CHAPTER 4

THE ZOO VISITOR:
WHO’S WHO IN THE ZOO

Burma, the elephant, playing with her enrichment tyre at Taronga.

Not everything that can be counted counts,
And not everything that counts can be counted.

Albert Einstein, German physicist (1879-1955).
Nobel Prize in Physics 1921
There is an underlying assumption that zoos exist simply for the keeping and display of wild animals. On reflection however, it quickly becomes evident that the role of the human visitor in the zoo is of prime importance, since without the support of these visitors zoos would fail to be financially viable and consequently would cease to exist. The visiting public thus forms an essential part of the intricacies of the operation of the zoo. Since it is essential that zoos continue to attract customers to provide necessary revenue, zoos are also for people. If the majority of zoos, like museums and other public institutions, aim to attract as wide an audience as is possible, then it is essential that they develop an understanding of their visitors. On occasions in the past some zoos have carried out a preliminary analysis of their visitors, but interpretation of the results has been fraught with difficulties due to the diverse complexities surrounding the casual visitor to the zoo. In Australia there has been a tendency for zoo administrators to make decisions based upon assumptions; little effort has been made to ask the public fundamental questions related to their motivations for visiting. It is possible that this may simply have been the result of a lack of available resources, but more pertinently it may have been brought about from a fear that it might be disturbing or dangerous to do so, particularly if actual findings conflicted with any preconceived thoughts or current practices.

As a recreational quest, a visit to the zoo has the potential to offer its participants a wide range of benefits and advantages. Various researchers have indicated that these rewards can include variables such as possible learning advantages (Roggenbuck et al., 1990), increasing family cohesion (Orthner & Mancini, 1990) and reducing stress (Ulrich et al., 1990). The zoo has often been regarded as being a setting with the potential to provide an opportunity for developing some learning and understanding about the wonders and creations of the natural world. These experiences are usually shared with close friends or family members, and visitors may also benefit from being relaxed and enjoying time in pleasurable surroundings. The circumstances surrounding such visits are an essential part of the learning process in the zoo, especially as the advantages gained from such an experience frequently relate to original thoughts and feelings about the visit. Consequently it is necessary to develop an appreciation of the various reasons which motivate people in choosing to visit the zoo, and the rationale for selecting this particular establishment from other available leisure activities.

Initially, the overall aim of this research was to develop a demographic profile for the range of people attracted to visit the zoo. Factors considered were the gender of visitors, their age range, and the size and structure of the group accompanying them, so that a profile could be developed to provide a better understanding of who actually visited the zoo. The
experience of travelling to the zoo, along with the amount of time spent visiting, were examined. The motivations which stimulated the visit were explored to determine whether visitors came simply for recreational purposes or for other reasons. Finally, the incidence of visitation was studied, to establish exactly what constituted a frequent visitor to the zoo. The different characteristics that were apparent as a reflection of this frequency pattern were resolved. The data obtained at the study sites in Adelaide and Sydney provided detailed information which, when compared subsequently, highlighted both the similarities and the differences between the two zoos. The results outlined in this chapter contributed to knowledge relating to the visitors and were significant in that not only were quantitative methods used to appraise accurately who actually visited the zoo, but just as importantly, qualitative methods were utilised to develop an understanding of the various reasons motivating the visit.

4.1 The zoo visitor

Museum visiting is not evenly spread throughout the population. Researchers have shown that the demographics of museum visitors have remained fairly stable, both over time and in different countries. In her presentation to the Museums Australia Annual Conference in Canberra, Lynda Kelly (2001) indicated that, in general, museum visitors were typically in the higher socio-economic class. Visitors were usually more highly educated, aged between thirty and fifty, visited with a family or social group, and first visited the museum themselves as children. Compared to previous generations, visitors to museums today are better educated, earn more, live longer, have fewer children and are more dependent upon technology (Ruthven, 2005). Along with these demographic changes, lifestyles and patterns of leisure activities have also changed. Statistics indicate that households are spending more on leisure activities. However, competition with zoological parks is constantly increasing, particularly since modern technology has delivered leisure and learning activities into the living room.

