INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF STAFF-FACILITATED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES ON VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND SELF-REPORTED LEARNING AT BRISTOL ZOO GARDENS, UK

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Abstract
Encouraging visitors to take part in informal learning activities, that aim to enhance their experience as well as delivering conservation messages, is a key objective of a modern zoo, and zoos are increasingly developing novel opportunities and techniques to do this. This study examined the impact of the ‘Participatory Zoo Experience’ at Bristol Zoo Gardens, which involved a range of interactive interpretation elements facilitated by Rangers (informal learning staff) within the ‘Seal and Penguin Coasts’ exhibit. The findings show that visitors who participated in the activities enjoyed the exhibit more than those who did not, and that participants were more likely to report learning from the activities than from other sources of information available in the exhibit. We also found a significant link between engaging with staff and overall visitor satisfaction with their zoo visit. These findings suggest that projects increasing opportunities for staff-visitor interactions have a positive impact on overall visitor experience.