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A survey of the attitudes of stakeholders in the zoo industry towards the husbandry requirements of captive Great Apes

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Abstract

*The attitudes of experts towards the husbandry of captive Great Apes was sought in order to gain a greater understanding of the potential importance of different features of the captive environment that may be critical in maintaining a high standard of welfare. Following initial consultation with the convener of the Primate Taxon Advisory Group of the Australasian Regional Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria, 17 husbandry attributes, such as social structure of the group, enclosure size and staff qualifications, each with two to four levels (ie husbandry scenarios) of possible provision in an enclosure were identified and described. An online survey using Adaptive Conjoint Analysis was distributed internationally to relevant stakeholders: zoo management staff, keepers and education staff, research colony personnel, veterinarians, animal welfare organisation representatives and scientists. A total of 359 respondents completed the survey, and the average importance values for the attributes, and rank order of importance for each of their levels were calculated. Great Ape social structure, enclosure appearance, group size, avoidance provision and enclosure furnishings were considered the most important attributes of captive Great Ape husbandry, whereas feeding interval, staff qualifications, the inclusion of plants within the enclosure, enrichment rotation, and the amount of time an animal spent in an outdoor enclosure were considered of low importance. The order in which these issues were ranked was influenced by the Great Ape species, with physical attributes of the enclosure being rated as more important for orangutans (*Pongo pygmaeus*) and group social attributes more important for the other species. Stakeholder group had little influence on the ranking of issues. It is concluded that experts provided a consensus view on the importance of husbandry attributes of the different Great Ape species that can be used to evaluate their welfare.*

Keywords: *animal welfare, Great Ape, husbandry, stakeholder, survey, zoo*