In comparison, little is known about the various characteristics of visitors who frequent zoos, particularly since most accounts have been framed on assumptions, rather than on statistically based evidence. In 2003 Taronga Zoo commenced market research, using self-completion surveys developed by Environmetrics. However, only the satisfactory results have been recorded in the Annual Reports (ZPBNSW, 2003:17; 2004:46). Occasional data has
been collected in Adelaide but this has been minimal, due mainly to limited resources and a shortage of available staff.

Although exhibits in zoos have, of necessity, been designed for the care of the animals on display, some consideration must also be given to the viewing public. Consequently, it is important that analysing visitors should form an integral part in the organisation of zoos. Stuart Davies (1994) considered that visitor figures were the only recognised measure for both performance and market size. In recent years, visitor surveys have occasionally been used to provide information relating to the demographics of different audiences in various institutions, such as museums and zoos. However, as Hood (1983:51) noted,

merely analysing demographics will not reveal what these groups value in their leisure experiences. Instead, we need to focus on how individuals make decisions about the use of their leisure time and energy, to concentrate on the psychographic characteristics … their values, attitudes, perceptions, interests, expectations, satisfactions.

Hood (1984) referred to museums and zoos as ‘preservation-exhibition institutions’ and working on the assumption that these establishments served equivalent audiences, transposed her art museum findings to the zoo environment. Although her suppositions have, in general, been accepted by zoo administrators, the validity of her research needs to be substantiated, particularly since it has been questioned by Milan and Wourms (1992). Summarising their investigations, they concluded their paper with the caution, ‘No longer can findings accumulated from museum visitor studies be so readily accepted as equally applicable to the zoo audience’ (Milan & Wourms, 1992:120). The research discussed in this thesis was developed on this assumption and considered zoo audiences as unique. Further, in responding to their respective audiences, although some common threads may be apparent, any one zoo does not necessarily provide a model pattern which could be applied to any, or all, other zoos.

The method for obtaining the statistical data used to determine the various results discussed in this chapter was adapted from established techniques which have been used in the fields of marketing and social science: techniques that have been modified and developed in studying museum audiences, in particular in the work of Hood (1983) and Serrell (1993). As outlined in the previous chapter, visitors to both zoos were observed unobtrusively as they looked at different exhibits, and data relating to the gender and number of members of the group, along with the number of children present, was recorded on a check sheet. To obtain additional information and data a series of questionnaire surveys were distributed randomly to visitors in the zoo. In each of these surveys (Appendix A), the initial questions were identical,
and the responses elicited were processed to provide information from which the following visitor profile was constructed.

To develop an understanding of the ways in which visitors have experienced the different displays in museum settings, investigative studies have been carried out by a number of researchers, such as Bitgood et al. (1988) and Falk et al. (1985). Despite these enquiries, similar institutions like zoos have not always accepted the findings of such investigations. By adapting techniques that have already been used successfully in museums, this research was able to develop baseline information relating to the people who actually visited the zoo, as well as accumulating other data relevant to both their reasons for visiting and their frequency of visitation.

