



VdZ



Association of Zoological Gardens  
Verband der Zoologischen Gärten e.V.

# THE GERMANS AND THEIR ZOOS

Results of the 2020 Forsa study



forsa.



# PREAMBLE

Dear Readers,

if modern zoos didn't exist in the 21st century – we'd have to invent them. The more urban and digital our world becomes, the stronger the need is for experiences in and with nature. Based on the high visitor numbers, zoos play a critical role in this in the 21st century. They are not only natural environments and educational institutions, but also our current conservation centres.

The question is whether this image of modern zoological gardens, which create close to nature habitats for the animals entrusted to them while also providing them with professional care, also meets the expectations of the population? This is the question we tried to answer as part of our current Forsa study on the attitudes of the German, Austrian and German-speaking Swiss population towards zoos.

We are proud of the results: in addition to a high level of acceptance of modern zoos, the study confirms that the zoo community succeeds in conveying and publicising the important topics in order to act as a bridge between the urban environment and the concerns of nature and species conservation.

This should make for a wildly interesting read!

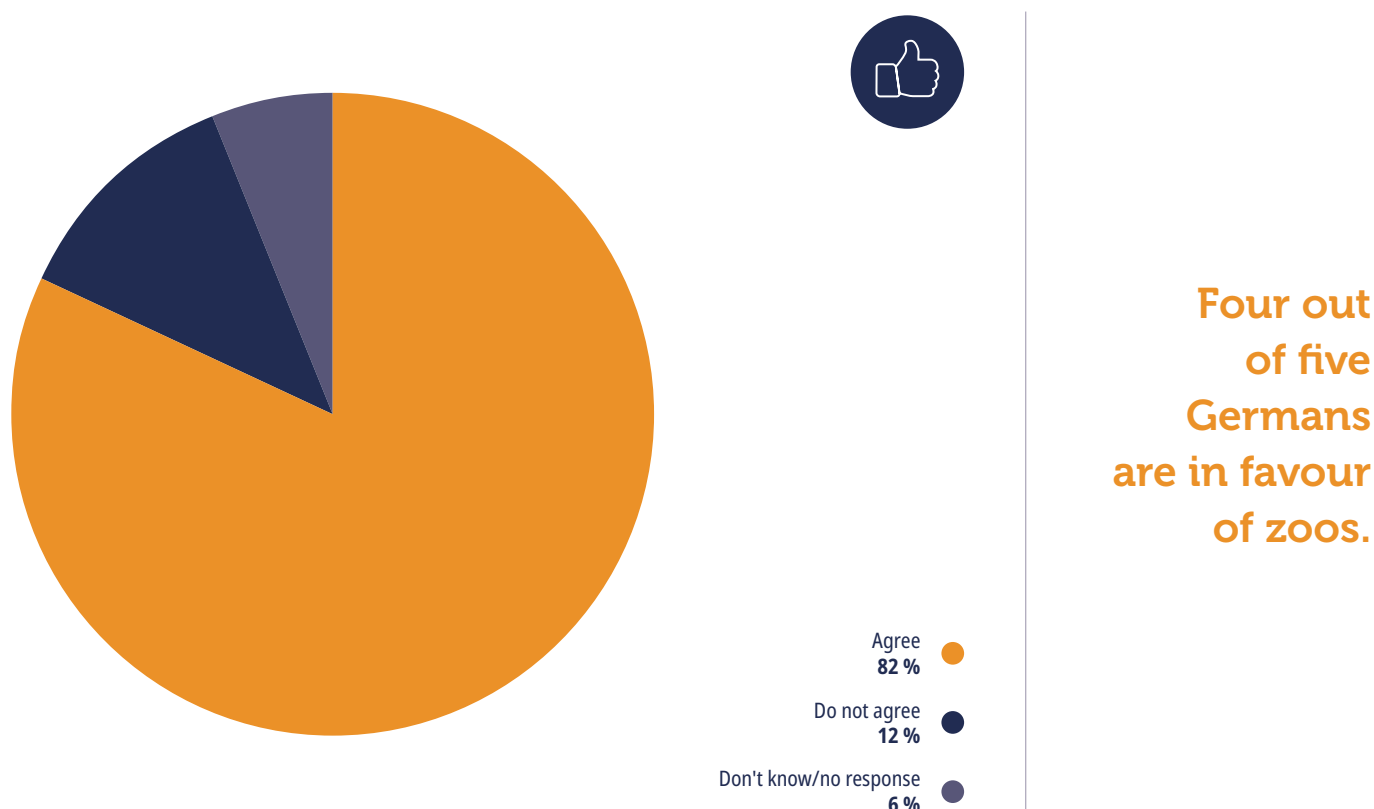
Yours sincerely,

**Prof. Dr. Jörg Junhold**

*President of the Association of Zoological Gardens (Verband der Zoologischen Gärten) and Director of the Leipzig Zoo*

