



Presentation Abstracts and Speaker Bios

Day 1 | Wednesday, November 16, 2022

Session: 9:30-10:00am

Presentation Title: *Pathways to Compassion for Animals: Concepts and Progressions for More Effective Goals & Assessments*

Description: Why do some of our relationships with animals move towards respect and compassion, while others end in fear, disgust, exploitation, or even extermination? Ask a coyote - it's not just about how cute and fuzzy animals are. An ideal progression for conservation education might move from awareness to curiosity, then on to respect and compassionate action, or at least tolerance! Unfortunately, there may be complex networks of steps along the way, all influenced by cultures and contexts, and many of the terms we use to describe them are vague, overlapping, or even conflicting. Participants in this session will get a chance to examine some of the possible pathways people take as they become aware of individual animals and the populations they represent, then try to fit them into their worldview. A clearer understanding of the terms and steps in this process, along with more consistent usage in our community, will help curriculum designers, practitioners, and (action) researchers interested in improving the goals, assessments, and structure of their animal programs and exhibits. We'll go through a few example pathways that are awesome, tragic, and even comic, and start work on ones that are relevant to the specific contexts of participants. Participants will come away with ideas for clearer progressions for their programs and new collaborators for effective action research.

About the presenter: *Bryan H. Nichols* is an associate professor of science and environmental education at Florida Atlantic University. His science background is in behavioral ecology, and he has worked with a range of wildlife on both coasts. He studies the moral and emotional implications of science and environmental education and has teaching experience from British Columbia to Belize.

Session: 10:30-11:30am

Presentation Title: *Testing Interpretive Messages for Empathy Impact*

Description: As zoo and aquarium practitioners work to incorporate empathy best practices into interpretation, the use of action research to reflect back which aspects work most effectively with various audiences is of great benefit. This session will offer a hands-on introduction to user testing of interpretive messaging. Participants will hear how Henry Vilas Zoo has been testing messages designed to encourage empathy, and what we've found to be the most effective approaches towards portraying animals as individuals, encouraging perspective taking and more. In addition, we will briefly introduce the principles of equitable evaluation as they apply to the practice of user testing. Along with general background and examples of how to conduct message testing, participants will receive a handout that outlines key steps to help them implement this work back at their own institutions.

About the presenters: *Kathryn Owen* is an independent evaluator, mentor and coach, and the principal of Kathryn Owen Consulting. She founded the Audience Research and Evaluation department at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, WA and was one of the original leaders of the empathy for wildlife initiative in the pacific northwest.

Courtney Cordova is the Education Specialist at the Henry Vilas Zoo in Madison, WI and manages both in-person and written interpretive programming. She leads an initiative to incorporate empathy into the zoo's interpretive framework and to inspire empathy in guests with every interpretive interaction. She is also the assistant education advisor for the AZA Orangutan SAFE program and is the secretary and treasurer of the National Association for Interpretations interpretive media section.

Day 1 | Wednesday, November 16, 2022, cont.

Session: 12:15-1:15pm

Presentation Title: *New Directions in Understanding Empathy*

Description: This panel discussion features four thought-leaders in environmental education and conservation psychology who specialize in the study of empathy, nature connectedness, environmental identity, and conservation learning. Panelists will offer insights on key issues in our field and make connections between social science research and day-to-day experiences in zoos, aquariums and informal science environments.

This session will also serve as a catalyst for a dialogue about potential questions and topics well-suited for action research studies in zoo and aquarium contexts.

About the presenters: *Louise Chawla*, Professor Emerita at the University of Colorado Boulder, is an environmental psychologist whose work focuses on the benefits of access to nature for human health and wellbeing, the development of active care for the natural world, and participatory methods for engaging children and youth in design and planning. Dr. Chawla's latest book, co-authored with two colleagues, is *Placemaking with Children and Youth: Participatory Practices for Planning Sustainable Communities*.

Jeffrey Skibins is an Associate Professor of Conservation Psychology at East Carolina University in Greenville, NC with more than 25 years of experience as a practitioner and researcher developing, managing, presenting, and studying interpretation and conservation in zoos, aquariums, and national parks around the world. Dr. Skibins' research focuses on wildlife conservation in zoos, aquariums, and parks. He studies how interpretation and wildlife viewing influence visitors' emotions and how institutions can increase visitor participation in conservation.

Cameron T. Whitley and Bryan Nichols will also join this panel. See Dr. Whitley's and Dr. Nichols' bios under their individual presentation descriptions.