4.2 Gender proportion

Survey results indicated that there was no significant difference between the two zoo populations throughout the period of this research. The female: male ratio of visitors in both zoos was approximately 1:1, with slightly more females (56%), on average, than males (44%) (Tables 4.1, 4.2; Figure 4.1, Plate 4.2). This disproportion was more noticeable on weekdays when the percentage of females rose to 58% (58% in Adelaide, 57% in Sydney). During the week (with the exception of school groups which were not included in the research), the main category of visitors at both zoos was mothers with young children of pre-school age. It was common to observe these mothers moving through the grounds with their children, often accompanied by grandmothers or other mothers with young children. It was also apparent that at Taronga, during the week, a higher proportion of members (‘Zoo Friends’) visited in the early morning periods and commonly stayed for short periods of time ranging between two and three hours. A similar pattern was observed at Adelaide where members, usually young mothers accompanied by their children, regularly took advantage of their membership to make cost-effective shorter visits. However, it was noticeable that in Adelaide these visits were made at various times throughout the day, rather than in the early morning as at Taronga, a factor which was linked to both the location of the zoo and the availability of parking.
Table 4.1: Proportion of adults and children visiting Adelaide Zoo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Weekday</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Weekend</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male adults</td>
<td>1226</td>
<td></td>
<td>1339</td>
<td></td>
<td>2565</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male children</td>
<td>1099</td>
<td></td>
<td>756</td>
<td></td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>2325</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2095</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4420</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female adults</td>
<td>2069</td>
<td></td>
<td>1663</td>
<td></td>
<td>3732</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female children</td>
<td>1093</td>
<td></td>
<td>759</td>
<td></td>
<td>1852</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>3162</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2422</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5584</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>5487</td>
<td></td>
<td>4517</td>
<td></td>
<td>10004</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 154 observational tracking periods.
19 exhibits.
Reference: Appendix Table 4A.

Table 4.2: Proportion of adults and children visiting Taronga Zoo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Weekday</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Weekend</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male adults</td>
<td>3597</td>
<td></td>
<td>2510</td>
<td></td>
<td>6107</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male children</td>
<td>1186</td>
<td></td>
<td>937</td>
<td></td>
<td>2123</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>4783</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3447</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8230</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female adults</td>
<td>5185</td>
<td></td>
<td>2986</td>
<td></td>
<td>8171</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female children</td>
<td>1159</td>
<td></td>
<td>976</td>
<td></td>
<td>2135</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>6344</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3962</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>10306</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>11127</td>
<td></td>
<td>7409</td>
<td></td>
<td>18536</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 210 observational tracking periods.
13 exhibits.
Reference: Appendix Table 4A.

Plate 4.2: Visitors listening to a tour guide at Adelaide Zoo.
Figure 4.1: Gender and age proportion of visitors to the zoos.

Source: 364 observational tracking periods.
(Adelaide 154 periods – Taronga 210 periods)
N=28,540 visitors.
Reference: Appendix Table 4A.
4.3 Age range

The mean age of visitors to both zoos was approximately the same: 24.9 years at Adelaide and 25.4 years at Taronga (Table 4.3). The range of ages was greater in Adelaide, with higher percentages of visitors in both the under 10 and the over 60 age range (Figures 4.2, 4.3). Possibly the greater proportion of these groups at Adelaide was related to the physical aspect of level surfaces which allowed greater access and movement throughout the zoo. Adelaide visitors could also hire Kiddy Kabz (Plate 4.3), a form of perambulator which proved popular for transporting both small children and possessions. These Kiddy Kabz also permitted a greater ease of transporting young children between the different exhibits. The higher proportion of visitors in the over 60s at Adelaide Zoo was also attributed to the even topography, where the absence of steep inclines and only one flight of stairs (which could easily be avoided if desired) allowed a greater ease of movement throughout the zoo. In comparison, Taronga, situated on sloping harbour foreshores, characteristically featured several steep inclines and several flights of stairs. Commenced in 2005, the installation of escalators and elevators at Taronga provided easier avenues of moving around the sloping terrain. In addition, the Sky Safari aerial gondolas gave visitors the opportunity of moving easily between the lower and upper entry points, as well as the chance of viewing the harbour and the city skyline. This aerial ride was commonly used, not only by patrons who accessed the lower entry after arriving by ferry, but also by those who had walked down through the zoo and needed to return to the parking area close to the upper entrance, avoiding having to re-climb steeply sloping pathways.

Table 4.3: Mean age of visitors to the zoos.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Age (Years)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taronga</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Question 1 (iii), 2,383 surveys.
Reference: Appendix Table 4B.
Younger people under the age of twenty comprised 47% of the daily attendance surveyed at Adelaide, whereas at Taronga this figure was 38%. An analysis of the survey responses indicated that the mean age of young people in both zoos was just less than 9 years, and that teenagers represented only 6% of the number of visitors surveyed. This lower proportion of teenagers was noticeable at both zoos, particularly at Taronga. Presumably the majority of teenagers were participating in other leisure activities which occupied their attention on weekends or visited the zoo as part of their secondary educational curriculum. A higher proportion of visiting adult groups was found at Taronga (62%) compared to Adelaide (53%), with the 20-39 age range comprising 42.6% of visitors at Taronga, compared with 28.5% at Adelaide. This was linked to the greater number of international tourists who visited at Taronga, the majority of whom were in the 20-39 age bracket.

