

LETTERS

Captive polar bears

Sir, Might I comment on Alison Ames' review of Ormrod's Captive Polar Bear Report (*Animal Welfare* 1993, 2: 290-292).

She has, I believe, inappropriately, and sometimes rudely, inferred/labelled Ormrod's report as a failed attempt to produce a classic scientific document. One should not always have to provide sheet after sheet of data to offer fair (and often correct) insight into animal welfare problems. Stefan's report is, I think, intended to offer such insights - and succeeds.

It remains to be seen, as yet, whether Alison Ames' written material will meet the same rigorous scientific requirements that appear to have been demanded of Ormrod's report.

Ormrod's handling of the polar bear problem in his report is characteristically well-founded and even-handed. That said, Stefan's even-handedness is not, thankfully, given to the common knee-jerk reaction of aiming for 'middle-ground' purely to keep 'everyone happy' and effectively compromising animal welfare to the moderated benefit of exploiters. Sadly, many of the so-called 'animal welfare' supporters and groups perceive this middle-ground as rational and in so doing steal potential welfare advantages from animals.

Has Ames nothing positive to say? Omission of credit in this review appears very obvious - it seems to give the impression of being an overdefensive 'sting-reaction' re UFAW-related work and the keeping of bears in captivity. It may well not be, but it seems that way. To see a Research Associate of UFAW

complaining about well-intentioned and entirely honourable work is most regrettable. It should always be down to the proponents to prove that their practice is sound. Zoos have failed to prove their case here. Ames' review may be perceived by some as UFAW attempting to defend the indefensible.

Clifford Warwick
Consultant Herpetologist
Worcester, UK

Author's response

Sir, I am responding to Clifford Warwick's comments on my review of Ormrod's Captive Polar Bear Report. It is hard to accept that Ormrod's report, which seems largely negative in its conclusions, can be described as 'well intentioned'. He made no suggestions for changes or improvements to the welfare of polar bears at present in zoos. It is easy to condemn zoos for keeping these animals, some of which have been inherited by current management, but it does nothing to improve their lives. I certainly agree with Ormrod that captive polar bears present a problem, but we differ in our solutions.

Warwick refers to my own research for UFAW which took three years to complete. It was found, at the end of the first year, that a single year's data were inadequate to provide a basis for positive recommendations for identifying polar bear needs, in order to improve their enclosures. This three year study proved necessary because of seasonal and individual variations in the behaviour of bears and in total I spent some 1,300 hours observing the animals.

I had some justification therefore in being critical of Ormrod for producing a

report on polar bear welfare based on only 70 hours of observation.

In my own report there are many positive recommendations and also the statement in the foreword that UFAW is opposed to polar bears being kept in zoos in the future unless enclosures can be designed which fully meet the animals' needs. UFAW is seriously concerned that the lives of polar bears at present in captivity should be improved as much as possible; there is no question of 'attempting to defend the indefensible'.

Alison Ames
Research Associate
UFAW