactions with guests, educational exhibits, trained shows, animal interactions with guests and summary.

Company Overview

Disney's Animal Kingdom opened on April 22, 1998 and is located in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. The park is themed to promote animal conservation and cares for 1,700 animals. Animal Kingdom is the fourth theme park of Walt Disney World and is the largest Disney park in the world. Animal Kingdom is home to a veterinary facility, interactive exhibits, and animal attractions, and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

SeaWorld Orlando opened on December 15, 1973 and is located in Orlando, Florida. SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment cares for 67,000 animals and aims to educate and inspire guests to care and protect the animals showcased. The company owns one of the largest animal collections in North America. SeaWorld is accredited by the

Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquarium.

Six Flags Discovery Kingdom is located in Vallejo, California and is an animal theme park that has been a part of the Six Flags company since 1999. Six Flags Discovery Kingdom consists of thrilling roller coasters as well as animal exhibits, though the park does not state how many animals it cares for. The park is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums.

Training Consistency

At Disney's Animal Kingdom, the staff constantly rotate the animals used for guest-to-animal encounters. While animals appear to be on display all day, each individual animal is switched out. This allows trainers to work with all animals and gives each animal a break from guest encounters. To further delve into training methods, guests can pay to interact with dolphins where they work with a team of marine mammal specialists, sit in on training sessions, and learn more in-depth about training. SeaWorld Orlando keeps training interaction close between their animals and staff. SeaWorld strives to keep animals engaged to their training by varying training reinforcement rewards such as food, toys, and massages. SeaWorld recognizes that every day and every animal is different when training their animals. Six Flags Discovery Kingdom trainers work directly with their animals. The animals at Six Flags Discovery Kingdom are raised from a very young age with their trainers and are able to develop a mutual understanding

and bond over that time. Due to this, Six Flags Discovery Kingdom acknowledges that while their animals are well-trained, they are still wild animals.

Positive Reinforcement

In terms of positive reinforcement training, there was little information available on Disney Animal Kingdom's website. For interactive animal encounters, Animal Kingdom uses a form of positive reinforcement by warning guests that though interaction is likely, it is never guaranteed because their animals participate voluntarily and are never forced to participate. At SeaWorld Orlando, training principles are centered around positive reinforcement. Animals may voluntarily participate in their shows; if they choose not to participate, they are able to do so with no consequences. SeaWorld Orlando also varies training to continually stimulate their animals and enrich their daily routine. Six Flags Discovery Kingdom, likewise, has animals that participate voluntarily. If animals choose to not participate, they do not have to. After a certain age, many of Discovery Kingdom's animals are retired from daily training sessions.

Habitat Size

Disney's Animal Kingdom and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom did not have sufficient information on their websites to determine habitat size at either theme park. SeaWorld Orlando facilities are established by federal accredited bodies and either meet or exceed standards established by the accredited associations. The marine mammal habitats are advanced with state-of-the-art facility and design management. SeaWorld

Orlando has some of the largest facilities such as Shamu Stadium, which contains 7 million gallons of saltwater that is continually chilled and filtered.

Habitat Authenticity

Disney's Animal Kingdom offers many backstage tours in which guests are able to view animals in their exhibits. In a particular backstage tour, guests are able to control cameras in the habitats to view the animals in a somewhat natural state. On Kilimanjaro Safaris, guests are informed by tour guides about animal habitats in the wild. However, as far as the materials and authenticity of each habitat, not much information was provided on the company website. SeaWorld Orlando constantly varies the activities offered in the animal environments to provide enriching and interesting lifestyles. Each habitat is continually changed and includes a variety of activities. In regards to materials and authenticity, not much information was provided on SeaWorld's website. Six Flags Discovery Kingdom provides activity sheets to guests and groups that visit the park. On these activity sheets, the wild environments of animals are discussed and Six Flags tour guides educate guests about the natural habitat of each animal. However, the actual environments at Six Flags Discovery Kingdom were not found due to insufficient information.

Feeding Authenticity

At Animal Kingdom, guests are able to speak with on-site experts and watch handlers prepare meals for animals at the nutrition center. Guests in the park can discover

diets, through their interaction with handlers and on-site experts. On the Animal Kingdom's website, diet ingredients and feeding authenticity are not easily accessible. SeaWorld Orlando focuses on preventative health and behavioral enrichment through their nutrition. SeaWorld Orlando somewhat touches on authenticity, rewarding their animals with whole fish as rewards. However, there was little information on SeaWorld Orlando's website to examine the ingredients and feeding authenticity. There was insufficient information on the Six Flags Discovery Kingdom website to determine the authenticity of animal diets.