# POPULARITY

In Germany and other European countries, there has been a social discourse about the keeping of animals in general for some time, which of course also affects the member institutions of the Association of Zoological Gardens. The media have discovered that this is a popular topic and often report on the supposed advantages and disadvantages of zoos. In this respect, the central question in the study commissioned by VdZ was the same one that was asked in 2017: *“Are you in favour of having zoos in Germany – or are you against zoos?”* The result obtained was unambiguous: four out of five Germans are in favour of zoos.



It is encouraging to note that the approval rate for zoos seems to be levelling off at this high level; compared to the first edition of the 2017 survey, it has increased by one percentage point.

All those who were in favour of zoos in question 1 were asked during the Forsa survey to freely formulate their reasons for this: *“What do you like about zoos?”* The three most frequent answers to this question were: conservation of species (35 percent), contact with and observation of real wildlife (24 percent) and zoos are important for children (22 percent).

The twelve percent of study participants who generally were against zoos were asked: *“Why are you against having zoos in Germany?”* The three most frequent answers were: Animals in captivity (37 percent), generally unsuitable housing and care (35 percent) and non-natural habitat (31 percent).

In addition to question 1, the participants in the survey were asked not only about their attitude towards zoos, but also about their individual zoo habits. This was the reason for question 4 *“How much do you enjoy going to the zoo?”* According to the answers, a quarter of Germans (25 percent) “really enjoy” going to the zoo; another 50 percent just “enjoy” going to the zoo. 16 percent “rather reluctantly” go to zoological gardens and only six percent responded with “very reluctantly”.

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In order to better assess whether the participants in the Forsa survey also had an up-to-date picture of zoos, they were asked to answer the following question: *"When did you last visit a zoo?"* According to the responses, 28 percent of those surveyed had been to a zoo in the last six months. For another 32 percent, the most recent visit to a zoological garden was between seven months and two years ago.

## APPRECIATION FOR NATURE AND ANIMALS

In the discussion about keeping animals in general and zoos in particular, the question arises again and again whether a visit to the zoo is at all suitable for introducing visitors to nature and animals. The background to this is the voluntary commitment of modern zoos to educate about the potential threats to the respective species and to raise awareness for the conservation of biodiversity. For this reason the participants in the survey were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: *"Visiting the zoo increased my appreciation for animals"*, *"Visiting the zoo increased my appreciation for nature"*, *"I felt connected to nature while visiting the zoo"* and *"During my visit to the zoo I felt close to the animals and their way of life"*.

