

Killing Non-5 Animals to Feed Carnivores in German-Speaking Nonos and its Acceptance by Staff, Visitors, and Media

Töten von Zootieren zum Verfüttern an Raubtiere in deutschsprachigen Zoos und die Akzeptanz bei Mitarbeitern, Besuchern und der Presse

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Abstract

Zoos keeping carnivores need to feed adequate animal material to these species. Several factors have contributed to the advocacy of using zoo-raised animals (both domestic and non-domestic species) in a 'breed and feed'-approach for this purpose. These include the following: The welfare of the food animals (which is probably better in animals kept at zoos than at conventional or intensive livestock farms, animals of which are additionally transported and processed in slaughterhouses; allowing reproduction and the associated social behaviours rather than preventing reproduction in zoos), sustainability (by reducing transport), education (by not excluding 'death' from the cycle of life presented at the zoo), the sustainability of zoo animal

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populations (for which the production of a certain ‘surplus’ may be considered an important safety strategy). It has also been suggested that the feeding of whole carcasses, including large ones, has psychological and physiological benefits for the carnivores, as well as providing a didactic element. On the other hand, it has been felt that feeding whole carcasses and zoo-raised animals may not be socially acceptable and hence represents a risk for the reputation of zoos. Data on these aspects are sparse. We conducted a survey among German-speaking zoos on the practice of feeding zoo-raised animals, asking about the zoos’ perceptions on which species should be excluded from this practice and about the zoos’ experiences with staff, visitor and media reactions to such feeding events. 36 zoos participated, all of which had fed zoo-raised animals to their carnivores, in 223 feeding events (21% domestic and 79% non-domestic species, 87% mammal species). The animals fed were mostly mid-sized non-domestic ruminants in 25.6% of all events, followed by mid-sized domestic ruminants in 22.0%. The taxon most often mentioned as not suitable for feeding were the great apes. Four of the nine participating zoos keeping elephants did not exempt them from being fed, in principle (although no elephant feeding was reported). Most staff and visitor reactions were judged as ‘accepting’ of the feeding events, while the media and the local press mainly ignored them. When evaluating only those events that the media did report on, the zoo staff showed the highest acceptance, followed by visitors, whereas the reactions of the press were mainly neutral, with positive reactions ranging second and the negative ones ranging third (but notably less than no reaction at all). These results suggest that, at least among the zoos participating, reactions of the public need not be considered prohibitive to the practice of feeding zoo animals to zoo animals. Continuing education and public outreach efforts that stress the many sound reasons for this practice may further increase its acceptance. This should also be reflected in the operating concept of zoos that does not represent the killing and feeding of zoo animals to zoo animals as individual cases of ‘surplus’ specimens, but as a holistic animal husbandry, breeding, and welfare concept.

Keywords: carnivore feeding, slaughtering zoo animals, carnivores, whole carcasses

Introduction

In nature, carnivores prey on other animals. In zoos, they are also fed with animal material, either as whole prey/whole carcasses, carcass parts, or processed meat (Allen et al., 1996, Kleinlugtenbelt et al., 2023). Generally, this means that zoos buy these items from commercial providers. In the past, the source of these items may have appeared irrelevant, but in recent years sustainability, accountability and animal welfare, including that of animals raised for the sole reason of providing food for humans or other animals, have gained more relevance.

It would be a reasonable alternative to use the zoo itself as the source as part of a ‘breed and feed’ strategy. Prey insects, chicks, rodents and rabbits are commonly raised as food animals. The reasons for in-house animal food production may have been predominantly financial and logistical, as it may have been cheaper, or the only available option. However, increasing awareness of the relevance of animal welfare and sustainability issues (which also include the carbon footprint of any transport), adds the additional arguments of (i) no transport, and (ii) that zoos themselves, as animal husbandry experts, provide higher welfare-oriented animal husbandry than commercial animal production systems. Notably, animals in commercial production systems are typically not allowed to breed naturally, or raise their own offspring for periods that correspond to a natural situation.

In the debate about surplus animals in *ex situ* breeding programs (Bertelsen, 2018), the aspect of food animal production has mainly gone unnoticed. Rather, the argument of *ex situ* popula-

tion sustainability has been put forward, outlining that suppressed breeding (by separation, contraception, or sterilization) can have deleterious consequences for a population. The fact that the effect of contraceptives may not be easily reversible, in the sense of “*use it or lose it*” (Penfold et al., 2014), is part of this issue. The argument of animal welfare is, in our experience, somewhat less frequently mentioned, i.e., that the possibility to express courtship and mating behaviour, to breed, give birth to, and raise offspring, with all the biological and behavioural consequences, is usually denied without compensating mitigation if reproduction is not allowed. Note, for example, that a traditional veterinary medical education teaches castration and contraception methods, including potential medical side effects, but concepts on their effects on life-long welfare are not part of the curriculum. Importantly, the aspect has rarely been raised that preventing the breeding of surplus animals that could be used as food supports, by default, commercial food animal producers, whose animal welfare standards may be below those of zoos.

An important argument in this discussion is the actual or expected reaction of staff, visitors and the public to such a feeding regime. Many zoos operate in societies that endorse the killing of food production animals, yet shy away from killing zoo animals, whose welfare is most likely higher. The general invisibility of production animal killing in many societies may be a decisive factor in this reaction. While some zoos proactively address this paradox, possibly considering it part of their mission to educate the public about all implications of life (rather than presenting a selective picture that blends out unpleasant aspects), other zoos pre-emptively avoid the conflict. According to Carter & Kagan (2010), dealing with surplus animals is the “*most sensitive public relation issue*” that zoos could be confronted with nowadays.