Feeding Schedules

At Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom, guests are able to feed animals during interactive encounters. While the controlled feeding schedules are not disclosed on any of the parks websites, guests are able to feed animals during park hours at these attractions. Animals that are fed at these attractions have somewhat irregular and uncontrolled feeding schedules in each park, since guests can constantly be feeding them during park hours.

Feeding Interactions with Guests

At Disney's Animal Kingdom, there is an Affection Station where domesticated animals can be fed, pet, and brushed by guests. SeaWorld Orlando has four interactive feeding interactions with animals such as dolphins, stingrays, fish, and sharks. Six Flags

Discovery Kingdom has 19 different feeding encounters that incorporates a number of animals ranging from alligators to giraffes to penguins.

Educational Exhibits

Disney focuses on conservation and education through the use of animals in their parks. Four educational exhibits are available for Disney guests. These are the Affection Station, Conservation Station, Fossil Fun Games, and Wilderness Explorers. At SeaWorld Orlando, there are 12 educational exhibits: Antarctica: Empire of Penguin, Dolphin Nursery, Jewel of the Sea Aquarium, Manta Aquarium, Shamu Underwater Viewing, Shark Encounter, Pelican Preserve, Turtle Trek, Wild Arctic, Dolphin Cove, Pacific Point Preserve, and Stingray Lagoon. Six Flags Discovery Kingdom also has a large number of educational exhibits, totaling to 19 different exhibits: Alligator Isle, Animal All Stars, Butterfly Exhibit, Cougar Rocks, Dolphin Discovery, Elephant Encounter, Giraffe Dock Feed, Kingdom Stage, Lion's Den, Lorikeet Aviary, Merlin's Island Part, Ocean Discovery, Odin's Temple of the Tiger, Penguin Passage, Reptile Discovery, Seafari Pass, Shark Experience, Tiger Island, and Walrus Experience.

Trained Shows

At Animal Kingdom, two trained shows are shown on the website: It's Tough to be a Bug and Flights of Wonder. Though other trained shows may be available, these two were the only ones readily advertised on the website. SeaWorld Orlando has a number of options as far as trained shows. SeaWorld Orlando has six year round shows: Reserve

Your Seats, A'lure, The Call of the Ocean, Clyde and Seamore Take Pirate Island, One Ocean, Blue Horizons, and Pets Ahoy. SeaWorld Orlando also has 16 seasonal shows, most centering around the holidays, winter, Shamu, Elmo, and other marine animals. Six Flags Discovery Kingdom has seven trained shows featuring many different animals. These shows are: Birds of the World, Drench!, Elephant Demonstration Show, Odin's Temple of the Tiger, Pinnipeds of the Caribbean, and the Wildlife Theater Show.

Animal Interactions with Guests

All three parks have many opportunities for guests to interact with animals. At Disney's Animal Kingdom, eight animal interaction attractions are available. These are: Affection Station, Conservation Station, Discovery Island Trails, Habitat Habit, Kilimanjaro Safaris, Maharajah Jungle Trek, The Oasis Exhibit, Pangani Forest Explorations. SeaWorld Orlando features ten animal interactions. These range from backstage tours to interactive exhibits. These animal interactions at SeaWorld Orlando are: Dolphin Cove, Pacific Point Preserve, Stingray Lagoon, Behind the Scenes Tour, Beluga Interaction Program, Dolphins Up Close Tour, Marine Mammal Keeper Experience, Penguins Up Close Tour, Wild Arctic Up Close Experience, and Sea Lions Up Close Tour. Six Flags Discovery Kingdom has four options to interact with animals. These animal interactions tend to be backstage special guided tours, where guests are able to interact with animals for long periods of time. These are: Dolphin Discovery, Trainer for a Day, Sharks in the Dark, and Backstage Safari.

Summary

A few key points stood out within the results of this study. The first was positive reinforcement in training, which all three parks practiced similarly. Each park allowed voluntary participation for their animals. If the animals choose not to participate, they were never forced to. SeaWorld Orlando aims to stimulate their animals and continually vary routines to keep the animals from falling into a sluggish routine. Six Flags Discovery Kingdom also allows animals to retire after a certain age from training.

