



PrioryPost124. Summer15

Conservation in action

Upper VI visits the ZSL

On Monday 23rd March the Upper VI Geography and Biology students visited London Zoo. Sruthi Pirabakaran, an Upper VI Biology student, reports on the visit:

'Just before the Easter holidays the Upper VI Biologists and Geographers had the opportunity to visit London Zoo with Miss Keep and Miss Pfannes-Varrow. We attended two educational talks; the first discussed the role that the Zoological Society of London plays in conservation, the second was about behaviour and intelligence among the animals in London Zoo.

We learnt about captive breeding programmes and explored the importance of ensuring animals are matched correctly, whilst maintaining animal welfare. We also learnt that the conservation that is carried out by ZSL is not only undertaken within zoos but in countries worldwide. As their website states, 'ZSL runs conservation programmes in Britain and over 50 countries worldwide; the conservation of wild animals and their natural habitats is fundamental to our mission. We work with local communities to conserve their environment and promote sustainability.'

One of our tasks was to arrange a list of animals in order of intelligence, this task proved to be harder than we thought and raised questions such as 'how do we measure intelligence?' and 'what is the definition of intelligence?' Animals at London Zoo are taught by associative learning which can be beneficial for vets who need to administer medicine to dangerous animals. It also has other benefits, for example, allowing birds to fly free from their enclosures to stretch their wings, as they have learnt to return to their enclosures when instructed.

In between the talks we had the chance to observe animals that displayed various types of learning, innate and learned behaviour and observed how gorillas learn through socialising.

Overall, it was an enjoyable and very instructive visit and has helped us to understand the importance of studying animal behaviour and also to appreciate the work that ZSL carries out to promote conservation.'