However, it is difficult to gauge the degree to which the presumed objection of the public is real or not. The few studies on this aspect do not indicate that a majority of zoo visitors are opposed to a feeding method that makes visible the fact that an animal was killed for the carnivores. Several studies conducted in various countries revealed that zoo visitors are not generally opposed to carcass feeding, but rather see it as beneficial to the animals and believe that feeding whole carcasses has educational value and supports a more natural species-specific feeding behavior (Veninga & Lemon, 2001a; Gaengler & Clum, 2015; Roth et al., 2017 incl. several unpublished studies). Gaengler & Clum (2015), for example, found that the number of visitors disapproving of carcass feeding always remained at a low level, although it increased with carcass size and taxonomic proximity to humans. The minority who disapproved of public carcass feeding justified it mainly by an irritating effect on children or the participants themselves. Nevertheless, most visitors thought that carcass feeding would be more acceptable if visitors were educated about natural feeding behaviours by zoo staff (73%) or signs (68%). It has been suggested that zoos should assess the benefits of carcass feeding, which outweigh the small percentage of negative public perception (Veninga & Lemon, 2001b).

Some zoos feed their carnivores whole or partial carcasses of slaughtered surplus zoo animals of various species (Schäfer, 2015). To our knowledge, there is no quantitative overview of data on the feeding of zoo-raised animals to zoo animals. This study aims at documenting the frequency of this practice and the perceived reactions of various stakeholders to it, and putting these in the context of the animal species involved.

Methods

We collected and compiled data via an online survey (google forms) from zoos in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Of the 44 existing zoos that are members of the Association of Zoo Veterinarians (‘Verband der Zootierärzte’, VTZ), 36 responded. The survey was elaborated by

the VZT working group on 'Population Management'. The questions included whether zoos feed their own animals to their carnivores, what species they feed, who kills them, how they are presented and the perceived reactions of the zoo's staff members, visitors and the local media. Notably, this survey did not directly ask staff and visitors or surveyed media outlets, but relied on the impression noted by the zoo person judging these reactions. We also asked which species should be exempt from feeding to other animals.

Results

Thirty-six zoos participated in this study, all of which fed their own animals to their carnivores; one zoo provided photographic documentation (Fig. 1). In terms of the feeding event itself, 25 zoos (69%) permitted visitors to be present during the feeding of their own animals, six zoos (16%) did not allow visitor presence during the feeding, and five zoos (14%) carried out both public and non-public feedings.



Fig 1: A harpy eagle (*Harpia harpyja*) fed an agouti (*Dasyprocta leporina*) (left) and a snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*) fed a Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*). Photos by Helmut Mägdefrau

Two zoos (6%) decapitated their carcasses before feeding them, nine zoos (25%) divided their carcasses in such a way that the species of the carcass was unrecognizable, and 24 (67%) fed intact carcasses that allowed the species to be identified.

In total, 94 different species or animal groups were reported to have been fed in 223 individual feeding events (Tab. 1). These events used 21% domestic and 79% nondomestic species, comprising 87% mammals, 11% birds, two fish and one reptile species. The most frequently mentioned group of animals fed was by far that of non-domestic medium-sized ruminants, accounting for 37% of the 94 different species, 44% of the 82 mammal species and 26% of the 223 feeding events. Among domestic species, mid-sized ruminants (mainly sheep and goats, accounting for 22% of all feeding events) and small rodents (mainly guinea pigs, rats, and mice) were most frequently mentioned. Among non-domestic species, large ruminants (i.e. bison and yak) and mid-sized rodents (i.e. nutria) were most frequently used, although to a lesser degree than the mid-sized ruminants (Tab. 1).

Seventy-two percent of the responding zoos deemed the great apes to be unsuitable for feeding purposes (Tab. 2). Primates and carnivores were most frequently mentioned as species not suitable for feeding to other animals. For some taxa, we evaluated especially whether the respective zoo kept the taxa itself. In the case of great apes and dolphins, all participating zoos that

Tab. 1: Mammal species mentioned in 223 feeding events.

Taxon	domestic species (n)	% of the total 94 species	% of 82 mammal species	% of 223 feeding events	Non-domestic species (n)	% of the total 94 species	% of 82 mammal species	% of 223 feeding events	
Ruminants	small ¹	-	-	-	3	3	4	1.8	
	medium ²	4	4	5	34	34	41	25.6	
	large ³	3	3	4	6	6	7	6.7	
Equids	2	2	2	1.8	3	3	4	4.5	
Camelids	2	2	2	1.3	1	1	1	0.4	
Rodents/ Rabbits	small ¹	3	3	4	6.3	2	2	2	1.3
	medium ²	1	1	1	4.9	8	8	10	4.5
	large ³	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2.2
Macropods	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	0.9	
Suiformes	2	2	2	2.2	2	2	2	2.2	
Carnivores	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	0.9	

¹small ruminant: small gazelle-sized; small rodent: mouse or rat-sized

²medium ruminant: sheep-sized; medium rodent/rabbit: rabbit-sized

³large ruminant: cattle-sized; large rodent: mara or capybara-sized

Tab. 2: Species considered by the responding person to be unsuitable for feeding.

Which animals would you exempt from feeding?	n zoos	% of all 36 zoos	n zoos that kept the taxon	of which do not like to feed it
Great apes	26	72	17	17
Primates in general	16	44	-	-
Felids	13	36	-	-
Canids	12	33	-	-
Carnivores in general	11	31	-	-
Elephants	8	22	9	5
Rhinoceros	4	11	12	4
Anteaters	2	6	10	2
Dolphins	2	6	2	2
Tapirs	2	6	-	-
Bears	1	3	-	-
Xenarthrans in general	1	3	-	-
Marine mammals in general	1	3	-	-
Suiformes	1	3	-	-
No taxon	9	25	-	-

did not consider these taxa acceptable for feeding actually kept them. In contrast, not all zoos that kept elephants, rhinos or anteaters exempted these taxa from the list of potential candidates for feeding. A quarter of all zoos explicitly did not exempt any species from being fed; of these zoos, only one kept great apes and none kept dolphins.

In the majority of zoos responding, the keepers themselves did the slaughtering with a bolt gun and blood drainage, whereas most zoos used a licensed hunter or holder of a license for firearms when shooting the animals (Tab. 3).