Habitat authenticity was not disclosed on any of the companies websites for the three parks. However, each park offered opportunities to learn about natural habitats. Animal Kingdom provided a backstage tour where guests are able to view animals in their habitat through cameras. SeaWorld Orlando varies environments to stimulate animals and offer a variety of activities, while Six Flags Discovery Kingdom provides activity sheets to educate guests about natural habitats.

While not much information was found about the authentic feeding schedules of the animals at each theme park, feeding interactions were available at all three parks. As a result, animals are constantly fed by guests during park hours, leading to a somewhat irregular feeding schedule for some species.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As tourism continues to evolve, the use of animals in theme parks is growing significantly. Due to this, it is important to examine how these animals are treated and how they contribute to the tourism industry. This concluding chapter will include the following: a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, limitations, conclusions based on research questions, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

Animals have become a huge integration within theme parks. Traditionally amusement parks consisted of rides and attractions, but as the tourism industry continually grows, the addition of animal attractions has seen a large increase. This study investigated the use of animals in Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom. Information for this study was gathered from online resources and literature reviews in the fall of 2013. To further investigate the use of animals in theme parks, a few subjects were examined. The topics investigated were the best practices of training, habitats, and feeding of animals in theme parks. Each of these best practices included more in-depth specifics related to each topic.

For this study, the researcher created a best practices matrix to compare the training, habitat, and feeding practices for each theme park. Originally, the researcher created a matrix based off of the literature review and pilot tested the matrix on three companies not used in the study. After the pilot test, the researcher refined and created additional practices to the best practices matrix. The researcher then went to each of the companies websites used in the study and wrote specific notes in relation to every practice, describing how each company fulfilled each practice and to what extent.

Positive reinforcement training was used at all three parks, allowing animals to voluntarily participate. Though little information was available about habitat authenticity, each park provided different methods to educate guests about natural animal environments. Feeding practices, such as authentic schedules, were not disclosed on the websites of the companies, but all three parks provided feeding interactions between guests and animals.

Discussion

The training practices used in each park focused on positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement training was similar in all three parks; each park never forces animals to perform. By allowing voluntary participation, each park values their animals beyond their recreational purpose, but rather care for the animals themselves. The most significant training progressions have been an increase in positive reinforcement in training animal behavior and a decrease in punishments used in training (Shay, 2003). These findings were consistent with recent research, as all three parks positively reinforce

their animals. Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom do not punish their animals if they choose not to participate, showing that they are consistent with the decrease in punishment training. While the three parks allow the animals to voluntarily participate, parameters should be considered when making this claim. Though each park stated that their animals are voluntary participants, none of the parks stated how they measured whether an animal wanted to participate or not. Since animal enthusiasts claim that some animals are forced to participate and therefore exhibit aggression, animal theme parks could benefit from giving a more descriptive parameter and procedure list to the audience, to deter these detrimental claims.

Though habitat authenticity information was not readily available on each company's website, all three parks provided opportunities to learn about natural animal habitats. At Disney's Animal Kingdom, guests can take backstage tours where they visit animal exhibits. Guests in the park are able to view the exhibits with cameras, which allow them to take a closer look into the animal habitats. In SeaWorld Orlando, every animal habitat is continually changed to keep variety in each animal's lifestyle. At Six Flags Discovery Kingdom, tour guides educate guests about natural habitats of the animals by providing activity sheets for guests. The habitat practices range at each park; Six Flags and Disney provide learning opportunities about natural animal habitats, whereas SeaWorld offers information pertaining to the actual exhibit.

In poor conditions, animals revert to poor behaviors and exhibit few natural behaviors (Burnett, 2001). Thus, it is vital that habitats are well-built and true to the native environment animals thrive in. These parks were inconsistent to the previous

research, in that each park did not provide enough information to decipher whether or not each exhibit was accurate to natural habitats. Data collected from the companies websites showed how each park provided opportunities to learn about native environments. However, there were no descriptions of how each company fulfilled requirements as far as how spacious, natural, and authentic each animal exhibit was.

Furthermore, trainers often stage-manage animal behaviors or train them to act a certain way while on display (Corliss & Drummond, 1998). The park attractions show how the parks often stage-manage the experience that guests have, not allowing guests to fully experience authenticity within the theme parks. While guests are able to learn about natural habitats through backstage tours and site experts, guests do not experience the authenticity of each animal habitat, but rather only learn what they should be in the wild. The findings showed that all three parks focused on marketing to guest experiences, rather than showcasing best practices within exhibits. Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, Six Flags Discovery Kingdom should provide more information that is easily accessible on their websites in regards to animal habitats. This will give guests a genuine and informative experience at animal theme parks, instead of providing a stage-managed experience where information can only be found through backstage tours. By presenting educational information on websites, these companies can combat animal cruelty claims from animal enthusiasts and give support to how each theme park follows best practices in regards to animal exhibits.

