

## AQUARIUMS VISITOR NUMBERS..2007

A report in 2007 sought to obtain figures on the global reach of zoos and aquariums in visitor numbers and conservation expenditures.

They approached 12 national and regional zoo and aquarium associations, covering all regions of the world, to provide a figure regarding the following two questions: How many visitors did your member institutions receive in 2008? How much money was spent on wildlife conservation by your member institutions in 2008? (Wildlife conservation in this context encompasses in situ conservation of wild species and habitats, including related ex situ work). Although all 12 associations submitted figures on visitor numbers that they sought to obtain from their more than 1000 members, only seven associations submitted figures on conservation expenditures.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

About 600 million people reportedly visited zoos and aquariums worldwide in 2008. When comparing zoo and aquarium attendance between the last global survey in 1990 and 2008 (Table 1), those associations reporting higher numbers in the current survey represent regions with established documenting structures (North America, Australasia, and Europe), suggestive of a growing number of visits in these regions [cf. Davey, 2007]. Conversely, those associations reporting lower numbers in the current survey represent regions where obtaining comprehensive numbers is more challenging (Latin America, Africa, and Asia). Although the current survey was specifically aimed at collecting documented figures from the associations members, which generally proved feasible for the former three regions, the previous survey [IUDZG/CBSG, 1993] relied on the associations' estimates of zoo and aquarium attendance. This may be more appropriate for the latter three regions, given the underestimates in documented figures confirmed by those associations in the current survey.

Considering this variation in reporting between the two surveys and assuming a largely unchanged number of existing zoos and aquariums, it seems legitimate to adjust the results accordingly, in which case zoos and aquariums worldwide receive more than 700 million visits annually. This figure, which may include multiple individual visits, is most certainly an underestimate [WAZA, 2009] and is unparalleled by any other group of conservation-oriented institutions.

The world zoo and aquarium community reportedly spent about US\$350 million on wildlife conservation in 2008. This amount includes the expenses of zoo-based conservation organizations, but given that only about half of the associations submitted figures on conservation expenditures (see above), it is most certainly an underestimate. Across regions, zoos and aquariums in North America and Europe spent the most by far on wildlife conservation (97% of expenses reported). In relation to major international conservation organizations (Fig. 1), the world zoo and aquarium community is among the main providers of conservation funding.

TABLE 1. Annual Number of Visits to Zoos and Aquariums Worldwide in 1990 [IUDZG/CBSG, 1993], 2008 (This Survey), and Adjusted (in Millions of People)

| 1990 | 2008 | Adjusted |
|------|------|----------|
|------|------|----------|

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|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| North America..... | 106 (1990)..... | 186 (2008)....  | 186 (adjusted) |
| Latin America..... | 61 (1990).....  | 11 (2008).....  | 61(adjusted)   |
| Africa.....        | 15 (1990).....  | 8 (2008).....   | 15 (adjusted)  |
| Australasia.....   | 6 (1990).....   | 17 (2008).....  | 17 (adjusted)  |
| Europe.....        | 125 (1990)...   | 142 (2008)..... | 142 (adjusted) |
| Asia.....          | 308 (1990)...   | 221 (2008)....  | 308 (adjusted) |
| Global total.....  | 621 (1990)...   | 585 (2008)....  | 729 (adjusted) |

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(adjusted =) 1990 figures for Latin America, Africa, and Asia. 2008 figures for North America

## SEALIFE CENTRES

During 2012, Merlin acquired Living and Leisure Australia Group (LLA) which owns and operates leisure attractions in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as the Dubai Aquarium through a management contract (Merlin Entertainments Annual Report, 2012). In late 2013 there were 51 Sea Life aquariums across the world, and others were under construction. The company states: 'We've spent the last 30 years developing our attractions into the spectacular and educational experiences that you would expect from the world's largest aquarium brand' (Sea Life website). With over 54 million visitors at its attractions during 2012 alone, Merlin is second only to the Walt Disney Company in terms of visitor admissions. In December 2012, Merlin operated over 90 attractions in 21 countries across four continents. In the same year, Merlin made its first entry into the rapidly expanding Asian aquarium market. An example of a Merlin attraction which brings in millions of visitors a year is London Sea Life. This aquarium receives over ten million visitors on a yearly basis. Footfall at Manchester Sea Life alone is expected to be in excess of 300,000 visitors per year (DEFRA, 2013). Merlin's 2012 revenue was around £1,074 million GBP, and the Midway attractions (including Sea Life), brought in £458 million GBP (44% of Merlin's annual income) to the company. The sheer scale of revenue generated by visitor attractions such as Sea Life is astronomical. During March 2012, Merlin also acquired the 'Cotswold Village Green LTD' – a shop adjacent to Sea Life London - for 1 million GBP in cash, so that the company could expand its retail offerings (Merlin Entertainments 2012 Annual Report).