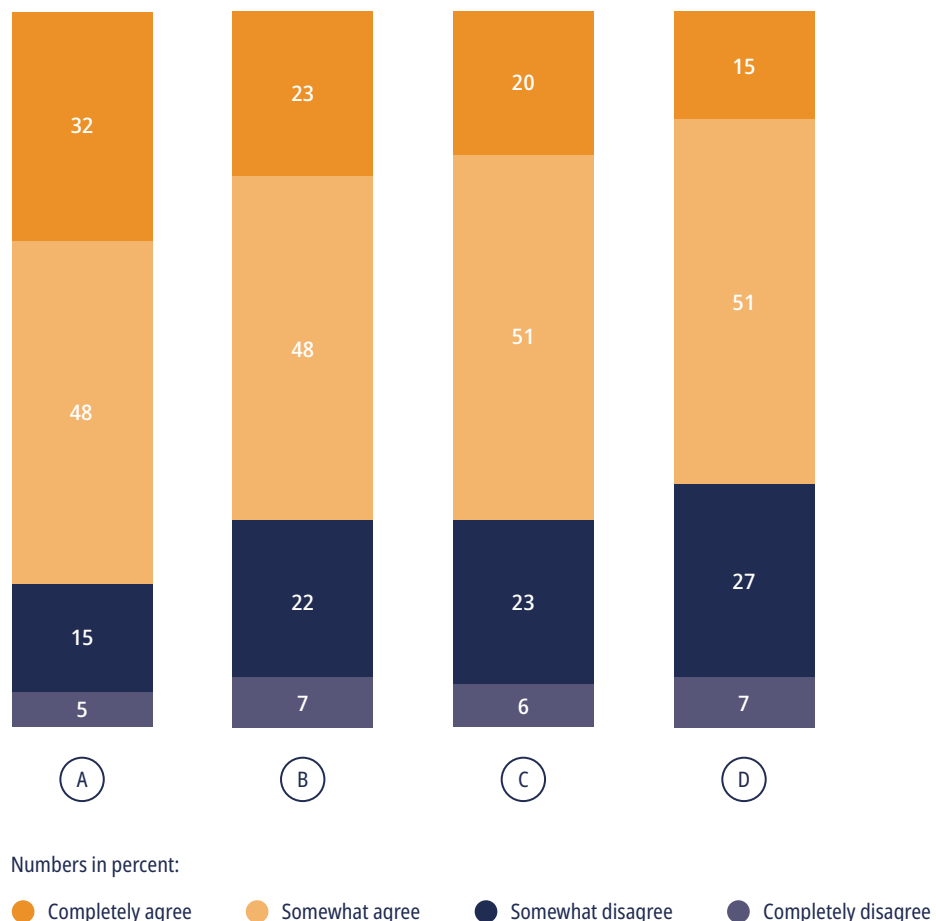
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The vast majority of zoo visitors feel an appreciation for nature and a closeness to the animals.\*

\* Participants were only asked this question if they had been to a zoo in the past two years.



- A "Visiting the zoo increased my appreciation for animals"
- B "Visiting the zoo increased my appreciation for nature"
- C "I felt connected to nature during my visit to the zoo"
- D "During my visit to the zoo I felt close to the animals and their way of life"







According to their own statements, the vast majority of zoo visitors feel an appreciation for nature and definitely a closeness to the animals during their visit – the consistently high approval ratings for all sub-questions show this. The first statement in particular (“Visiting the zoo increased my appreciation for animals”) is pleasing from a zoo’s point of view: four out of five visitors feel that a visit to the zoo is all they expected it to be. It must be remembered that the question in this survey cannot capture how much the participants valued animals before the study and whether it could ever increase. Only a very small proportion of the respondents were evidently not at all “impressed” by their zoo experience.

In order to be able to determine even more precisely how intensively visitors benefit from the offers of the various zoos, the participants in the study were asked to answer the following question: *“How often did you visit a zoo in the past two years?”* It seems that more than a third of the zoo visitors (36 percent) had been to a zoo only once in the past 24 months. Almost half (45 percent) had been to a zoo two or three times. 12 percent said they had been to the zoo “four to five times”; seven percent of those who have been to a zoo in the past two years even said they had been to the zoo six or more times. It was also interesting to see the far-reaching attraction of zoological gardens. Apparently, the respondents are not only interested in the zoo in their home town or region in general, but also in other municipalities and areas. When asked *“How many different zoos did you visit in the past two years?”* 44 percent said they had just visited one zoo during this period. Another third of the zoo visitors (34 percent) went to two different zoos during this period. 16 percent had been to three different zoos.

In summary, it can be said that the vast majority of Germans have an exceptionally positive attitude towards zoos: they advocate for their existence, they like to visit them and feel close to nature and the animals during their visit. This is evidenced by the number of visitors: In 2018, the German members of the VdZ saw a total of almost 35 million visits.

