

Special Issue on Animal Welfare

Introduction

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Welfare is a term routinely used by the media, whether print, televised, or social. It can be applied to humans or animals or both. Unfortunately, the term *welfare* is often misconstrued or deconstructed to validate specific objectives that are usually biased and narrow in breadth. We contend that the term *welfare* is neutral and can refer to either positive or negative situations for an individual(s). The main goal of this “Special Issue on Animal Welfare” presented by *Aquatic Mammals* is to establish what is meant by “animal welfare” and where and how animal welfare can be assessed by humans—that is, how animal welfare has been or can be assessed on animals in managed care (e.g., zoos and aquaria) and/or in a free-ranging, natural habitat setting.

Assessing animal welfare is a common concern for several communities, including zoos and aquariums, regulatory agencies, tourism and travel agencies, research scientists, independent agencies and assessors, and more. But, are all assessment packets and tools equally applicable, and do they offer the same information across the board? Are they comparable? Similarly, are all enrichment programs synonymous with positive welfare for animals? Do enrichment and/or welfare programs offer outlets for animals that are environmentally or socially stimulating, or both?

Contributing authors to this special issue have summarized previous research that used a variety of established techniques and have discussed other research from colleagues who have suggested new techniques to assess welfare. The articles in this special issue focus on defining animal welfare, discussing the legal issues surrounding animal welfare, and offering some examples on how animal welfare can be studied, measured, and assessed. A discussion and description of enrichment tools and their application to animals in managed care is also included. Across the articles, the science and ethics of animal welfare focusing on human impacts on animals in the wild as well as on animals residing in human care are addressed. The overarching goal of this special issue is to set the stage with respect to how animal welfare is defined, including reference to terrestrial and avian animals; to provide context for how it is assessed and managed; and to explore what animal welfare means for animals in both wild and managed care settings.