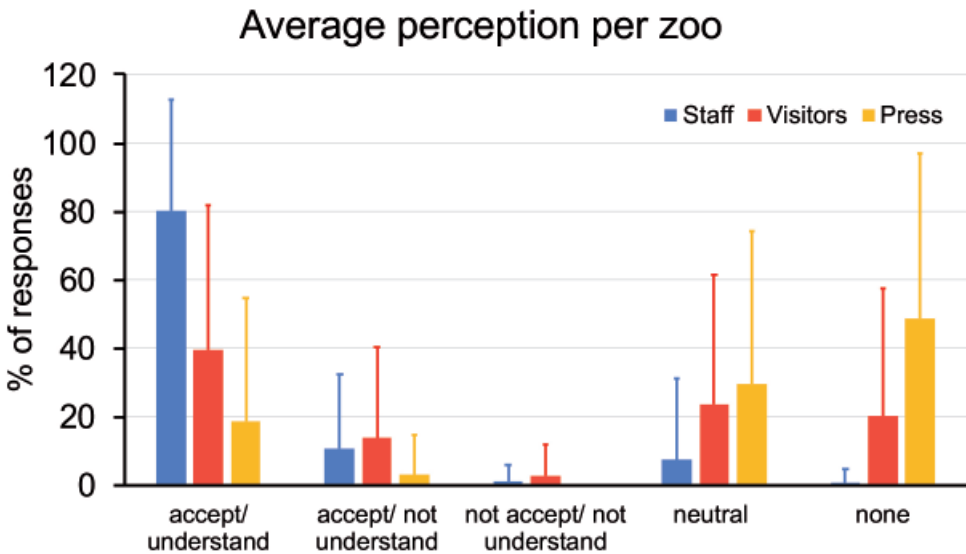
Tab. 3: Persons responsible for killing/slaughtering.

Method	total n of zoos slaughtering their own animals by	n of zoos where keepers do the killing by	n of zoos where a veterinarian does the killing by	n of zoos where a hunter does the killing by	n of zoos where "others" do the killing by
shooting*	36	4	10	20	15
bolt gun*	36	27	14	4	8

*followed by blood draining

Reactions Reported

For all the zoos, reactions of the staff and visitors to individual feeding events were predominantly positive, whereas the majority of feeding events did not elicit any response from the press (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2:** Average perception per zoo for all feeding events.

Counting absent reactions as part of overall reactions makes a comparison between the groups difficult. Therefore, from here on, all reactions are given only as a percentage of the actual reactions. The resulting evaluation indicates that both visitors and press show a homogenous pattern: In the case of visitors, the majority of feeding events was accepted and understood, and neutral and more critical reactions decreased continuously. Press reactions ranged from accepting to critical, with the majority being neutral. In contrast, there was a dichotomy among zoo staff. Whereas most staff members accepted and understood the feeding events, they were actually more critical of them than neutral. In other words, the zoo staff appeared to be split into an accepting majority and a critical minority, with little neutral ground. This pattern persisted in all the subsequent evaluations.

While the data does not lend itself to easy statistical evaluation (due to the large imbalance among zoos in terms of numbers of feeding events), some general trends can be gleaned: Zoo

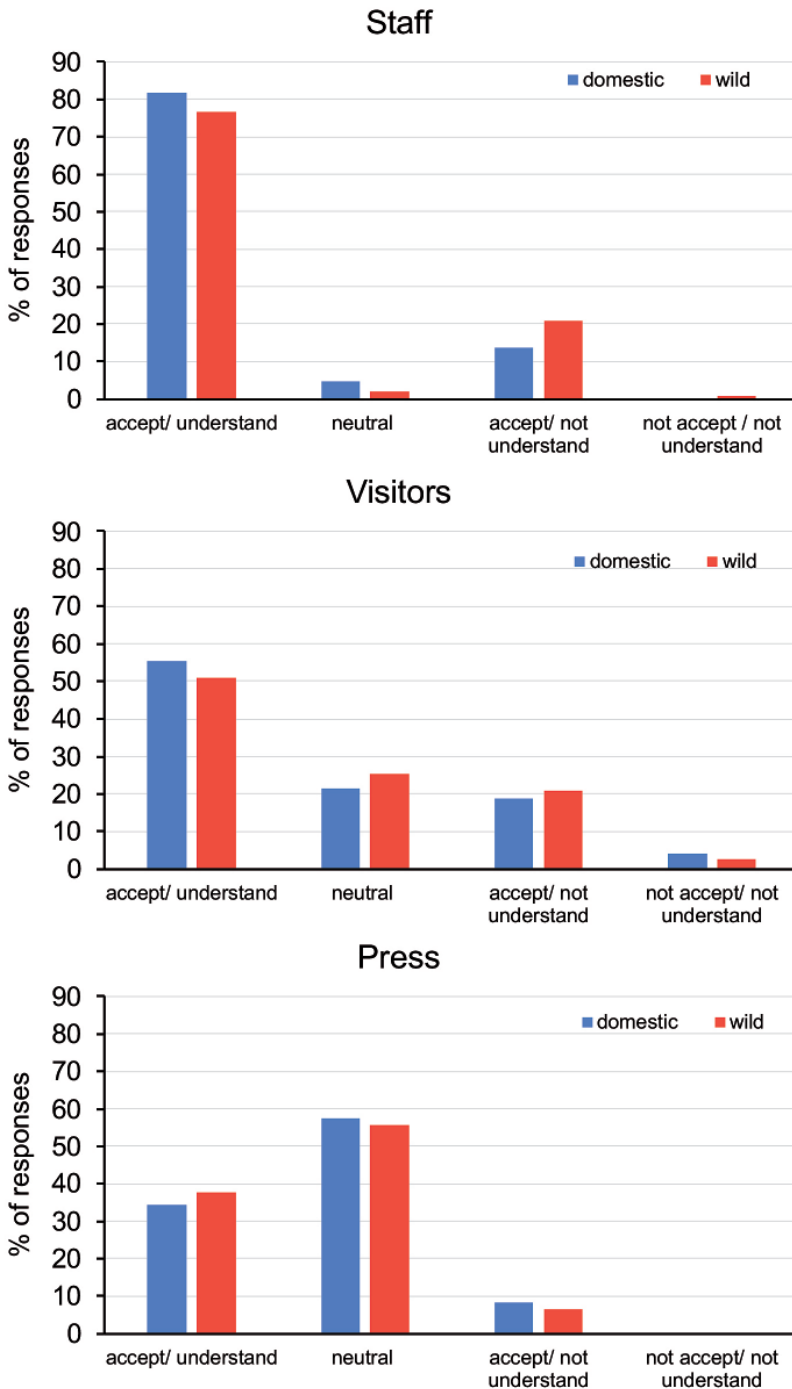


Fig 3: Reactions of staff members, visitors and the press to feeding domestic vs wild species.