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# RESPONSIBILITIES OF A ZOO

Among others, the German Federal Act for the Conservation of Nature and the Zoo Directive of the European Union define and regulate the tasks and responsibilities of zoos. For example, the legislators set requirements for appropriate animal housing conditions, but also for species conservation through the care and breeding of endangered species, for research and education of the public in terms of conserving biodiversity. In this context, the Forsa study tried to find out to what extent the Germans support these tasks: *"Please indicate whether you find the following tasks of zoos very important, important, less important or not at all important?"*

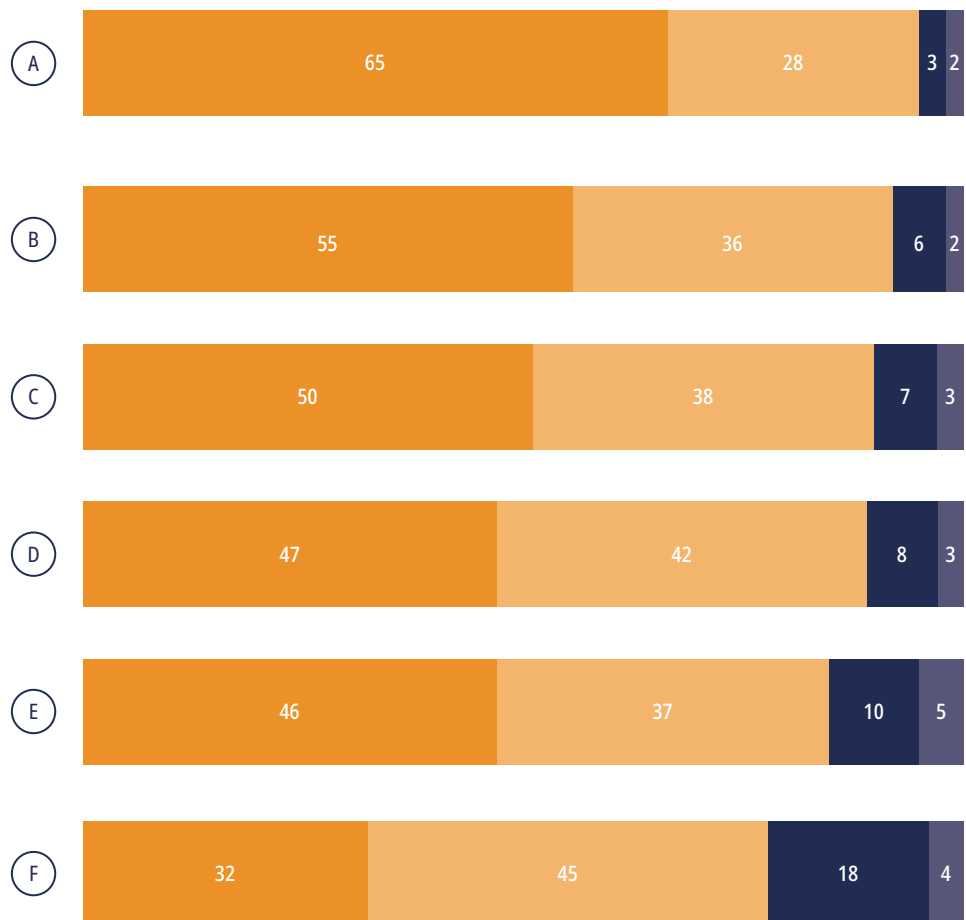
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Most of the respondents felt that the conservation of biological diversity by keeping and breeding endangered animal species is an important task of zoos.



## Question 9: Estimated importance of public responsibilities of zoos

- A ... The conservation of biological diversity by keeping and breeding endangered animal species.
- B ... Their commitment to nature and species conservation outside the zoo.
- C ... Their commitment to sustainability and environmental protection.
- D ... To offer learning opportunities about different animal species and to continue their education.
- E ... To provide the opportunity to see and experience different animal species with your own eyes.
- F ... The research on animal species.



Numbers in percent:

● Very important
 ● Important
 ● Less important
 ● Not important at all

Based on the information from the Forsa survey, it can be clearly seen that the Germans are extremely positive about the tasks of the zoos. If you add up the approval ratings, in some cases they are even higher than the actual approval ratings for zoos themselves. It is also noteworthy that the zoos demonstrably succeed in convincing them with their work on site. If you only look at the answers of the study participants who also went to a zoo in the past two years, their approval ratings are higher than the average – in some cases quite substantially.

### Question 9: Answers from study participants who have been to a zoo in the past two years.



- A ... The conservation of biological diversity by keeping and breeding endangered animal species.
- B ... Their commitment to nature and species conservation outside the zoo.
- C ... Their commitment to sustainability and environmental protection.
- D ... To offer learning opportunities about different animal species and to continue their education.
- E ... To provide the opportunity to see and experience different animal species with your own eyes.
- F ... The research on animal species.



