

The Influence of Childhood Zoo Visitation on Adult Sustainability Behavior: A Self-Assessment Analysis

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Abstract

Since the industrial revolution the world has undergone a rapid urbanization, leaving many species without homes due to habitat loss and destruction, and humans ignorant to the impact they are having on the environment due to lack of proper environmental sustainability education. Currently, one of the most common ways to connect children with nature, especially for those living in urban areas, is by visiting zoos. Zoos engage individuals with species and education opportunities that they may have never come in contact with on their own; specifically, education regarding visitors sustainability habits. This presentation investigates the extent to which adult participants believe their sustainability behaviors, such as recycling and water usage habits, have been impacted by their childhood zoo visitation rates, and discusses the long term impact zoos have on socially acceptable sustainability behavior. A survey of 137 Southern Illinois University Carbondale students of various majors found that a majority individuals do not remember learning sustainability behaviors while visiting zoos; however, participants believe that visiting zoos has impacted their overall level of environmental concern, primarily regarding animal welfare. The initial analysis of the findings suggest that zoos need to develop new ways of engaging visitors in regards to sustainability behavior and provide post-visit experiences that reinforce and extend sustainability messages and action. Further research and analysis is required to verify these claims.