

Guidelines for Animal Visitor Experiences

at Zoos Victoria

These guidelines are prefaced with a conceptual model outlining how to conduct these experiences, including why they are important and how they can add value to the animals and the people involved (Fig 1). The guidelines are then broken down into two segments, each with “Dos and Don’ts”:

- Framing the experience and creating anticipation in visitors
- The Animal Experience

Aim

We want people to be in awe of animals for what and who they are, not what use they are to us. As such we will encourage people to connect with animals and appreciate them in a way that fosters respect for the wildness and intrinsic value of both the individual and the species.

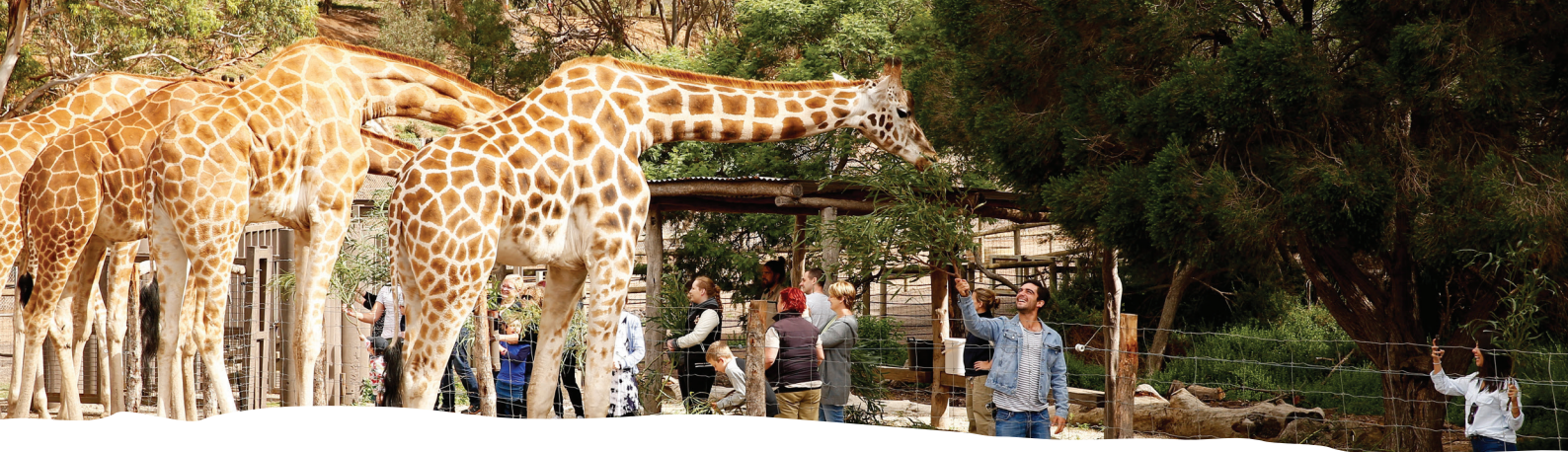


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Eco-centric encounters

- Encounter focused on animal's needs/wishes (humans can add value to animal's life)
- Visitors can contribute to experiences that animals find positive (e.g. food provisioning, enrichment, positive interactions)
- Free choice of participation for animals
- Focus on animals as individuals
- Keeper engagement to build excitement and anticipation in visitors
- Utilise Connect-Understand-Act model, ensuring a strong underlying conservation message
- Education opportunity to promote ethical experience
- Photos can be taken of the experience but key focus is on the animal

Figure 1: Conceptual model for how ZV can conduct animal-visitor experience that is good for animals and people.



Framing the experience and creating anticipation in visitors

Do

- ✓ Create excitement and anticipation in visitors
- ✓ Explain what to expect in a positive way and celebrate animal choice and control as part of the experience
- ✓ Provide unique insight about the individual animals they'll meet
- ✓ Focus on all elements of the experience as exciting (i.e. remember that being back-of-house and meeting staff is sometimes just as exciting for a visitor as meeting the animal)
- ✓ Encourage people to pay attention to the sensory aspect of the experience e.g. sounds, smell and close up sights of the animal
- ✓ Describe interesting species-typical animal behaviour
- ✓ Explain to visitors that we want to encourage photos of the animals and the experience. Use this as education opportunity to provide visitors with the tools to identify ethical wildlife experiences
- ✓ Offer unique photo opportunity for the group/individuals that takes place during the experience, but outside of the animal's environment
- ✓ Showcase our conservation and sustainability work
- ✓ Ensure the focus is on the animals, their behaviours and their inherent value in nature
- ✓ Encourage people to take amazing photos of the animal
- ✓ Allow photos of people enjoying the experience
- ✓ Ensure staff and volunteers are well trained to deliver positive messaging

Don't

- ✗ Begin experience with negatively framed instructions for visitors (e.g. "don't touch", "don't use flash" etc)
- ✗ Talk about zoo animals like you would pets/domestic animals (e.g. easy to train like your dog)
- ✗ Provide too much technical jargon, ensure the information provided is engaging and digestible
- ✗ Focus on negative messaging around other venues (focus on why we do what we do as a good example)
- ✗ Talk about choice and control as a limiting factor in the experience



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Animal interaction

Do

- ✓ Carefully consider both animal safety and human safety
- ✓ Focus on natural, species typical behaviours that have context
- ✓ Encourage people to participate in positive animal care
- ✓ Ensure humans are adding value to animal's life
- ✓ Feed natural diet (content and quantity) from a safe distance under keeper supervision
- ✓ Ensure free choice for animals – opt in and opt out
- ✓ Focus experience on the animals, their behaviours and their inherent value in nature
- ✓ Ensure the animal has the opportunity to seek food outside of experience if they choose
- ✓ Discuss conservation action/awareness/education opportunities
- ✓ Keep the experience within a distinct area/zone in the habitat to minimise disturbance
- ✓ Ensure the experience occurs in a naturalistic/habitat-focused setting wherever possible
- ✓ Keep a safe distance (variable according to animal)
- ✓ Ensure adequate staff training to read animal behaviour, manage visitors and communicate positively
- ✓ Conduct regular monitoring of individuals involved*
- ✓ Consider unpredictability in scheduling of these events to minimise risk of anticipatory behaviour

Don't

- ✗ Restrain or confine# animals for the experience
- ✗ Touch animals unless they solicit contact
- ✗ Encourage any unnatural behaviour
- ✗ Encourage animals to sit/climb on people or present animals as pets (e.g. on laps, walking on a lead etc)
- ✗ Set up animals in a way that presents them as photo props
- ✗ Transport animals outside of zoo or around the zoo as a display to visitors~
- ✗ Disturb animals for an encounter (resting animals can be given the choice to engage)
- ✗ Take nocturnal animals into daylight
- ✗ Withhold food for the purpose of a visitor encounter
- ✗ Provide unnatural food or food presented in an unnatural way (e.g. plastic containers)
- ✗ Apologise for animal choice/behaviours during the experience
- ✗ Disrupt social groups for the purpose of an encounter
- ✗ Use camera flashes

*: monitoring frequency will vary according to animals but min req is (TBD).

: restrain includes use of hands or harnesses (leads, jesses etc), confinement refers to any forced movement of animal into a restricted space without choice to leave. For example if in back-of-house area, ensure there is opportunity for them to leave.

~: this refers to transport as part of the experience. It is recognised some experiences will involve moving animals to an enriched area for the purpose of the encounter. This is acceptable if the animal has choice.

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