

VISITORS' PERCEPTION ON EXISTING ZOOS IN SRI LANKA AS *EX-SITU* CONSERVATION CENTERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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The diversity of the environment become degraded day by day because of the anthropogenic and natural factors. So two approaches are used in the science to conserve the biodiversity such as *in-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation. The zoo which have been established in 19th century mainly for educating and entertaining the visitors. But in 21st century the zoo has become as *ex-situ* conservation center with a simple hierarchical management structure, innovative leaders, professional scientists and conservationists as staff members in the global scenario. Therefore the expectations of the visitors have become changed on the 21st century zoos. This study was conducted in Dehiwala (DZ – confined environment), Pinnawala zoos (PZ – Semi natural environment) and Ridiyagama Safari Park (RSP – Free roaming areas) to provide a complete document of the performances of the zoos in Sri Lanka as *ex-situ* conservation centers and to compare and contrast the role of each zoo. The structured questionnaire survey was used and 150 randomly selected visitors were involved in the survey from three zoos. 52% from DZ, 44% from PZ and 48% from RSP visit the zoo as a recreational destination and only 1% of the visitors have realized the conservational value of the zoo. Only 6% of PZ and 10% from RSP satisfied on the availability of the awareness boards in the zoo premises and the main roads and totally unsatisfied on canteen facilities. Also they completely unsatisfied on the types of gathering information for disabled visitors and involvement of the staff members in providing information on animals. Still visitors of DZ (98%) gain information from descriptive boards and none of visitors use new technical methods in PZ, but 100% of RSP visitors get information via discussions with the staff members. Both DZ and PZ visitors recommended on concerning animals but 40% of RSP visitors recommended to concern on the visitor facilities too. 90% of visitors in PZ and RSP were happy at the departure but only 68% of visitors in DZ. This study was conducted to assess the roles of these established zoos in Sri Lanka as *ex-situ* conservation centers as a comparative study.

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