

The Controversy over the Value of Zoo Animals --- Two Stories about Gorillas in a Japanese Zoo and What They Mean ---

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Abstract

The year of 1999 was not a very good year for gorillas in Japan. Two sad and strange stories about captive gorillas in a Tokyo zoo were reported in the mass media. I was involved in this problem as a primate (gorilla) researcher and came to the realization that, in Japan, zoo animals are regarded simply as breeding machines that are easily replaceable by buying other animals. I found it was really difficult to talk with zoo personnel on how to promote the welfare of zoo animals to assure 'quality of life' and respect for 'the dignity' of animals. Why is the understanding of zoo animals by Japanese zoo professionals so different from that of Western countries? Surely this difference needs to be clarified before discussions to change this situation in the future can occur. Clearly, Japanese zoos have not kept up with the times, and it is not only a problem for zoos but also for all Japanese because sympathy for captive animals as the weak is an indication of our attitude toward all living things including humans.
