

## The HSUS System for Rating Zoos

To facilitate the distinction between what Hediger had called a "zoological garden" and a "garden with animals," and to further distinguish those two categories from the squalid menageries which, though called "zoos," bore no similarities to gardens of any sort, Sue developed a simple 1-2-3 system of rating zoos according to their approach to exhibiting animals.

Class 3 zoos were at the bottom of the scale, and Sue contended there was no justification for their continued existence. Into this category fell all "roadside zoos," privately operated by individuals who had neither the necessary knowledge of wild animals to exhibit them adequately, nor, in most cases, the concern to do so. These were the squalid exhibits so frequently photographed and described the preceding decade by Defenders of Wildlife, and generally found adjacent to gas stations, gift shops and other like enterprises to attract customers.

But Sue also placed a number of municipally operated zoos in this class, among them America's first zoo, the Central Park Zoo in New York City. Even though there was evidence of a movement to improve the zoo from within, Sue felt that it was too close to the class 1 Bronx Zoo to justify its continued existence. Had it been in a community without a better zoo near, she explained, it would have been classified as a class 2 zoo and thus worth the effort and expense it would take to improve it.

Of the class 3 zoo, Sue stated in her presentation to the Western Regional Workshop of the AAZPA in 1972:

In my mind the Group 3 zoos do nothing, serve no one, and indeed, give the whole profession a black eye. . . . In plain language, the third rated zoo is a ghetto for animals with no professional staff,

## The HSUS System for Rating Zoos

little thought given to display and a cancerous growth rate. These zoos must be stopped (HSUS Files).

She considered these zoos to be a waste of wildlife and, in the case of municipal class 3 zoos, a waste of public funds. Whether public or private these zoos desensitized the public to the needs of animals by blatantly ignoring those needs, often resulting in cruelty.

The second and first class zoos differed from the third in that their continued existence was not challenged. Both classes of zoos were needed by the people in their communities. But the first and second class zoos differed widely in the extent to which they provided a "positive view" of wildlife.

The second class zoos' inadequacies stemmed from the fact they were largely under the control of municipalities. They had qualified professional staff members as well as veterinary services and some education programs, but they were hampered in their progress by municipal systems or bureaucratic interference.

In these cases, Sue felt, the professional staff could not be blamed for the zoos' failures. They were victims themselves. Zoos in this group such as those in Tucson, Arizona, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were most in need of help from outside the zoo to untangle the red tape and insure that decisions affecting the health and well-being of the animals were made by the people with the best qualifications and judgment. Many zoos in this class had been started by accident and had failed to develop the objectives, policies, and funding necessary for a modern zoo. Their problems were compounded if they happened to be managed by a director who considered that the zoo's primary purpose was entertainment rather

## The HSUS System for Rating Zoos

than education or conservation.

Although lack of adequate funds was a problem common to the class 2 zoos, Sue felt that money would not always bring about the necessary improvements. If the zoo had no philosophy of operation, or the director's vision was limited to a newer, cleaner version of the old-fashioned "stamp collection" type of zoo, then money would only make things worse.

The few zoos which fell into the first class were able, Sue said, to "instill in the public the need for wildlife and its meaning to the world." This class included the New York Zoological Park; the Houston, Texas Zoo; the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago; the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.; and the San Diego, California Zoo. The smaller, privately operated class 1 zoos such as the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, Texas, and Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum near Tucson were also meeting the criteria of zoos in this class to "cater to civic pride," and contribute substantially to the preservation, understanding and appreciation of animal life.

Sue was quick to point out that even these zoos, as their directors would doubtless acknowledge, were not perfect. These zoos were often saddled with archaic buildings, and their plans and desires outstripped their available funds, even when these funds numbered in the tens of millions of dollars for the annual budget of one zoo alone. Exhibits could be found in first class zoos which were worse--in terms of meeting the animals' needs or educating the public--than some which could be found in third class zoos. All of these zoos were characterized, Sue emphasized, by the autonomy of the professional staff to determine the zoo's philosophy and future direction. They were generally under the control of zoological societies.