Session: 2:15-3:30pm

Presentation Title: *To Empathy & Beyond: Addressing the Gap Between Empathy and Conservation Action*

Description: Encouraging our visitors to prioritize conservation is core to our missions as accredited zoos and aquariums, but how do we know if we are having

an impact? Many of us use empathy as part of our conservation messaging without assessing whether we are motivating guests to change their behavior. This session will explore how zoos and aquariums can build on effective empathy practices with behavior change research to try to foster caring and conservation actions in our guests. The panel will start with an introduction of community-based social marketing (CBSM) and its connections to the most readily available conservation psychology science; share results from a 20-zoo/aquarium inventory analysis about empathy and conservation calls to action; and culminate in case studies from Minnesota Zoo and Roosevelt Park Zoo on using CBSM and the related Zoo Victoria's Care Understand Act (CUA) model as ways to try to increase the impact of conservation calls to action. Panelists will then facilitate an interactive discussion using questions provided by the participants on this topic. Attendees will learn about resources and considerations for starting similar projects and brainstorm about possible collaborations.

About the presenters: *Marta Burnet* is the Grants and Network Manager for empathy initiatives at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, WA. Dr. Burnet enjoys connecting about empathy with other zoos and aquariums in the Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife network and beyond.

Kerrie Littlejohn is the Senior Director of Evaluation and Impact at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, WA. She previously served as the Director of Impact and Evaluation for NNOCCI, the National Network for Ocean and Climate Change Interpretation. Dr. Littlejohn is a conservation social scientist and educator, passionate about expanding the way people think about environmental issues using research, education and partnerships.

Carol Strecker is the Director of Education, Events and Experiences at the Minnesota Zoo in Apple Valley, MN. She is excited to share how the zoo has used social science research and public engagement to foster conservation behaviors beneficial to a very special species without a face.

Jennifer Kleen is the Executive Director at the Greater Minot Zoological Society at the Roosevelt Park Zoo in Minot, ND. In her role, Jennifer supports all aspects of the society and the zoo's strategy and operations, including philanthropy, communications, and community engagement. She has been deeply involved with the Connect-Understand-Act Framework as a tool for advancing conservation engagement.



Presentation Abstracts and Speaker Bios

Day 2 | Thursday, November 17, 2022

Session: 9:05-9:45am

Presentation Title: *Using Animal Portraiture to Develop Empathetic Response*

Description: With growing concern for biodiversity loss, conservationists are faced with increased pressure to depict animals in ways that evoke empathy and lead to conservation. In recent years, conservation photographers have called on scientists to assist them in identifying the best ways to depict animals to elicit an emotional response. Collaborating with conservation photographers, our team uses survey experiments to assess what types of animal images work for eliciting empathetic responses and associated conservation behaviors. Our studies have been published in various academic journals and have influenced how conservation photography has developed among elite networks. Broadly our work shows that those exposed to animal portraits reported increased empathy and decreased positive and relaxed emotions when compared to those exposed to traditional wildlife photography. We engage critical anthropomorphism, arguing that strategic anthropomorphic animal imagery (SAAs) may be an essential tool to encourage conservation efforts. Specifically, SAAs may be an ideal “attention grabbers,”

after which wildlife images can serve as “educators.” Our findings have important implications for conservationists and particularly conservation photographers.

About the presenter: *Cameron T. Whitley* is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA. His primary research agenda explores how our relationships with others- human and nonhuman- influence how we make decisions related to the environment, with a particular focus on altruism and empathy. He currently works with elite conservation photographers to assess how conservation photography and strategic anthropomorphic animal imagery can be used to enhance conservation attitudes and behaviors. Secondly, he uses this same focus to explore issues related to LGBTQ+ individuals. Recently, he has begun work to assess how LGBTQ+ people think about and engage environmental conservation.

Cameron grew up just outside of Boulder, Colorado. As a result, he loves being outdoors and spends most of his free time with his family hiking, walking along the water or volunteering with environmental, animal, and social justice organizations. He is also an avid LEGO collector and NASA/space enthusiast.

Conference Facilitator: Jessica Luke

Jessica Luke is a Teaching Professor in the Information School at the University of Washington in Seattle as well as the Director of the Museology Graduate Program. Her research focuses on museums and youth development, family learning, and parent involvement. She is interested in the role that museums play in information behavior and early learning and how these impact human development over an entire life span. Dr. Luke has a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Maryland, a Master’s in Museum Studies from the University of Toronto, and a B.A. in Art History and Political Studies from Queen’s University.