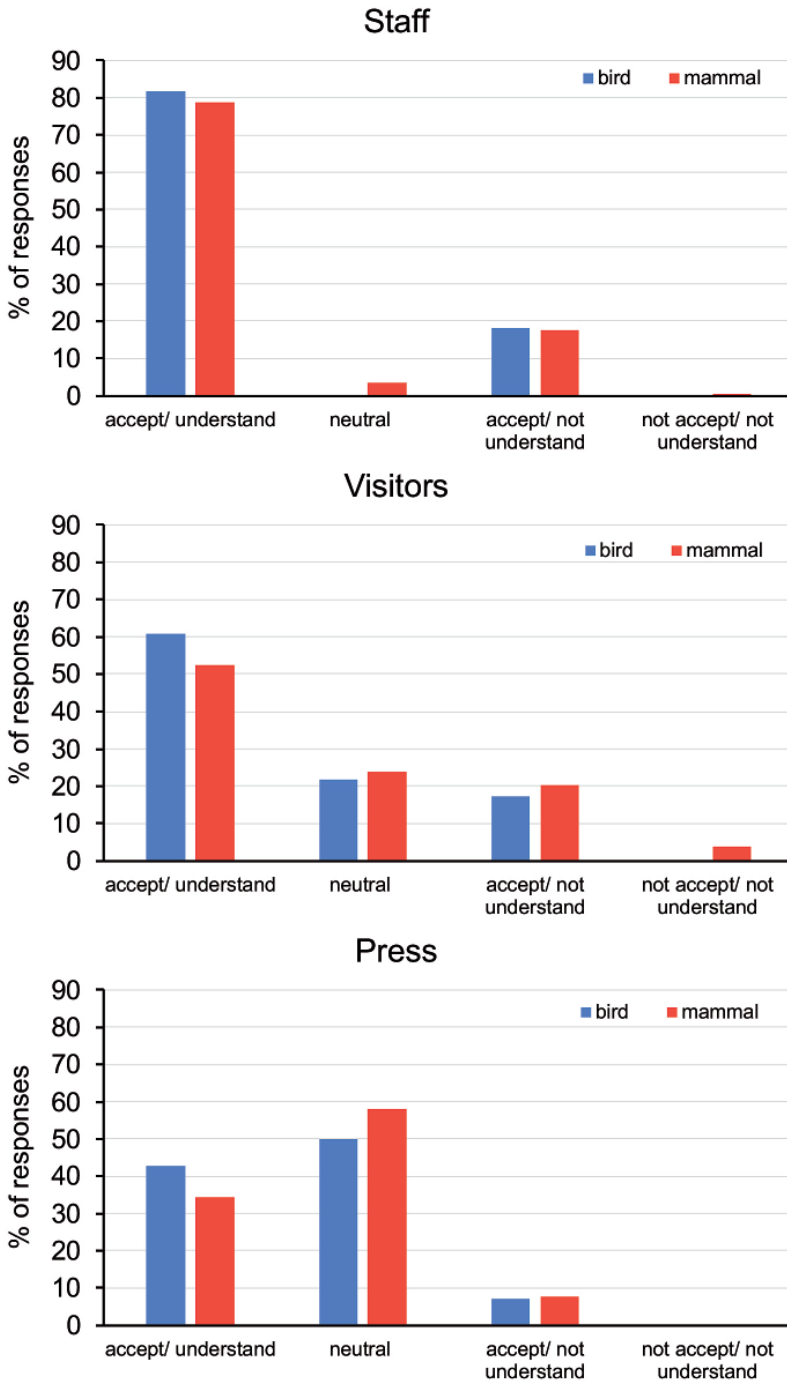


Fig. 4: Reactions of staff members visitors and the press to feeding bird vs mammal species.