## The HSUS System for Rating Zoos

These zoos led the way in conservation and education programs. Under the direction of William Conway, the New York Zoological Society (NYZS) "bucked the trend" in collecting large numbers of species and began, in the 1960's, to "change the collection in the Bronx Zoo to emphasize breeding groups rather than singletons or pairs" (Campbell, 1978, p.36). The NYZS also sponsored the study of mountain gorillas which led to the publication of a scientific book on the characteristics of these little known and much maligned animals, as well as the popular book, The Year of the Gorilla. The author of these works, Dr. George Schaller, became the coordinator of the NYZS's Center for Field Biology and Conservation, and would continue to study the behavior of animals in the wild and publish both scientific and popular accounts of his observations under the Society's sponsorship.

It also seems that the revelations about the shortcomings of zoos emanated primarily from the class 1 zoo. Hence it is not surprising to find Schaller reporting in The Mountain Gorilla:

The most reprehensible shooting of gorillas is being done by some zoo collectors, who usually slaughter the female, and even the whole group, in order to obtain the infants for export. That such a drastic collecting technique is unnecessary has been shown by Cordier, who has safely netted whole groups, and by Rhyiner (1958), who has captured infants unharmed by using tear gas.(p.321)

Although the criticisms offered by zoo people of their profession and its shortcomings have been intended to inspire improvements, they have been used as arguments for the elimination of zoos (See: Zoos Pro and Con). But The Humane Society of the United States, although it has veered very close to an anti-zoo position from time to time, has officially maintained a position supporting the efforts of good

## The HSUS System for Rating Zoos

zoos, the improvement of mediocre zoos, and the elimination of bad zoos. The rating system was created as a means to distinguish among them, and while it is perhaps a rather simplistic means of doing so (See: Conclusions and Recommendations), it has effectively prevented the Humane Society, its constituents, the general public, and the news media from lumping together in one indistinguishable mass such radically different operations as the New York Zoological Park and the gas station with a caged bear simply because they are both referred to by the all-purpose term "zoo."

Sue expressed to the Board of The HSUS the hope that class 3 zoos would be eliminated by the USDA when it began to inspect and license exhibitors under the Animal Welfare Act. As a former staff member of a zoo, she expressed disappointment that the Federal Government had been forced to regulate zoos (HSUS Files):

I think of qualified zoo people in the same way as I do a doctor. A highly skilled professional who must maintain professional standards. To have the federal government forced to set guidelines was a great disappointment to me. I feel the zoo professional has not been careful of the company he keeps. He has done very little to regulate and accredit his contemporaries. A small handful have a deep moral commitment but they are rare. The HSUS should be a conscience plus a sounding board for the public on zoo matters.

The focus of The HSUS Zoo Program became the elimination of the class 3 zoo and the elevation of class 2 zoos to the level of their class 1 counterparts. To accomplish this, public awareness and sympathy were essential.

Sue stressed that she judged zoos from the perspective of the informed and concerned citizen. She urged the general public and humane societies to do the same by asking certain questions of themselves as they visited zoos. She described

## The HSUS System for Rating Zoos

this approach in a speech to The HSUS New Jersey Branch and urged the members of the audience to ask themselves if the zoo appeared to have a "social conscience." To make that determination one must first ask: what does the zoo do for the community? Does it have programs for school children? Does it provide an education service for the school system? Does it have a staff of professionals who are willing and able to speak out on conservation issues and give advice about specific problems relating to either indigenous or exotic animals in the community? Are there significant and farsighted breeding programs underway at the zoo? Do the zoo's staff members give testimony on legislation to protect wildlife? Do the keepers have adequate training and concern for their animals? Do you as a visitor to the zoo get anything positive out of your visit?

Sue maintained from the earliest days of the Zoo Program that zoos belong to the community and the citizens have just as much responsibility as the municipality to insure that the zoo functions as it should. A bad zoo, she contended, is reflective of an apathetic community. Enlightened, concerned citizens can improve zoos. To generate the necessary concern The HSUS made its findings public.