![Figure 4.2: Age range of visitors to the zoos.](image)

Following research at the Australian Museum in Sydney, Kelly et al. (2002) reported that Taronga Zoo had the highest reach into the older audience market of visitors to museums in Sydney, with nearly every older person surveyed having visited Taronga at some point of time. However, the present research found that although the older sector now visited Taronga infrequently, this decrease was not as marked at Adelaide. It is possible that this older sector was more represented at the museum, a topic which could be further examined in future research. Although the Adelaide site is level, it still covers considerably more ground area (8 hectares) than that found in any museum, and Taronga features 38 hectares of sloping terrain. Consequently, viewing the various exhibits in both zoos requires more locomotion than at the museum. This extra degree of movement was offset in part by the picnic atmosphere which existed in the grounds of both zoos, where a number of open lawns and eating areas gave visitors the opportunity to relax and enjoy a pleasant time together.
Figure 4.3: Age range of visitors to Adelaide and Taronga Zoos.

Source: Survey Question 1 (iii).
Total 2,383 surveys (Adelaide 1,300 – Taronga 1,083).
N=8,114 visitors.
Reference: Appendix Table 4B.

Plate 4.3: Information centre at Adelaide Zoo, with Kiddy Kabz available for hire.
4.3.1 Children

During the period of this research, for the population studied, the female: male ratio of children in both zoos was approximately 1:1 (Figure 4.1). Surveys were not distributed to children in school groups, and their numbers were not considered in any of the tracking process, although their patterns of behaviour were noted, particularly when these groups interacted with other viewing categories. Interesting comparisons between the two zoos emerged. It was observed that at Adelaide zoo, as school groups followed their specific pattern of activity and moved throughout the zoo grounds, these groups experienced more supervision than was the situation in Sydney. At Taronga, it was apparent that school-children indulged in their own interests and often pursued their own agendas. Unless specifically directed by a teacher or guide, children rarely recorded any information, a characteristic observed in both zoos.

In its Annual Report, the Zoological Parks Board of New South Wales indicated that during 2004, 86,703 school students visited Taronga Zoo as part of a school excursion, comprising approximately 7% of the annual attendance (ZPBNSW, 2004). In comparison, Adelaide Zoo catered for more than 55,000 students through its education programme for 2005-06.

It was observed that children acted very differently on school visits than when visiting with the family group. Groups of school children, in the presence of their peers, were observed to move rapidly (often running) past exhibits, spending little time viewing specific exhibits. When they did stop, it was common to observe that some members often attempted to deliberately distract the animals, either by noises or actions, both of which often caused visible stress to the animals. Usually, these school groups were associated with a high level of noise and a lack of discipline, and in situations where little supervision was apparent they were observed rushing aimlessly throughout the zoo grounds, showing little thought or concern for other visitors. Several survey responses indicated that this behaviour was not acceptable to adult visitors, most of whom had paid full admission fees. The following comments typified this reaction.

There were too many screaming kids (T318).
The zoo should not allow school kids to run amok (T358).
Noisy school children made life unpleasant for both viewers and animals (T214).
4.4 Size of group

The mean number of people in groups visiting both zoos was 3.4, with 76% of the groups ranging from two to four people (Table 4.4). The group size was marginally higher at Adelaide (3.6) than at Taronga (3.2), and this was attributed to the higher number of visitors over the age of 60. The size distribution of visiting groups is depicted in Figures 4.4 and 4.5.

