

The Coe – Jones Rules for Landscape Immersion Zoo Exhibit Design

Introduction. These guidelines were written by Jon Coe and included in a talk given by Grant R. Jones at the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums regional Conferences in 1982.

1. Don't: Require the animal to be closer to the public than its natural flight distance permits. Don't remove the element of locational choice from the animal's life.

Do: Allow the animal to remove itself from situations it finds stressful. A well designed exhibit allows the animal to choose between sun and shade, hot and cool, high and low, dry and wet. Provide these alternatives, including the option to be "off exhibit."

2. Don't: Display social animals in solitary confinement or in numbers far below normal wild group composition.

Do: Display social animals in social groups, allowing this remarkable dimension of behavior to be seen and appreciated by the public.

3. Don't: Display animals using human artifacts such as toys or playground equipment. This implies the animals are deviant or incomplete humans and perpetuates anthropomorphic attitudes among the visiting public.

Do: Provide abundant "occupational" alternatives using features that are found in the animal's natural habitat and that are suitable for the animals' physical and mental capabilities.

4. Don't: Allow exhibit props to detract from the animals. Overly dramatic waterfalls and rockwork can steal the show, divert attention, and subvert the purpose of the exhibit.

Do: Recreate or replicate a landscape typical of the animal's natural habitat(s) without gigantism, distortion, or exaggeration, faithful in all possible details.

5. Don't: Use visible barriers unless absolutely necessary. Today the trend is to make barriers look "natural." Nevertheless they are obviously barriers and highly visible. Eliminate them from view totally whenever possible.

Do: Make it impossible to determine what contains the animal. If the animal appears to be unconstrained, it adds to the impression of the animal's independence and innate nobility.

6. Don't: Surround the animals with viewers, this does not allow the animal the dignity apparent when encountered in the wild, reduces the animal's flight distance and may be stressful to the animal.

Do: Provide several smaller overlooks well screened from each other along not more than 30% of the exhibit perimeter

7. Don't: Allow the entire exhibit to be seen from a single overlook. Both the exhibit and the means of containment become obvious.

Do: Design the exhibit to have several overlooks with overlapping lines of sight. If you can't see the entire exhibit, you can't verify that it is completely enclosed. Allow the animals to move through the view. Allow the visitor to appear to move through the animal area. And then, add complexity and multiple views.

8. Don't: Have people looking across exhibits at each other (cross-viewing). Nothing attracts human attention more than other humans.

Do: Design the exhibit so that viewers at one overlook cannot see any other overlooks. Exception: walk-through exhibits.

9. Don't: Place viewing areas where unavoidable distractions abound.

Do: Locate overlooks on secondary pathways, leaving primary circulation ways unimpeded for major pedestrian movement and service vehicles.

10. Don't: Exhibit the animal in a setting totally unrelated to its origins or adaptations.

Do: Accurately replicate the landscape in which the animal is naturally found and in which it evolved.

11. Don't: Build perceptual barriers by placing the humans in a familiar man-made setting and the animals in a naturalistic setting. Isolate exotic flower plantings to primary circulation areas apart from exhibits.

Do: Immerse the viewer in the replicated landscape even before seeing the animal. Make overlooks and adjacent circulation areas appear to be extensions of the animal's habitat.

12. Don't: Have viewers looking down on animals. This puts the animal in potentially stressful sub-ordinate positions and only emphasizes human dominance.

Do: Have animals at or above eyelevel. Even a dormouse looks more interesting at eyelevel.

13. Don't: Display deformed or disfigured animals.

Do: Provide good facilities for such animals off-exhibit.

14. Don't: Display animals from different habitats together in a natural habitat setting. For example, in South American zoo-geographic exhibits one often sees animals from tropical riparian settings such as tapir and capybara together with animals adapted to high altitude steppes such as llama and guanaco. Again, the public is misled.

Do: Combine compatible animals from the same habitat and use this opportunity to demonstrate and interpret interrelationships among these species.

15. Don't: Exhibit animals from strikingly different habitats in adjacent exhibits unless this is in response to an interpretive concept pointing out some useful adaptive characteristics the two species share -like locomotion between elephants and giant tortoises.

Do: Relate adjacent exhibits into habitat complexes and thus form transitional or ecotonal areas between exhibits of adjacent habitat zones.

16. Don't: Design the building first, the animal holding areas second, the exhibits third and the interpretive system last.

Do: Plan all these elements concurrently as interrelated parts of an integrated whole.