

The Eden Syndrome

This syndrome is a multi-faceted process which is ongoing, and includes the following components;

Monitoring caged primates, birds and or other wildlife for tell-tale behavioural patterns

These recorded observations, which take place right throughout the pre-release period are used for evaluation purposes, and are the most reliable indication of an animal's progress towards readiness.

Dehumanizing of primates, birds, predator cats and other wildlife while still caged

The behaviour of the keepers while in the confinement area of the animal, or within sight of their cages has been identified as the single most important factor to the achievement of a dehumanized animal. For this to be effective, keepers are required to abide by previously agreed rules of behaviour and speech. These rules are modified as the animal progresses towards dehumanization and this whole process can be construed to be a form of conditioning or training.

The release into the greater exhibit or Eden Area: Once a predetermined level of dehumanization has been reached, and the keepers are satisfied that the animals are sufficiently ready to advance to a new environment, they are then released into the Eden Arena which is ideally large enough for more than at least one territorial area to be formed by a given specie.

Greatly reduced or zero interaction between humans and the primates (this also applies with other wildlife).

Once released into the Eden Arena, interaction is eliminated, the animals are left to explore and formulate individual conclusions regarding these new developments in their lives. Feeding techniques are very important in this stage of the process.

Anonymous feeding: Feeding up to this point, while clinical and without vocalization by the keepers must now become a total mystery, and the primates should again be allowed to formulate their own individual opinion as to the origin of food present in the Arena. At Monkeyland 16 individual feeding stations are strategically placed within the 12-hectare Eden Arena. These feeding stations are serviced at approximately 6.00 AM each morning, while it is still dark, and the primates are still sleeping in the forest. The waking primates at first light, descend on these feeding stations to find them fully stocked, the intention here is for the primates to associate the feeding platforms with food, and not humans any longer.

Strict human code of conduct: At this point Eden Syndrome will be in full swing, and the only way in which it can be broken down, would be through humanizing the primates, by humans. To ensure that this does not occur, a strict code of behaviour and conduct is required by the staff and visitors. Touching, feeding, teasing and any other form of direct interaction must be eliminated.

THE ADVANTAGES OF INTRODUCING THE PROCESS ARE EQUALLY MULTI FACETED

Typical behavioural patterns are evident almost immediately

Natural pairing and group structuring

Total environmental enrichment becomes a reality

Absence of pacing, and other stress related behaviour

Total freedom of association for all troop members

Greatly increased freedom of movement and related advantages

Inter specie acceptance

Sharing habitats skills and knowledge

Grouping, setting of territories and creating separate group hierarchies.

The transferal of knowledge from related and or unrelated species is yet another advantage observed after the introduction of the Eden Syndrome process, the primates have shown greater tolerance and acceptance of each other. This occurs not only within individual species, but also right across the range of specie present in their shared or communal habitat. Transferal of knowledge and respect for orders and other species has been noted in the following situations;

Previously inapt mothers are now raising their own young having been taught by their own and or through the observation of other species

Skill transferal such as foraging techniques and vegetation knowledge and the utilization thereof, especially regarding the dangers and possible discomfort that can be inflicted by some insects, mammals and birds is immediately noticeable shortly after being released into the Eden Arena.

Hand-reared primates quickly begin to perform specific natural behaviour which were never displayed as part of their normal behaviour prior to the process being implemented.

Social order amongst these free-roaming primate species once established has proved to be more meaningful longer lasting.

Inter-specie interaction has been observed, this has always been respectful, and where proper specie composition is present, socialization is limited to sharing space knowledge and joint watch keeping against possible predation, especially with regard to raptors. No hybridization behaviour has been observed at all where the composition of species and groups are correct.

Call recognition has been observed, in that individuals in different species have learned to identify the different sounds and calls of other species, thus enabling them to distinguish alarm calls from other calls. Observations have been recorded regularly where all species immediately display natural evasive behaviour resulting from the alarm call emanating from another specie.

Eden Syndrome is not only about the advanced state of natural behavioural enrichment, which results from the process, but also the improved quality of the exhibition of the animals from a visitor's perspective. Viewing of species in larger more natural and uninhibited space, combined with natural behaviour in family groups created with a certain level of choice with proper leadership are very rewarding from a viewing prospective. Often, the behaviour of an animal will have a more profound impact on a visitor than the presence of the animal itself. When this behaviour is natural behaviour, the entire experience is far more rewarding and memorable.

If you wish to donate money, services and/or goods to assist either Monkeyland's primates, the birds of Birds of Eden or the Apex cats and other wildlife at Jukani Wildlife sanctuary you could do so by contacting us on info@saasa.org.za

If you simply want some more info re the Eden Syndrome process, please contact our group curator Isabel Wentzel curator@saasa.org.za