Table 4.4: Size of groups visiting the zoos.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adelaide</th>
<th>Taronga</th>
<th>Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Visitors</td>
<td>4682</td>
<td>3432</td>
<td>8114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Groups</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>2383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People/group</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Question 1 (ii).
Total 2,383 surveys (Adelaide 1,300 – Taronga 1,083).
Reference: Appendix Table 4C.

It was observed that the different groups of visitors generally showed good social relationships and moved throughout the zoo grounds in closed units. This allowed for conversation which provided the opportunity for visitors to satisfactorily process information from the different exhibits. In this regard zoos and museums can be regarded as similar institutions. However, the variations that occurred within the different categories suggest that museum findings are not necessarily applicable to the zoo situation. As in museums, there was no single type of visitor audience for the animals in the zoo; consequently individual exhibits had to cater for a wide variety of behaviours shown by the wide variety of visitors.

In discussing museum visitors, Charles Gunther (1999:) considered that one segment of adult visitors often appeared uncomfortable in museums, particularly when children were present and the adults tended to act as disciplinarians. He indicated that in these situations where the parents restricted their children’s behaviour and attention the resulting visit was not a pleasant, rewarding experience. These patterns of behaviour were not observed at the zoo. Within the zoo environment an almost opposite effect was observed, with children unconsciously dictating the amount of time spent observing the different exhibits. In the presence of their family unit, children tended to remain in closer contact with their group, reflecting the degree of control or supervision from one or more supervising adults, usually a female. Overall, while their movements were related to the family groups, in many situations
children actually controlled the viewing patterns of the group. When children could not see something or were impatient because of their short attention span, they hurriedly moved away, seemingly aimlessly, searching for something else to occupy their attention. These patterns of behaviour were often observed at feeding sessions, such as those for the lions at Adelaide Zoo and the gorillas at Taronga. It was commonly observed that many groups with young children left the exhibit prior to feeding commencing, or immediately after the food had been supplied, without waiting to observe any further activity or interaction between the animals.

Figure 4.4: Size of groups visiting the zoos.

Source: Survey Question 1 (ii).
Total 2,383 surveys (Adelaide 1,300 – Taronga 1,083).
Reference: Appendix Table 4C.
Figure 4.5: Proportion of group size of visitors to the zoos.
Combined data.

Source: Survey Question 1 (ii).
Total 2,383 survey responses.
(Adelaide 1,300 – Taronga 1,083)
Reference: Appendix Table 4C.
4.5 Category – who accompanies the visitors

In her discussions relating to museum visitors, McManus (1994: 91) described the family unit as being like a:

coordinated hunter-gatherer team actively foraging in the museum to satisfy their curiosity about the topics and objects that interest them, and to satisfy their curiosity about the topics and objects which museum professionals collect and study. Their behaviour is practical and economical since the exploration and information gathering is shared out between the family members.

It was noticeable from tracking observations that this description could similarly be applied to visitors in the zoo, as family groups wandered from exhibit to exhibit seemingly intent on satisfying their interest and curiosity relating to wild animals.

As outlined in the previous chapter (Section 3.5.2), this research considered visitors as belonging to one of five categories: singles, couples, adult groups, families with at least one child of pre-school age and families with school aged children (Plate 4.4). Survey responses indicated that at least one other member of their family accompanied 83% of zoo visitors (88% at Adelaide, 77% at Taronga).

![Figure 4.6: Percentage of observed category groups visiting the zoos.](image)

Source: Tracking observations.
Total 11,195 categories.
(Adelaide 3,549 – Taronga 7,646)
Reference: Appendix 4.E.
The largest category visiting the zoo comprised family groups (Figure 4.6, Plate 4.5). Children were included in 46% of visiting groups (63% at Adelaide, 39% at Taronga). Within these family groups, attention invariably centred around the children as they required (and received) almost constant and continual assistance and guidance from at least one of the parents or grandparents present. It became apparent that when the family group included younger pre-school children, viewing at exhibits was characteristically shorter and involved both fewer and shorter conversations. It was noticeable that as families moved from one enclosure to the next, they attempted to follow a determined but individual agenda. During holiday periods and on weekends, when older children of school age were involved in the make-up of the family group, conversations tended to be longer and involved more detailed and careful explanations, so that these groups tended to have longer visits.

