Workshop summary

23 May 2022

*This is my attempt to pull out some of the major themes that were discussed. I don’t emphasize the information presented by John Fraser and Janet Swim because you have access to the slides.*

Introduction:

 The problem of climate change, which threatens nonhuman species as well as humans, and which requires a transformation of human behavior.

 The relevance to the zoo mission, which includes educating visitors and conserving species.

 The potential of zoos and aquariums not only to inform visitors, but also to enhance resilience by helping with the emotional response, because they reach a wide audience and are generally trusted to deliver environmental information.

 The importance of considering emotions in people’s response to climate change. People feel anxious about climate change, but also feel positive emotions and connection during a zoo visit. (This includes zoo staff as well as visitors.)

Some potential obstacles for zoos to be aware of:

 Pushback from people who don’t want to hear about climate change

 The risk of being seen as a political institution

 The need to deliver high quality information

 Concerns about compromising the entertainment value of a zoo visit.

Some points related to the NNOCCI program:

 The importance of considering social interactions in understanding visitor learning. People learn better in pairs than on their own.

 The importance of trust, especially trust for zoos and communicators at the zoo.

 The desire of zoo visitors (at least in the U.S.) to get more information about climate change and about actions they can take.

 “Talking” as a behavior. Talk is important because people don’t talk much about climate change, because talk creates and shapes people’s beliefs as well as potential solutions, because talk can also help people cope with emotions.

 The importance of hope, including as a predictor of action

Some general comments:

Recognize the diversity of opinions and knowledge and opportunities, not just among zoo visitors but also among zoo staff and volunteers

Zoo personnel did not report much pushback from visitors when they raised the topic of climate change.

The physical aspect of the zoo is part of the educational message. If people see the zoo acting unsustainably, it undercuts trust in the zoo and undermines the conservation message.

Visitors don’t understand the link between climate change and threats to species.

St. Louis Zoo has been doing “climate solutions” webinars

Chester Zoo has been working with the local community

Some recommendations:

 Use simple messages, test the messages, have measurable outcomes

 Make sure that visitors are allowed to provide input as well as receiving information; “Start with conversation, not presentation”.

How to move more quickly – what substantial things can zoos do:

 Work more within their communities and regions. Create networks.

 Change the narrative around climate change, to be more positive. Emphasize hope. Personalize the situation.

Some apps and links that were mentioned

<https://crankyuncle.com/>

<https://climateinterpreter.org/>