

Comparison of Leading British and German Zoological Gardens

Recent decades have witnessed a transformation in the role, importance and performance of Europe's major Zoos; traditionally they have concentrated on the maintenance of a diverse collection of animals, housed largely in traditional cages, with little attention paid to increasing public concern and criticism over the role of Zoos, animal welfare, and the unacceptability of keeping large animals in confined spaces. Reacting to these criticisms and benefiting from a steady increase in relevant knowledge, leading Zoos have invested in new and improved facilities, and increased their involvement in in-situ and ex-situ conservation projects.

Britain and Germany are and have been historically the most important and largest zoo countries in Europe in terms of number of zoos and of zoo visitors. Probably nearly 50% of Europe's zoo visitors are from Britain and Germany; German zoos attract about 50 million visitors (corresponding to 60% of population) whilst Britain has nearer 25 million (nearer to 40% of population). Of the 24 oldest established Zoos in Europe 4 are to be found in Britain and 8 in Germany.

For the purposes of my survey British and Irish Zoos are being taken together since they have a common membership association, BIAZA. I have focused on Zoological Gardens and have excluded Safari Parks and Aquaria. I have visited 12 British and 21 German Zoos this year and have observed that there are significant national differences between the major Zoos in Britain and the major Zoos in Germany.

For the 33 leading Zoos analysed, average visitor numbers at the British Zoos are 650,000 whilst the corresponding figure for the German Zoos is 1,150,000. Whilst Britain has 2 Zoos (maybe shortly 3) with 1 million plus visitors, there are 11 such German Zoos. However, most German Zoos use a season ticket calculator that may exaggerate some of their declared visitor numbers. Whilst 20 of the 21 German Zoos are located in major cities, only 4 of the 12 of the British Zoos are correspondingly sited. Whilst virtually all major German cities have a Zoo this is not so in Britain where only London, Dublin, Edinburgh and Bristol have a major Zoo.

Nearly all of the German Zoos are their No. 1 paid visitor attraction in their city; typically they are well sign-posted both from nearby motorways and within the city as well as from main railway stations. They are high profile both with local politicians and the community as well as with local, and sometimes national, media featuring in many TV programmes. German Zoos are frequently assisted by their City Councils to keep entrance fees low, thereby increasing visitor numbers. British Zoos, whilst also receiving significant media attention, do not enjoy public financial support or such a high public profile, and depend primarily on their gate receipts and self-generated funds. Entrance fees are much higher in British Zoos. The average for the German Zoos is EUR 10,- for adults and EUR 5,50 for children whilst the corresponding figures for the British Zoos are EUR 19,- and EUR 12,50, about double the German average.

British Zoos are privately owned, mostly by charitable trusts. By contrast, 19 out of the 21 German Zoos are majority or fully publicly owned, usually by their City Council. British Zoos have Councils or Boards of Trustees, whilst German Zoos tend to have an Aufsichtsrat[↗] or equivalent on which local politicians from their City Council will have a majority.

Whilst there is a common tendency in both countries to reduce the numbers of species on display in order to provide more space for those remaining exhibits, German Zoos have on average larger collections. An analysis of the 33 Zoos shows average numbers of different species as follows:-

	British Zoos		German Zoos	
	Species	Specimens Per Species	Species	Specimens Per Species
Mammals	70	9.23	88	7.78
Birds	73	6.03	134	6.02
Reptiles	29	4.94	43	5.24

Taking the total specimens of the above, the average for the British Zoo is 1230 and for the German Zoo 1720.

Where on display, the elephant is the most popular animal with visitors; 8 out of the 12 British Zoos and 18 out of the 21 German Zoos have these iconic animals. However, they require major investment in indoor as well as outdoor enclosures and several well - trained zookeepers. Much has been done in recent years but there are still major investments required in some of the zoos.

In-Situ Conservation is increasingly recognised as being of special importance; all Zoos sign up to international strategies of in-situ conservation but priorities in funding vary greatly. British Zoos devote more resources and give higher priority than do German Zoos to such conservation projects. British Zoo charters typically embody significant priority being given to such work.

Similarly, scientific research has a higher profile and priority, on average, in British Zoos; for example, ZSL London and RZSS Edinburgh give great prominence to such work whilst in the German Zoos perhaps only ZGF Frankfurt is in a similar position. This reflects the stated aims of the owners; German City Councils being primarily concerned with providing best possible zoological gardens for their residents. However, German Zoos have more qualified veterinary staff on their payrolls and some of them are engaged in scientific research, frequently with IZW Berlin.

Zoos in both countries typically have their own Zoo Schools, designed to convey the importance of habitat and threats to the natural world; the great importance of the next generation being fully aware of this subject is recognised fully in both countries and increasingly resources are being devoted to education in most zoos. Due to their city location, German Zoos typically cater for larger numbers of school visits. German education authorities are also more prepared than British LEAs to assist with funding.

Friends of the Zoo organisations exist in nearly all of the Zoos surveyed; German Zoos, helped by their location in major cities, have much larger memberships on average. These organisations are important sources of funding for capital expenditure projects. Several of the German Zoo organisations are responsible for corporate as well as private sponsors and donors; regular corporate sponsors include the local Sparkasse and Stadtwerke.

Traditionally, the Anti-Zoo Lobby has been stronger and more vocal in Britain than in Germany. British Zoos have been and continue to be more sensitive to this lobby but increasingly are successfully defending the modern role of zoos which incorporate strong conservation policies. German Zoos, normally backed by their local politicians including the Greens, with very few exceptions, have suffered less from this lobby.

There is a major difference on policy towards admission of dogs on leads with their owner visitors to Zoos; in Britain, none of the surveyed Zoos allows dogs' admission whilst about

50% of German Zoos do allow, and sometimes charge for, dogs with their owners. This reflects the greater discipline of the average German zoo visitor rather than any veterinary or health and safety reason.

In conclusion, whilst all Zoos have made progress in recent years, on-going improvements are needed to bring them up to best practice level for accommodate the species in their collections. Local implementation of the EU 1999/22/EC Directive requires substantial investment over the next few years. Zoos are fully aware of this and have Master Plans in place; investment programmes are generally larger in German Zoos, backed by public as well as corporate and private funding. EU assistance, where it exists, flows through regional assistance programmes but needs to be more directly available and targeted to full implementation of their Directive.

Notes:

- ↻ Aufsichtsrat - a Board of Directors or Council
- ✕ Sparkasse – the local savings bank
- ✕ Stadtwerke.- the local power company