Authentic feeding schedules were also difficult to find on all three of the companies websites. Information was not provided on the nutrition of animal diets or on

scheduled feedings times. However, all three parks allowed guests to feed animals in a petting zoo environment. This led to animals being fed constantly by guests during park hours, resulting in a somewhat irregular feeding schedule for some animals. The time of day animals are expected to eat is an important aspect relating to feeding habits (Kawata, 2008). While some animals are content being fed all day by guests, this practice can be unnatural for other species who, in the wild, only feed a few times in a day. Animal species differ in that each species have a specific feeding schedule they follow; while some animals feed a few times a day, other animals constantly feed throughout the day. Therefore, the findings in this study were inconsistent with previous research because the animals in the parks had irregular feeding schedules.

This shows that the feeding practices used in these theme parks seem to be geared more toward guest enjoyment, rather than toward animal nutrition. The irregular feeding schedules the animals have are to allow guests to interact and feed animals, but give little regard to the health of the animal. The findings showed that all three parks focused again on appealing and marketing to guests, instead of focusing on animal well-being. Therefore, it would be in the best interest of each park to provide more information about whether the species at the petting zoos are equipped to be constantly fed. Along with this, all parks should ensure that they are using the correct animals in their feeding attractions. If animals are being used that have a specific feeding schedule, they should be removed and replaced with animals that can sustain thriving and healthy lives, while being fed constantly throughout the day.

The researcher took into consideration that limitations may have impacted the results of this study. Since research on this subject was restricted to online means, the quantity and quality of information may have been impacted. Much of the study included specifics such as habitat size and feeding ingredients, which was not readily accessible on the companies' websites. While the companies websites did provide sufficient information on some topics, other topics may have been better investigated by speaking to an employee or looking at research papers. Furthermore, some of the data could have been provided by being a guest at the park. While many attractions have tour guides that explain in-depth about the habitats and diets of animals, much of this information was not available on the websites, perhaps to promote visitation to the parks. It is important to note that the findings in this study should not serve as a basis for the entire animal theme park industry. While these theme parks are major companies in the tourism industry, they do not give insight to smaller animal theme parks or parks that are not located in Florida or California. Despite these limitations, this study gives insight to the best practices related to the use of animals at theme parks and how Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld Orlando, and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom fulfill each best practice.

This research provides animal theme parks with insight relating to best practices in training, habitat, and feeding. The findings illustrate that while all three animal theme parks excelled in certain practices, each park would benefit from refining and updating some of their procedures. All three parks focus on positive reinforcement training, supporting the most popular form of animal training. The parks did not provide valid information to decipher the size or naturalness of exhibits, but did supply educational

opportunities about native animal habitats. All three parks offered attractions where guests were able to feed animals. This led to irregular feeding schedules. The findings identify that some of the experiences are stage-managed, where information can only be found through backstage tours and tour guides. All three parks would benefit from presenting additional educational information about habitat and feeding practices to deter detrimental claims from animal enthusiasts and exemplify how each park follows best practices.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The training practices utilized for animals at the theme parks centered around positive reinforcement.
2. Habitat practices utilized by the selected theme parks provided opportunities to learn about natural habitats of animals.
3. The feeding practices utilized at the selected theme parks centered around guest enjoyment and interaction with the animals.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Develop parameters to measure how animals are voluntary participants in shows.
2. Offer educational information about the materials of animal habitats and how authentic they are to the animal's natural environment.

3. Provide more information pertaining to habitat size of each animal and whether or not they are meeting space requirements.
4. Eliminate the use of animals that are not equip to being apart of feeding attractions and focus more on animal nutrition rather than guest interaction.
5. Future research should examine the marketing aspects of animal theme parks where information will be more easily accessible.
6. Future research should investigate whether theme parks focus more on animal health versus guest satisfaction in their animal practices.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A
Instrument

	Disney's Animal Kingdom	SeaWorld Orlando	Six Flags Discovery Kingdom
Training Consistency			
Positive Reinforcement			
Habitat Size			
Habitat Authenticity			
Feeding Authenticity			
Feeding Schedules			
Feeding Interactions with Guests			
Educational Exhibits			
Trained Shows			
Animal Interactions with Guests			