Numbers in percent

● Very important
 ● Important
 ● Less important
 ● Not important at all

**Those that had been to a zoo in the past two years felt more strongly about this than the average respondent.**



## SPECIES CONSERVATION IN MODERN ZOOS

It is particularly valuable, that selected tasks achieve high approval ratings and go well beyond simply experiencing animals. In fact, in terms of importance, Germans rate them even higher than the opportunity to learn more about animals. If almost two thirds of Germans (see question 9 in graph) consider it “very important” that zoos conserve biodiversity by maintaining and breeding threatened species, this is an important indicator for the acceptance of modern zoological gardens. Add to this another 28 percent who describe this task as “important”. The situation is similar with the 91 percent of Germans who are in favour of zoos being active in nature and species conservation outside their borders. Species facing man-made threats from habitat destruction and overexploitation, poaching and illegal trade in many regions of the world, however the commitment and expertise of modern zoos are clearly viewed as highly valuable to counter these threats. The general population now seems to be aware of the fact that modern zoos are active in conserving endangered species in numerous projects around the world and using their own staff and resources for this purpose. The fact that the study participants also consider a (general) commitment of zoos to environmental and nature conservation to be important adds up to the expectations image of Germans.



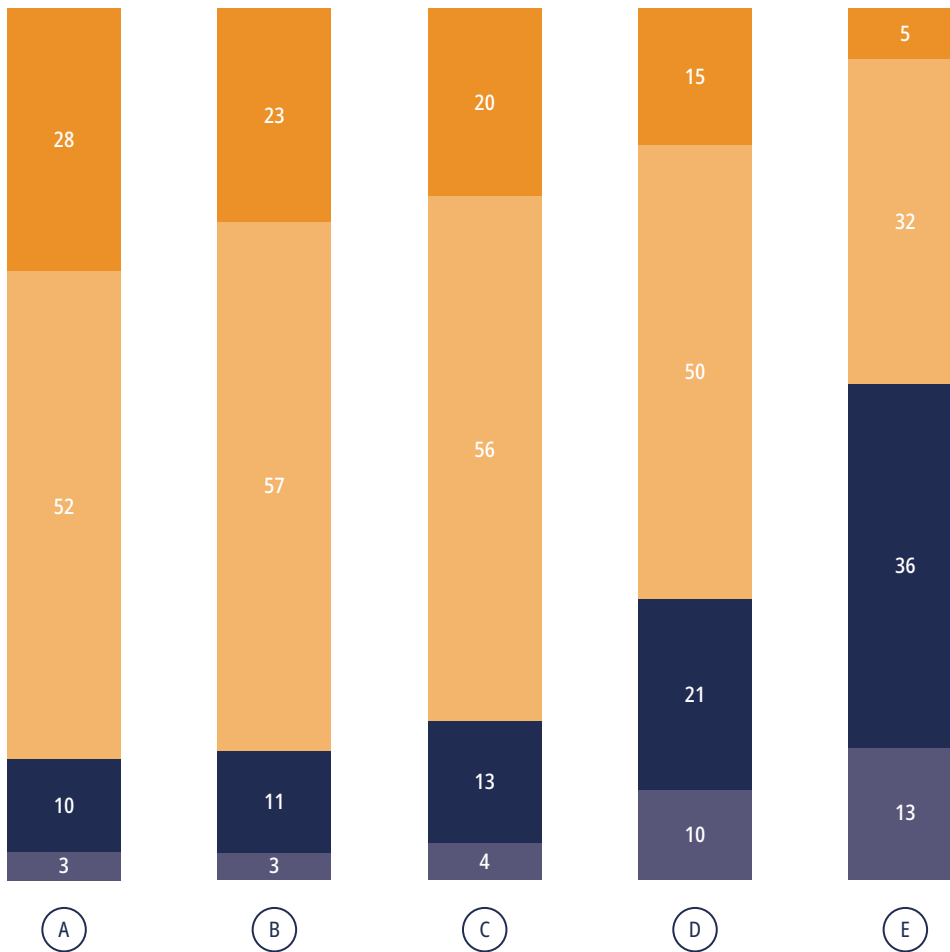
Field research: Prof. Thomas Ziegler from Cologne Zoo in the habitat of the Vietnamese crocodile newt; the zoo successfully breeds the endangered species. (Cologne zoo)



Because the care and breeding of wild animals is an essential feature of zoos, the Association of Zoological Gardens, which commissioned the study, wanted to know how Germans feel about this: *"Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements on keeping wild animals."*

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- A Zoos have a high level of expertise in keeping wild animals.
- B Zoos treat their wild animals responsibly.
- C Wild animals in zoos are generally healthy.
- D It is okay for wild animals to be kept in zoos.
- E Wild animals feel comfortable in zoos.