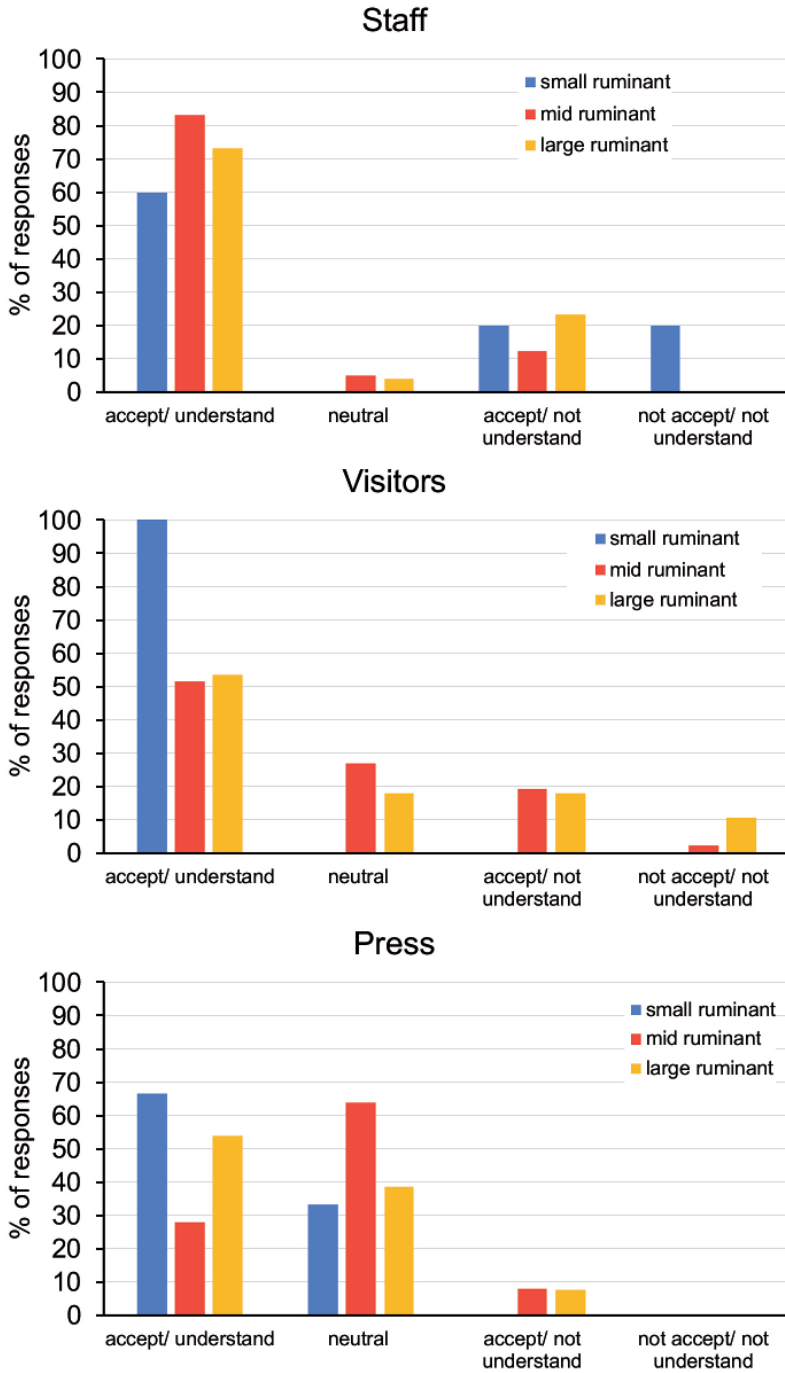


Fig. 5: Reactions of staff members, visitors, the press to feeding ruminant species of different sizes.

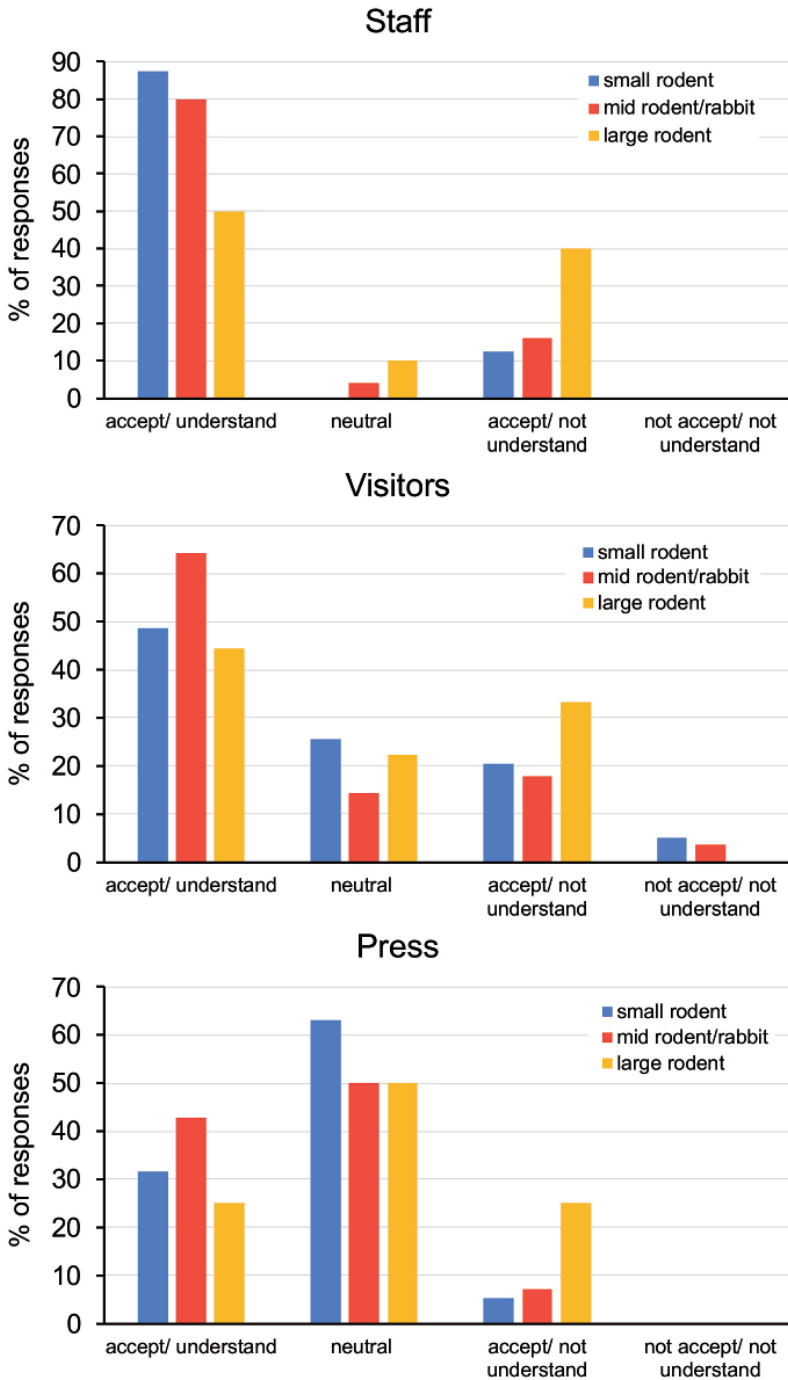


Fig. 6: Reactions of staff members, visitors and the press to feeding rabbits and rodent species of different sizes.

