

*Special Issue*

## **Zoo Horticulture: Plants and Animals Together at Last**

For most of this century, the term *zoological garden* has seemed a misnomer, mocked by frustrated animals pacing back and forth in barren cages. Over the past twenty years, however, the reality of this grim image has slowly been eroding. New zoo design strategies have transformed animal enclosures into "habitat exhibits," which combine plants with other naturalistic elements to simulate the look and feel of "wild" nature.

Horticulture has come of age in the field of zoo management, as carefully crafted plantings are seen as contributing both to the welfare of the captive animals and to the enjoyment and education of visitors. This issue of *Arnoldia* displays a small sampling of the creativity and skill that can be found in the modern zoological landscape.

The creation of realistic habitat simulations in zoos serves two important purposes. It recognizes, first, that in nature animals exist in specific environments and, second, that the closer an enclosure can approximate the animal's natural home, the greater the probability the animal will exhibit more natural

behaviors and, if all goes well, will reproduce successfully. Indeed, habitat exhibits evolved partly out of public concern and, in some cases, outrage over the conditions endured by many of the animals.

A second force driving the evolution of habitat exhibits is their powerful influence on the way visitors perceive zoo animals. Designers of habitat exhibits supplant the often depressing experience of viewing animals in metal cages with that of being immersed in a wild landscape, where barriers between animals and the visitor are minimized. In some exhibits, traditional roles are reversed, and the visitor gets the feeling of being confined, while the animal roams free.

The net result of these changes is that the visitor's appreciation of the animals is enhanced, and the link between animals, their habitats, and conservation is permanently etched on the mind of the viewer. At long last zoological gardens across the country are beginning to live up to their names.

*A field of small boulders used to protect grasses and wildflowers from the constant pressure of half-grown snow leopards at play. © New York Zoological Society Photo.*



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