**Four out of five Germans feel that zoos treat their wild animals responsibly.**

Numbers in percent:

● Completely agree   
 ● Somewhat agree   
 ● Somewhat disagree   
 ● Completely disagree

It is apparent from the answers that a clear majority of Germans are convinced that zoos have a high level of professional competence in dealing with wild animals, that they also treat their wild animals responsibly and provide them with good health care. In addition, around two-thirds (65 percent) say that "it is okay for wildlife to be kept in zoos". It is noteworthy that, despite these all-round positive reviews, participants are still not sure about the following: only 37 percent think that wild animals feel comfortable in zoos. While 14 percent of those questioned answered "don't know", 49 percent answered no to this question. This point clearly demonstrates that zoos need to do more to persuade the population.

## HOUSING CONDITIONS

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If you look at discussions relating to zoos in recent years, the focus has always been on the housing conditions. The zoological gardens have made considerable investments in recent years to further develop the housing conditions in accordance with the current state of scientific knowledge on animal welfare. This has received widespread support, as seen in the study with the question *“There are various ways in which zoos can set up the housing conditions for their wild animals in a contemporary fashion. Please indicate how important you think it is for the zoos to invest in the following measures.”*.

A total of 98 percent (79% “very important”; 19% “important”) found it essential that zoos invest in enclosures that are set up in a way closely relating to the animal’s natural environment. For 96 percent of Germans (69% “very important”; 27% “important”) it is essential that there are more opportunities for the animals to retreat into the enclosures. The same proportion of the population thinks it is important (75% “very important”; 21% “important”) that the zoos build larger enclosures. 94 percent of those questioned (62% “very important”; 32% “important”) are in favour of more behavioural enrichment options for animals. In contrast, only 71 percent of the participants (25% “very important”; 46% “important”) are convinced that keeping different animal species together in one enclosure would be a worthwhile investment.

There is a limit to this study at this stage as some of the statements require zoological expertise which large parts of the population obviously can not have. For example, it is often not that important for the animal’s welfare if it or groups of animals get larger enclosures. Changing the set up of the enclosure

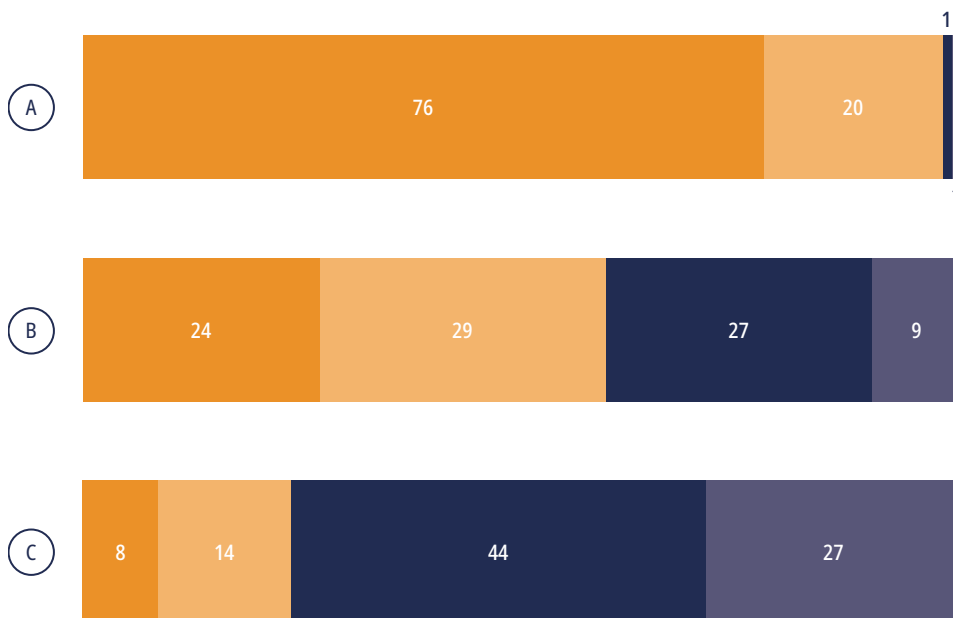


would in many cases be more helpful such as giving certain animal species climbing opportunities that did not necessarily exist before. The last statement or its evaluation should be viewed in a similar way: if more and more zoos provide innovative collective housing of different species in one enclosure, they will continue to promote interactions between the different species which have a positive effect on the well-being of the animals as they are exposed to variety and social interaction.

