



GUIDANCE FOR VOLUNTEERING WITH WILD ANIMALS

A quick search online reveals the vast number of volunteering schemes that offer the opportunity to work with wild animals.

Born Free has serious reservations about many projects which claim to deliver conservation benefits. We believe that, in some cases, not only is the opposite true, but that there are negative welfare implications for the individual animals involved.

We therefore urge you to consider the following issues when choosing your volunteering experience.

Origin of captive animals

Wild animals may have been removed directly from their natural habitat; bought from suppliers (who obtained animals from the wild); or bought from breeding centres, zoos or private individuals keeping them as pets.

All of these activities threaten the stability of wild animal populations - undermining conservation efforts.

Contact with captive animals

Direct physical contact with wild animals can encourage them to become more accustomed to humans, and is usually not in their best interest (unless for the administration of veterinary or neonatal care).

Direct contact with wild animals also poses a significant risk to human health and safety through potential disease transmission or injury.

Captive breeding for conservation

Even when following very strict guidelines, the reintroduction of captive-bred animals to the wild is fraught with problems and generally has a very poor track-record in terms of success. While many animals die after release, others never breed successfully once back in the wild.

Captive-bred wild animals may not have adequate skills to survive unassisted in the wild and may be released into areas with inadequate resources to sustain them. Should these animals be accustomed to human contact or lack the

necessary skills to hunt and survive, there is the additional risk of coming into conflict with humans once released, exacerbating conservation challenges

In some cases, young are separated from their mothers at an early age to be hand reared and to become more familiar with humans and easier to train and control. This causes acute distress for both young and mothers and impacts negatively on their health, behaviour and ability to interact naturally with other animals. Once young animals have grown too big for photo props, cuddling, walking with, etc, they are often sold to private owners, zoos and trophy hunting operators.

For example, in the case of breeding lions for use in the 'lion encounter' industry under the guise of conservation, Born Free's reservations have been backed up by some of the world's most renowned big cat biologists and conservationists, who: "...find little of conservation value that justifies the use of captive-origin lions for reintroduction... (and that)...even under the best possible circumstances, breeding lions in captivity does little to address the root causes of the species' decline in the wild. Resources and attention would be more productively steered towards securing existing lion habitat and mitigating anthropogenic killing of lions and their prey."

Sanctuaries

Many establishments call themselves 'sanctuaries' and 'rehabilitation centres', terms associated with non-commercially driven projects which rescue animals from lives of suffering.

However, while a true sanctuary might be expected to, for example, prevent animals from breeding, preferring instead to allocate available resources to animals already in need, many establishments using these terms do not limit breeding, thus increasing the captive population of animals with little chance of release to the wild and undermining the welfare standards they are able to provide. For further information on what the Born Free Foundation believes to be appropriate practices for sanctuaries, see the **Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries website**.