

## ZOO ETHICS: THE CHALLENGES OF COMPASSIONATE CONSERVATION

**Author:** Jenny Gray

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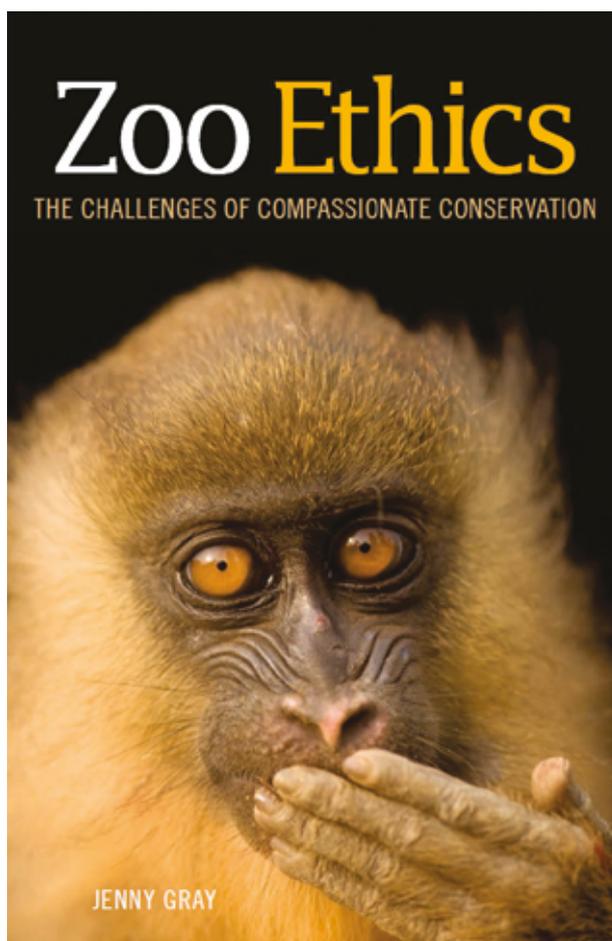
**Reviewed by** Hamish Gibson

My first memories of attending a zoo are from 30 years ago at the Perth Zoo in Western Australia with my grandfather. I took delight in trying to capture a squirrel running 'wild' around the gardens. Perhaps I needed an impossible task to keep me occupied on the long tour around the enclosures, or maybe I just wasn't that interested in seeing animals in cages. I've always had an interest in natural history and learned about the biodiversity of flora and fauna on bushwalks using guides to look up the names of birds, reptiles and wildflowers. More recently, I've attended learning experiences at the same zoo with my students, relating well to the use of psychological learning theories in the care of zoo animals.

Reflecting upon these experiences reveals a clear affinity with the sentiment and thoughtful presentation of ideas in Jenny Gray's book, *Zoo Ethics: The Challenges of Compassionate Conservation*. This text provides a well-researched snapshot of the changing role zoos play in the conservation process and the ethical dilemmas they face in performing this role. Considering the human-induced extinction of many animals on our planet, it is of paramount importance that we heed the message contained in the foreword by Joel Sartore of the National Geographical Society: "when we save other species, we save ourselves". Humanity's most significant barrier to this is our own hubris.

Modern zoos, as Gray points out, have a pivotal role in inspiring us all to be actively involved in the conservation process: protecting the biodiversity of the planet. In examining this role, Gray makes important distinctions between the virtuous notion of conserving and protecting animals that are endangered and the practical application of these ethical standards in the care of animals within a zoo setting. She eloquently points out that ethics itself is an intellectual construct, whilst applied ethics involves the careful evidence-based set of behaviours that facilitate effective zoo operations as a sustainable business. Specific consideration is applied to all aspects of zoo management including: behaviour towards animals in captivity, creating an educative experience for visitors, and, most importantly, conservation.

Her book explains the role of zoos as key decision-makers in how best to protect natural habitats and promote the welfare and rights of animals. It provides an objective analysis of how these



standards are progressed through the systematic re-evaluation of operations and virtues about how zoos should best operate. There is a 'matter of fact' honesty that matches this objectivity as Gray recognises the propensity for zoos to be places where we may view the very best behaviour of humans, and also the very worst.

In conclusion, Gray highlights the unique strength of zoos to provide millions of visitors with the opportunity to engage face-to-face with beautiful animals and engender a true love for wildlife. By evoking these emotions of genuine awe and wonder, she instils a sense of responsibility for the protection of animals. Gray finishes this book with the story of the young boy, Isaac, who, rather than receive gifts for his birthday asks for money to be contributed to help save the critically endangered eastern bandicoot. This thoughtful inclusion of a child's perspective made me think of a quote from one of Dr Seuss's books, *The Lorax*: "UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." *Zoo Ethics: The Challenges of Compassionate Conservation* is not only a guide for ethical standards in zoos but also a reminder as to why zoos exist in the first place.

The book is recommended for all those interested in improving the ethical standards that govern the care of animals in our zoos, particularly those who may see themselves working in that industry in the future.

**Rating:** 4 Lifted Loraxes out of 5