In addition to the questions about housing conditions, the association also wanted to know how Germans feel about regulations on keeping wild animals: *"Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements."*



- A ... Zoos should be required to adhere to certain minimum sizes and standards for enclosures for wildlife.
- B ... Zoos should not be allowed to keep certain animal species.
- C ... Zoos should not keep wild animals in general.



Numbers in percent:

● Completely agree   
 ● Somewhat agree   
 ● Somewhat disagree   
 ● Completely disagree

**Almost all respondents believe that zoos should adhere to certain minimum sizes for wildlife enclosures.**

In order to be able to further qualify the answers to question 12, the study participants were asked to answer in their own words: *"In your opinion, what kinds of wild animals should not be kept in a zoo?"*. The answers (multiple answers were possible) provided a very indifferent picture. 21 percent generally answered "wild animals", 19 percent "carnivores" and 11 percent think that no "marine animals" should be kept in zoos. When it comes to specific species, the percentages of the answers drop significantly: 5 percent each do not want "bears", "lions", "dolphins" or "whales" to be kept in zoos. Six percent did not want to see elephants in zoos. Only two percent felt that monkeys should not be kept in zoos.



Curiously, it should be noted that more than half (57 percent) did not provide an answer to this question. Whether participants felt unable to answer that question or simply did not want to answer it, is anyone's guess. It is however remarkable that this question had the highest rate of non-response in the whole study.

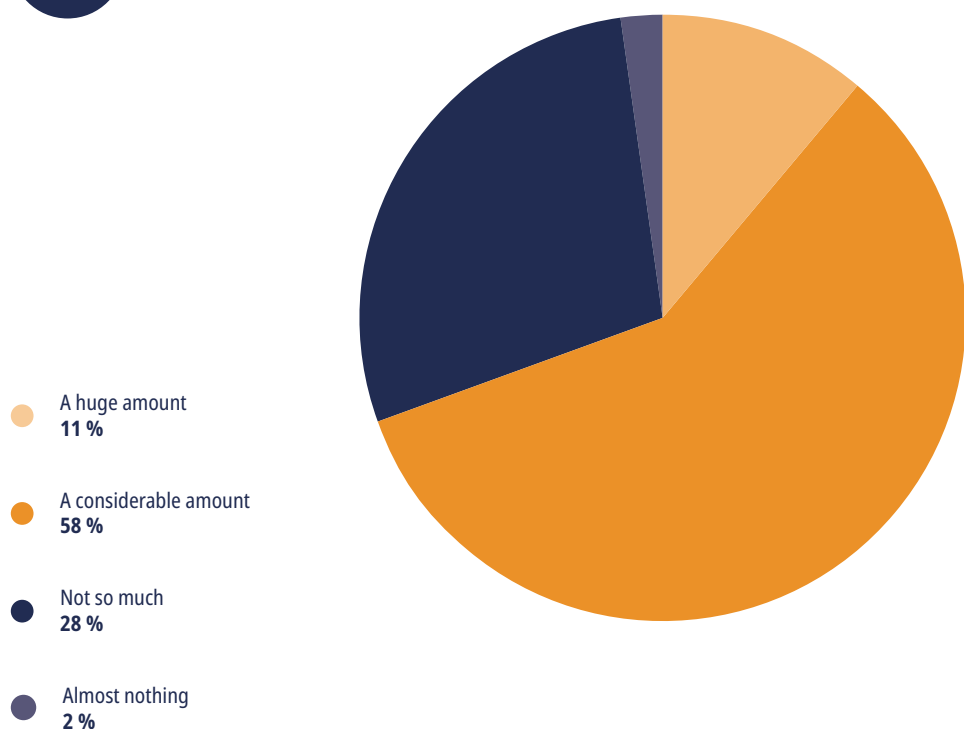
It can therefore be concluded that Germans are predominantly positive about the public responsibilities of zoos. They do, however, have very strong feelings about the housing conditions of zoo animals.