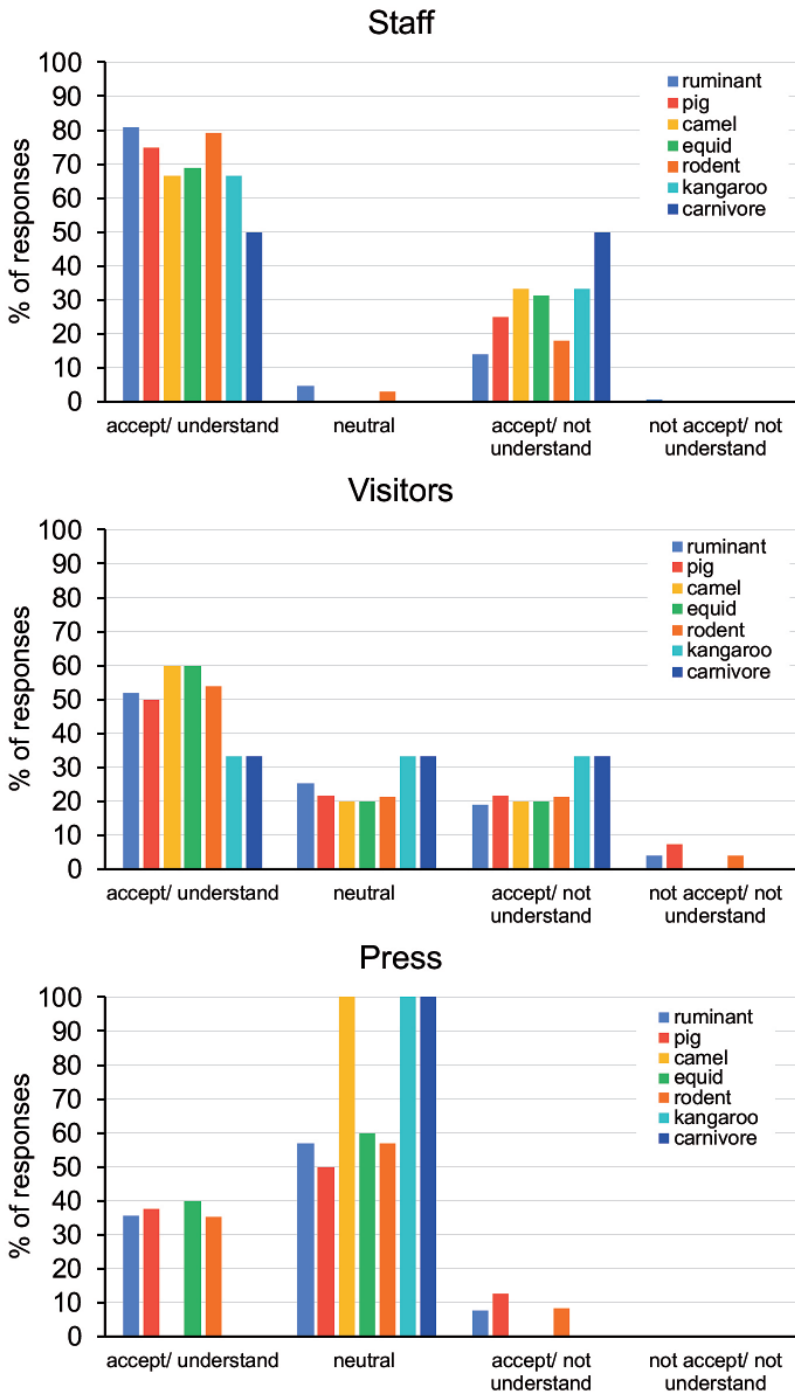


Fig. 7: Reactions of staff members, visitors and the press to feeding various mammal groups.

staffs are split (although the majority approves of feeding their own animals), the public generally approves of feeding killed zoo animals and the press is largely neutral, yet with more approving than critical reactions. Feeding domestic species appears to be slightly easier to accept than the feeding of non-domestic species (Fig. 3), and the same holds true for birds compared to mammals (Fig. 4). Among ruminants, no clear pattern was evident with respect to body size (Fig. 5), whereas in rodents, it seemed that feeding medium and especially large rodents was seen more critically than the feeding of small rodents (Fig. 6). When dividing the mammals by taxonomic group, the split within the zoo staff was particularly evident. It was the feeding of kangaroos to carnivores that elicited the most critical response (yet, it should be noted that these cases represent a minority of feeding events) (Fig. 7).

With respect to public education, 75% of the zoos provided no education to the public about feeding during most of these feeding events and 18 zoos never gave any kind of public education during a feeding event. 25% of the zoos had a responsible staff member standing close by for any upcoming questions, 19% did educational talks during the feeding events, 17% did some kind of education through social media and 11% used other educational options. Many zoos used more than one educational technique. There was no evident correlation between the visitor reactions reported and the public education efforts by the zoos.

Discussion

Over the past years, the use of zoo animals for feeding purposes has been questioned, but our findings suggest that the perception towards feeding a zoo's own animals to carnivores kept at the zoo is not as negative as previously assumed. However, the number of zoos surveyed in this study was small, geographically limited and constrained to membership in the Association of Zoo Veterinarians of German-speaking countries. Visitor reactions reflect the cultural attitudes of each area, so that broader surveys across the European zoo community would be welcome. Also, it must be noted that reactions asked for related to staff, visitors and media, and not – because this would have been impossible to judge – of the overall society. Evidently, detailed interviews with staff, zoo visitors and people who do not visit zoos would be interesting in the future, as well as linking feeding events and husbandry practices to the respective public and social media reactions in a quantitative manner.

