

Applied Animal Studies: Zoo
Stream trip to South Lakes
Wild Animal Park

February 2009



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The Beginning

After a snowy start, de-icing the minibus, we left Moulton College at 9.30am on Wednesday 11th February and made our way up the M6 (where the roads were a little clearer) towards Cumbria. It was a race against the clock as the infamous 'Tiger feed' at the park started at 14.30pm to which we didn't want to miss. Luckily the traffic was on our side and a quick lunch stop allowed us to arrive at the wildlife park at around 14.00pm. This literally gave us time to pay and get to the enclosure to watch the tigers climb the poles to reach their food.

Prior to the tigers being let out for their selection of meat-up-poles (Figure 1), the keepers gave a high impacting, informative talk to the students about tiger conservation. South Lakes Wild Animal Park (SLWAP) has ownership of the Sumatran Tiger Trust Charity to which 100% of the donations is sent directly over to Sumatra to help fund the Sumatran tiger and other endemic species and the local workers who are out there to protect them. SLWAP are reputedly the sole funder of the projects carried out raising over £1,000,000 and is the largest fundraiser for Sumatran Tigers worldwide.

Figure 1. Sumatran Tiger Feed at South Lakes Wild Animal Park.



The feeding technique used at SLWAP is also pretty unique with other zoos and parks around the world only just starting to grasp the idea of such an exciting and influential feeding regime. This method of feeding also showed the students the importance for 'natural feeding solutions' within captive animals – a topic which we have had many discussions on within lessons.

After the tiger feeding was the penguin feed, the vulture feeding, giraffe feeding (Figure 2) and the lion feed. All unique methods of feeding which for some of the species, the students could actually take part in. Students and visitors were able to feed a variety of species at encouraging positive interactions between the zoo animals and visitors to which the students all loved.

Figure 2. Students feeding the bachelor group of giraffe at SLWAP.



The park is famous for its variety of mixed species enclosures (Figure 3) and the students were able to see an array of natural enclosure designs with many species put together that have not been tried or successful elsewhere in the world (apart from in the wild).

Figure 3. An example of one of the mixed species enclosures housing giraffe, white rhinoceros and baboons. Other examples included mandrills and pigmy hippos and spectacle bears, otters, tapir, coatis and capuchin monkeys.



The park also has a unique system of keeping the animals within their enclosures. Most zoos and wildlife parks use cages, high galvanised mesh or glass to allow the animals to be viewed from ground level through a medium which may obstruct the viewing of the animals. SLWAP mainly uses electric fencing (apart from the tigers and lion enclosures) to which the animals are trained to ensuring that they are not able to jump or climb out of their enclosures (Figure 4).

Figure 4. 'Klinga', the black spider monkey blowing kisses from behind the electric fencing.



Along with the access to all of the enclosures along at ground level, the park has around a mile of aerial walkways. This enables the visitors (and students in this case) to get a birds-eye-view of the majority of the animals and their enclosures (Figure 5).

Figure 5. An example of one of the aerial walkways above the spectacle bear, otter, coati, tapir and capuchin enclosure.



As the evening was drawing to a close we made our way back to minibus to find the B&B to drop off our bags and organise rooms. Once we had settled in, we took a 5-minute stroll towards some restaurants (we noticed whilst driving in), where we had something to eat and a few well deserved drinks then headed off back to the B&B for an 'early night'.

The next morning was a prompt start. Breakfast was at 8 o'clock, and then we headed off back to SLWAP for a chat with the creator and director of the park, Mr David Gill. David's enthusiasm and dedication to the park showed through in all aspects of his talk to the students. He began by talking about how the park began and his initial ideas; and went on to talk in depth about the charities and fund raising achieved by South Lakes over the 12 years it has been open. His talk was clearly inspirational to the students and they fully enjoyed listening to his input and knowledge to conservation worldwide.

The weather unfortunately took a nasty turn and the rain was beginning to get harder and the students looking much wetter! So, after some lunch in the cafeteria we decided it was best to get on the road and make the journey back to snowy Northampton.

We had a good run home and arrived safely back to Moulton at around 8pm on Thursday after a small technical glitch with the minibus, now who said the tank would get us all the way there and back? The students were very well behaved throughout the entire trip and were a credit to the college.

Student comments

"The trip was an excellent idea and South Lakes was an amazing to visit as it offered more up-close encounters with the animals than other animal collections I have visited. The talk with the director was brilliant, it gave me a real insight into the conservation efforts made at South Lakes – would highly recommend this trip!"

"Overall, the park is smaller than others I have visited however, the amount of enclosures and their design are not something I have seen on such a large scale including the mixed species enclosures. The barriers used is also something that I have not seen used before making the animals feel much closer. South Lakes appears to put in a great deal of time, money and effort into different conservation projects and it's great to see how passionate they are about conserving animals in the wild. The trip was more than worthwhile and was a great opportunity to experience a different approach to exotic animal care – I would definitely recommend this trip to others and would love to go back."

"South Lakes is a much more realistic and less commercialised animal park than any other than I have been to. The animals in the mixed species exhibits looked lively and more active with good positive interactions between them. The talk with the director has given me valuable information and inspiration to conserve animals that I was unaware of being endangered. The only improvement, a longer stay to make sure we got to see everything for as long as possible."

"South Lakes seems to offer a lot more about the conservation of animals and provides a much closer interaction with them than seen

in other animal collections. It offers a much more personal touch to the more commercial places. The enclosure designs were unique with greater interaction and viewing. The conservation at South Lakes is a much higher priority than seen in most zoos, particularly external conservation in other countries. The interaction is much greater than in other zoos with contact opportunities with giraffe, penguins and numerous other species. The trip was a brilliant experience for both the zoo and also the opportunity to get to know class friends better. The park was different to any other animal collection I have viewed and the talk from the director was very interesting and helpful in looking for future career interests and opportunities. I would highly recommend future Applied Animal Studies students to participate in this trip, it is highly relevant, enjoyable and is extremely different to other parks in the UK."