Couples were the second largest visiting category (36.7%). The majority of couples consisted of two people of opposite gender, although some same gender couples were observed. Couples spent the longest periods viewing exhibits and it was observed that most engaged in conversations at the different enclosures. Following her research in museums, McManus (1991) reported that couples comprised the third largest group and were characterised by a lack of conversation, with nearly 50% not talking at all. The findings of the present research indicate that in this respect the behaviour of zoo visitors varied greatly from that observed by McManus.

Within the zoo, the smallest categories were singles and adult groups (Figure 4.6). Tracking observations showed that 7.5% of observed groups in the zoo comprised adults only (5% at Adelaide, 9% at Taronga), and 9.4% (8% at Adelaide, 10% at Taronga) of the category groups were single people. The female: male ratio of singles was the same as the overall visitor ratio, with females (56%) outnumbering males (44%). The higher proportion of single visitors at Taronga was linked with the presence of international visitors. Within the zoo environment, adult groups spent more time reading the signage, and these groups were also characterised by a lack of conversation at the exhibits, preferring to engage in discussions as they moved between the exhibits rather than at the actual exhibit itself. These figures for zoo visitors also differed considerably from the results obtained by McManus (1991) who reported that singles formed the second largest constituency in the museum and that males outnumbered females in a ratio of 2:1.
Plate 4.4: Different categories of visitors watching the Free Flight Bird Show at Taronga Zoo.

Plate 4.5: A family group viewing the duck pond in the children’s section of Adelaide Zoo.
4.6 Where visitors come from

As expected, the majority of visitors to both zoos originated from the surrounding metropolitan areas (Adelaide 65%; Taronga 53%) (Figure 4.7). The percentages of people visiting from regional areas and from interstate were similar in both zoos. Taronga experienced much higher visitation from overseas visitors (Adelaide 4%; Taronga 19%).

![Pie charts showing place of origin of visitors to the zoos.](image)

*Figure 4.7: Place of origin of visitors to the zoos.*

Source: Survey Question 3.
Total 2,383 survey responses.
(Adelaide 1,300 – Taronga 1,083)
Reference: Appendix Table 4F.

The distribution of the place of origin for visitors from the metropolitan areas surrounding each of the two zoos was mapped in relation to postal areas derived from aggregations of the ABS (2001) collecting districts (Figures 4.8, 4.9). Different shades of colour were used to represent the different proportions of visitors to each zoo as a percentage of the overall visiting population. For each map, five classes were used to represent the statistical data. These maps illustrated the greater attracting power of Adelaide Zoo, both in terms of the proportion of population and in terms of distance travelled.

At Adelaide, the distribution followed a linear pattern, in a north-east/south-west axis (Figure 4.8). Few visitors to Adelaide Zoo came from suburbs which, according to census data provided in the Adelaide Social Atlas (ABS, 2002a), were areas of low income and contained higher than average proportions of people who were older, lacked qualifications,
were not fluent in English and who were born overseas. From the distribution of visitors, it could be inferred that in general visitors to Adelaide Zoo possessed more qualifications, were better educated and came from higher socio-economic classes.

At Taronga it appeared that visitation to the zoo was influenced by distance factors and the difficulty of travelling. The distribution of visitors tended to form an approximately circular distribution radiating around the zoo, with decreasing numbers visiting with increasing travelling distance to the zoo (Figure 4.9). This distance factor was most noticeable with the lack of visitors originating from the heavily populated southern suburbs of the Illawarra region. It was also apparent that competition factors from other zoos, particularly Featherdale Wildlife Park at Doonside and Fairfield City Farm, were responsible for lower visitation figures from the outer western suburbs. A comparison of the distribution of visitors to Taronga with the Social Atlas (ABS, 2002b) maps of Sydney suggested that the local visitor to Taronga possessed more qualifications, was better educated and came from higher socio-economic classes.