Based on this survey, only a few taxa are still largely considered unsuitable or unacceptable to be fed to carnivores, such as great apes and elephants. This corresponds to the “cuteness index” depicted by Bertelsen (2018), wherein meat, insects, fish, small rodents and day-old chicks range lowest, domestic animals being in the middle range, non-domestic prey species (such as zebras, antelopes or giraffes) scoring higher, but being topped by charismatic species such as elephants and great apes. Thus, the reluctance to feed these latter groups to other animals can be expected to be highest. Domestic species that are also consumed by humans and those species featuring prominently as prey animals in predator-prey narratives (such as wild ruminants) are particularly well tolerated as food animals. This contrasts, for example, to anteaters or tapirs (Tab. 2), which are also preyed upon in their natural habitat, but whose peculiar physiognomy sets them apart. The comparatively high proportion of negative visitor reactions to feeding kangaroos to zoo carnivores, although they are even hunted for human consumption in their native habitat, may be explained by their distinctness from animals typically slaughtered in the region of the present study (Fig. 7). In this respect, it would be interesting to perform a similar survey across Australian zoos and assess whether the perception of feeding kangaroos is different on that continent.

The perceived reactions mirror this ranking, regardless of whether staff, visitors or the media are concerned. Our findings indicate that keepers have a tolerant and understanding attitude to-

ward feeding their own zoo animals to their carnivores, except for a small minority who neither approve nor understand this practice. The literature sheds no further light on this subject. In hindsight, both the high acceptance and the dichotomic split in this group is understandable. On the one hand, zoo keepers can be expected to better understand the 'cycle of nature' as well as the behavioural benefit of both (surplus) breeding for the breeding group and carcass feeding for the carnivores than the general public, since their choice of profession may well be connected to this knowledge. On the other hand, one does not become an animal keeper to kill animals, but rather because of an emotional connection that may also be more pronounced than that of society as a whole, and which may lead to a distinct aversion to the practice. The lack of 'neutral' reactions from zookeepers is thus understandable. Here, we propose that a positive emotional bond to a specific animal, and to animals in general, need not preclude the acceptance of the unavoidability of death in general, and the respectful, humane killing of a specific individual that was provided with high quality husbandry conditions.

The zoo visitors asked about in our study appeared to tolerate and generally comprehend this feeding practice. As previously mentioned, naturalistic feeding practices are seen as a potential issue for zoo visitors, but a closer look makes clear that the number of visitors who disapprove of this practice remains very low (Gaengler & Clum, 2015). More detailed studies on the perception of the killing of animals would be welcome, as would be even more efforts to educate the public in this regard.

The press seemed in general more neutral and uninvolved in the feeding events in our study, but when involved, the majority was understanding and accepted this feeding practice. As evidenced in this survey, and as easily understandable, the press does not report on all feeding events in their local zoo. This may be an indication that more naturalistic feeding of carnivores with zoo-bred animals is not considered to be as spectacular as one might have deduced from notorious public outcries, in particular that related to the killing of the surplus giraffe 'Marius' at Copenhagen Zoo (Bertelsen, 2014). Concerns by zoo managers that the public, and in particular media will have negative reactions to the feeding of zoo animals to zoo animals are intuitively understandable, but based on the judgement voiced in our survey, are not based on the experience of the majority of participating zoos. In that same line of thought, it should be remembered that even in the notorious 'Marius' case, the large majority (79 %) of public media reactions were considered 'neutral' (with 4% 'positive' and 17% 'negative') (Zimmerman et al., 2014), and that the scientific director of Copenhagen Zoo was elected "citizen of the year" in the aftermath of the related public media activity (Vesterberg, 2014).

Given the combined effects of nutritional value, behavioural management, and public education, it is surprising that European zoos do not generally feed large carcasses, irrespective of whether they derive from animals raised at the zoo or elsewhere (Kleinlugtenbelt et al., 2023). It has been reported, for example, that feeding large whole carcasses enhanced cooperation among zoo-managed bush dogs (*Speothos venaticus*) (Macdonald, 1996) and painted hunting dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) (Veninga & Lemon, 2001a) and helped zoo-managed lions resolve social tensions during the feeding event (Höttges et al. 2019). Whole-prey feeding is linked to reduced plaque formation and focal palatine erosion (Lindburg, 1988). In particular, the less digestible or indigestible components of whole carcasses, including bones, tendons, cartilage, skin, hair or feathers, have been termed 'animal fibre' and may benefit the health of the carnivores by modulating their intestinal fermentation (Depauw et al., 2013). A carnivore consuming a carcass is also a truer representation of natural circumstances than a carnivore consuming skinned meat on the bone, and will be more helpful in fulfilling the educational aims of a zoo.

As stated by Bertelsen (2018): "*The vast majority of human beings and every zoo known to the author have made the fundamental choice that it is acceptable to kill animals.*" This has implications – for the actual individual act of killing, and for the general judgement of the societal setup.

If done without glee or displays of bravado or humour, but with respect, the killing itself need not detract from the dignity of the animal; if done in a professional way with adequate methods and at an adequate time in the animal's life (e.g., at dispersal age), it need not detract from the welfare of the animal or its social group. Taking the responsibility for this – respectful, welfare-compatible – killing may be an important didactic hallmark of modern zoos. Notably, this includes managing the animal's death in a part of its used surroundings during what it perceives as usual daily routine.

In current interpretations of the legislation in Germany, the focus is mainly on the individual animal, and less on the overall food production concept of both the society and the zoo, or on the societal goal of nature and species conservation. For example, a recent commentary explicitly denies a relationship between using zoo animals for food and the reduced demand this would have on commercially produced animals (Hirth et al., 2023) (section 58b, p. 806). However, in our view, the interrelatedness of feeding concepts (of zoos, of humans, of farm and pet animals) with enterprises that provide food for these demands cannot be ignored, as any individual consumer decision will affect the overall outcome, even if not immediately; and if animal welfare is considered a relevant societal issue (as it is for zoos), then the corresponding implications cannot be ignored, either. As another example, Hirth et al. (2023) claim that no act of killing can ever be necessary to prevent a species from going extinct (section 58b, p. 805); again, while sounding intuitive on an individual case basis, this statement seems to ignore constraints population managers have to operate under in real life, and the effect individual case decisions have on an overall outcome, even if not immediately.