## EDUCATION BY ZOOS

Modern zoos see themselves as places of learning and education: somewhere where you can see the diversity of nature based on the different genera and species, and a place where animals can be observed and researched. In addition, zoos raise awareness of the state of the environment, warn of the threats to biodiversity and even take action outside their borders. When asked, *"In your opinion, did you learn a huge amount, a considerable amount, not that much or almost nothing about animals during your last visit to the zoo?"*, study participants were largely positive about the zoos' educational efforts.

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Over two thirds of the zoo visitors learned a considerable amount or even a huge amount about animals.



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The Forsa study participants were also asked to answer the following question: *"In your opinion, do zoos generally do enough to provide information about animals and nature or would you like more comprehensive information?"*. There was a clear response: 73 percent of Germans feel adequately informed when they are out and about in a zoo; 23 percent felt there could be even more on offer.

In many municipalities and regions, visits to the zoo by daycare children or schoolchildren are a regular occurrence: however, these are mostly customised solutions that have developed over the years between the teachers of the zoo schools and certain facilities, perhaps as part of the biology class. But the Germans are very open to the idea of comprehensive schooling in and through the zoo. Based on the question *“Do you think that regular visits to the zoo should become an integral part of the school curriculum?”*, a total of 84 percent (41% “definitely”, 43% “somewhat agree”) were in favour of it becoming part of the curriculum. Only 15 percent (combined) answered “probably not” or “definitely not” for visits to the zoo to be part of school lessons in the future.



## ZOO SUBSTITUTE

In the discussion about zoos, some critics repeatedly take the view that the media could take on similar tasks in order to provide education about wild animals. However, when asked *“Does a good animal documentary or animal film offer the same experience as going to the zoo?”* almost two thirds (65 percent) said “No”. Less than a third (31 percent) of Germans feel that a good animal film provides an equivalent experience. Virtual reality zoos were rejected even more clearly. When asked, *“In your opinion, would a virtual reality zoo offer the same experience as going to a ‘real’ zoo?”* 68 percent answered “No”; VR technology would therefore only be a good substitute for 19 percent.

In summary it seems that visitors see modern zoos not only as an opportunity to observe animals – they actually absorb new knowledge about animals and feel connected to them during their visit.

# PUBLIC FUNDING

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Many German zoos are under municipal ownership or at least have connections to their respective cities. Much fewer are administratively located in a region or in a federal state. Most of them receive financial support from their administration. The study participants were asked their opinion on this: *“Should or shouldn’t cities and municipalities support the local zoos financially with public funds?”* It seems that the vast majority of Germans are of the opinion that subsidies for zoos from the public sector are appropriate: 82 percent answered the question with “Yes”; only 12 percent did not want them to be funded.

Four out of five Germans are in favour of public subsidies for zoos.





## **THE GERMANS AND THEIR ZOOS**

### **RESULTS OF THE 2020 FORSA STUDY**

#### **PHOTO CREDITS**

Cover – King penguins – Zoo Berlin;  
Page 5 – Sun parakeet – Timo Deible/ Zoo Karlsruhe;  
Page 10 – Lar gibbon – Tierpark Berlin;  
Page 13 – Chinese leopard – Timo Deible/ Zoo Karlsruhe;  
Backside – Polar bears – Zoo Hannover

#### **FORSA METHODOLOGY**

On behalf of the VdZ, forsa Politik- und Sozialforschung GmbH carried out a representative survey on the attitudes of Germans, Austrians and residents of German-speaking Switzerland towards zoos. A total of 1,508 citizens aged 14 and over, selected according to a systematic random principle, were surveyed in Germany. The survey was carried out from November 4th to the 15th, 2019 using the online forsa.omninet panel. The results obtained can only be transferred to the whole adult population in Germany with the error tolerances possible in all sample surveys (in the present case +/- 2.5 percentage points). During the survey, participants were asked the questions in a different order. For 100 percent of missing answers, "don't know/no response" was used.

In this brochure the word zoo is generally used. Of course, this also includes zoological facilities, which by name are animal park (Tierpark) or animal garden (Tiergarten).



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