

Visitors' perceptions of zoo-housed lesser anteater (*Tamandua tetradactyla*) welfare: Observation plays a larger role than a brief informative talk

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Resumen

There is a growing ethical concern in modern society about animals' quality of life. We hypothesize that zoo visitors' perception of zoo animal welfare, particularly in the case of lesser anteaters, changes positively after listening to scientific information. Visitors observing active lesser anteaters in their enclosures at Córdoba Zoo (Argentina) were asked to respond to a questionnaire about animal welfare. The treatment group (T) answered the questionnaire after listening to a brief informative talk based on local scientific studies on lesser anteaters. The control group (C) answered the questionnaire without hearing the informative talk. Visitors (87.2%) considered biological, sanitary, and sociocultural aspects to be necessary conditions for optimum wild zoo-housed animal welfare. The majority of visitors considered that natural surroundings provide the highest level of

welfare for wild animals. Visitors in the T group ranked the zoo as providing a higher level of animal welfare than those in group C. In reference to management measurements, the T group agreed on the positive effect of the application of environmental enrichment (Likert Medians: C = 4 and T = 5; $p = .0443$). On the basis of their perception, most visitors in both groups stated that the lesser anteaters at Córdoba Zoo appeared to be in a good state of welfare. We interpret this as meaning that, what these Córdoba zoo visitors personally perceived while observing the lesser anteaters carried greater weight than what they learned from the informative talk, though the talk did slightly affect their opinion.

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