Thus, a typical dilemma arises when decisions about killing an individual animal are made on a case-by-case basis: if the main aim of allowing this animal to be procreated is proclaimed to be species conservation, then an *ad hoc* decision to kill (and feed) it as a 'surplus animal' might be perceived as in conflict with that aim. For example, Hirth et al. (2023) repeatedly state that such a case may represent a 'contradictory conduct', where killing is justified by circumstances that make the animal 'surplus', whereas that situation would have been predictable and the procreation of the individual could have been prevented. As long as zoos proclaim species conservation as the main goal, and the killing of individuals as peculiar 'surplus' cases, this standpoint may appear valid. Such an approach cannot be considered holistic, as it excludes an integrated view of how zoos are managed (including food provisioning and their carbon footprint), of the restricted resources under which nature and species conservation necessarily operate, and important aspects of animal welfare (both for commercially raised food animals and for zoo animals) that zoos, as centers of animal husbandry expertise, stand for.

Therefore, it might be beneficial for general media outreach and the education of visitors, as well as for the acceptance of local and national executive agencies, to have a written, overarching concept that outlines the principles of feeding animal products in a specific zoo, as well as the source of the animal products. In other words, the breeding of zoo animals should, from the outset, have a dual aim: species conservation and welfare-oriented high quality food provision. This should include aspects of sustainability, accountability, animal dignity and welfare, as well as alternative sources of food animals, in addition to considerations of population sustainability. When the breeding of zoo animals is planned, from the outset, to include killing and feeding as well as ensuring thriving *ex situ* populations, then the indictment of contradictory conduct does not apply (Hirth et al. 2023) (section 58d, p. 807).

Acknowledgement

We thank all those zoos who chose to remain anonymous in our study for taking the time to participate.

Zusammenfassung

Zoos, die Fleischfresser halten, müssen diese Arten mit tierischem Material füttern. Mehrere Faktoren haben dazu beigetragen, dass die Verwendung von in Zoos aufgezogenen Tieren – sowohl Haustieren als auch Wildtieren – im Rahmen einer ‚Breed and Feed‘-Strategie zu diesem Zweck befürwortet wird, darunter das Wohlergehen der Futtertiere (das bei in Zoos gehaltenen Tieren möglicherweise am höchsten ist, verglichen mit Tieren aus konventioneller oder intensiver Tierhaltung, die nach Transport in einem Schlachthof getötet werden; Ermöglichen von Fortpflanzung und damit verbundener Verhaltensweisen statt Unterdrückung der Fortpflanzung in Zoos), die Nachhaltigkeit (durch Verringerung der Transporte), die Bildung (indem „Tod“ nicht aus dem im Zoo dargestellten Lebenszyklus ausgeschlossen wird), die Nachhaltigkeit der Zootierpopulationen (für welche die Produktion eines gewissen „Überschusses“ als wichtige Sicherheitsstrategie angesehen werden kann). Darüber hinaus wird angenommen, dass die Fütterung ganzer Tierkörper, einschließlich großer Kadaver, psychologische und physiologische Vorteile für die Fleischfresser mit sich bringt und auch ein didaktisches Element enthält. Im Gegensatz dazu wurde behauptet, dass die Fütterung ganzer Tierkörper und von Tieren, die in Zoos aufgezogen wurden, gesellschaftlich nicht akzeptabel sein könnte und daher ein Reputationsrisiko für Zoos darstellt. Es gibt wenig Daten über diese Fütterungspraxis. Die Autoren haben eine Umfrage unter deutschsprachigen Zoos zur Praxis der Fütterung von Zootieren durchgeführt und die Meinung der Zoos darüber erfragt, welche Tierarten von dieser Praxis ausgeschlossen werden sollten, sowie die Erfahrungen der Zoos hinsichtlich der Reaktion von Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern, Besucherinnen und Besuchern sowie der Presse auf solche Fütterungen. Insgesamt nahmen 36 Zoos an der Umfrage teil, die bei insgesamt 223 Fütterungen (21 % Haustierarten und 79 % Wildtierarten; 87 % Säugetierarten) Tiere aus der eigenen Zoohaltung an ihre Fleischfresser verfüttert hatten. Die am häufigsten verfütterte Gruppe war die der mittelgroßen nicht domestizierten Wiederkäuer mit 25,6 % aller Fütterungen, gefolgt von mittelgroßen domestizierten Wiederkäuern mit 22,0 %. Das am häufigsten genannte Taxon, das als nicht zur Verfütterung geeignet betrachtet wird, sind die Menschenaffen; im Gegensatz dazu haben vier der neun teilnehmenden Zoos, die Elefanten halten, diese nicht grundsätzlich von der Fütterung ausgenommen (es wurde aber keine Verfütterung eines Elefanten gemeldet). Die Reaktionen des Personals und der Besucher wurden mehrheitlich als „akzeptierend“ eingestuft, während die Presse die Fütterungen überwiegend ignorierte. Bei der Bewertung nur der nicht ignorierten Ereignisse hatte das Zoopersonal die höchste Akzeptanzrate, gefolgt von den Besuchern, während die Reaktionen der Presse hauptsächlich neutral waren, gefolgt von positiven Reaktionen, während negative Reaktionen an dritter Stelle standen (alle drei aber deutlich weniger als gar keine Reaktion). Diese Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass – zumindest in den teilnehmenden Zoos – die Reaktionen der Öffentlichkeit auf die Praxis der Fütterung von Zootieren an Zootiere nicht als prohibitiv angesehen werden müssen. Kontinuierliche Aufklärungs- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, die die vielen guten Gründe für diese Praxis hervorhebt, könnte ihre Akzeptanz weiter erhöhen. Dies sollte sich auch in den Management-Konzepten von Zoos widerspiegeln, die das Töten und Verfüttern von Zootieren an Zootiere nicht als Einzelfall-Lösungen für *Surplus*-Individuen beschreibt, sondern als Teil eines holistischen Konzeptes von Tierhaltung, Zucht und Wohlergehen.

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