

PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIOURS OF ZOO LIONS (*PANTHERA LEO*) AND ZOO VISITORS: ARE THEY LINKED?

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In the last 10 years researches have been focused on the impact of personality on welfare, health and management of zoo animals. Moreover, researches have reported effects of visitor presence on zoo animal behaviour, in particular primates and felids. The aim of this study was to evaluate the effect of the visitors' presence on the behaviour of three females and one male of lion housed at Parco Natura Viva - Garda Zoological Park and to assess the influence of their own personality on the visitors' effect. The study was run over two different periods: the first period without visitors' presence and the second one with the presence of visitors. Focal animal sampling method was used to collect the frequencies of individual and social behaviours. A survey was also completed by the two keepers of the lions. The questionnaires listed 31 traits rated on a scale from 1 (trait was never exhibited) to 12 (trait was always exhibited) by the keepers for each lion. Personality traits were defined for each individual through the questionnaires. A correlation between behaviour and the personality of each individual was done. Moreover, a comparison between two different periods of behaviours showed by each individual was done. Results underlined significant differences between lions for the following traits: curious, friendly to conspecifics, playful, solitary. In addition, significant differences between the two periods were found for individual behaviours related to specific personality traits. In conclusion, findings from this study seem to show that different personalities can differently help to cope with the presence of visitors. Studies about animal personality seems to be useful to take care and manage each individual of a zoological garden to guarantee his/her welfare.