A much higher percentage of overseas visitors visited Taronga (19% as against 4% in Adelaide). Overall, the majority of the overseas visitors surveyed (76%) came from the UK, New Zealand or the USA (Figure 4.10). At Adelaide there were considerably fewer international visitors, with the majority (60%) coming either from the UK or New Zealand (Appendix Table 4G). These people visited the zoo with relatives or friends who were resident in Adelaide. At Taronga, a higher proportion of visitors from the USA and Scandinavian countries visited mostly as part of their individual holiday activities. Although both zoos were open to the public every day of the year, their audiences still varied with the season. It was apparent that during the winter months, which correspond with the summer holidays in the northern hemisphere, the proportion of international visitors from overseas was higher at Taronga. As expected, during school holiday periods, the number of visitors from interstate increased in both zoos.
Figure 4.8: Distribution of metropolitan visitors to Adelaide Zoo.

N = 1050.

Source: Survey Question 3.

Figure 4.9: Distribution of metropolitan visitors to Taronga Zoo.

N = 1150

Source: Survey Question 3.

Figure 4.10: Distribution of international visitors to the zoos.

$N = 254$.

(Adelaide 47 – Taronga 207)

Source: Survey Question 3.
Reference: Appendix Table 4G.
4.7 Method of transport

It was apparent that part of the overall zoo experience, especially that experienced by family groups, was the process of ‘getting there’. This was most noticeable at Taronga, where the majority of visiting groups (51%) used the ferry trip across the harbour to arrive at the zoo. As outlined in Chapter 3, in order to determine the various methods used by the different categories in coming to the zoo, visitors were asked which mode of transport they had used and the postcode of their home address. The proportional distributions of these modes of transport are shown diagrammatically in Figure 4.11.

![Figure 4.11: Mode of transport to the zoos.](source: 1,490 survey responses. (Adelaide 718 - Taronga 780). Reference: Appendix Table 4H.)

Approximately five to eight minutes’ walking distance from the CBD of Adelaide, the zoo can be accessed easily in a number of ways. Various methods of transport include public bus services that pass the zoo gates, a short trip across Lake Torrens by the ‘Popeye’ ferry (Plate 4.6), walking from the CBD, or use of one of these alternatives following a train or tram journey to the city. However, the great majority of visitors (83%) arrived by private car and made use of parking areas in the streets surrounding the zoo. Since the available time at these parking spaces was constrained by meters, the length of time spent visiting the zoo was significantly restricted. Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicates that 81% of employed people in Adelaide travel to work by car (ABS, 2002:34). This significantly similar figure
suggested that travelling to the zoo by car was regarded as the most practical and functional mode of transport and was accepted as part of the overall experience.

Situated on the northern foreshores of Sydney harbour, Taronga Zoo is approximately five kilometres from the CBD. To arrive at Taronga Zoo, the majority of visitors either travelled in their own car (48%) or took the 12-minute ferry ride from the city (50%). The majority of those who travelled by ferry (Plate 4.7) also used a variety of public transport methods to arrive at the ferry departure point. At Taronga, this mode of transport was related to the geographic distribution of the visitors, with people from the northern suburbs travelling by car (due to a lack of public transport) whereas those who travelled from the southern suburbs utilised train and ferry combinations. The percentage of visitors using private cars increased at weekends, which was presumably linked with the ease of family groups travelling together and the fewer public transport services available for travelling at weekends. The percentage of visitors using the ferry was greater on weekdays; this was linked to the number of international tourists who combined the opportunity to view various harbour features such as the Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House with their day at the zoo. Taronga is situated at the terminus of the bus route. In comparison, a number of bus routes stop at the gates of Adelaide Zoo.

Visiting groups choose a number of different methods to travel to the zoo. It was apparent that visitors who travelled by train or bus lived near a train station or an appropriate bus route, and used this method as a matter of course. For many Sydney families, the ferry journey was regarded as an enjoyable part of the overall experience, since the children enjoyed travelling on the ferry and the family appreciated the opportunity of taking a relaxed trip across the harbour while avoiding the problems associated with traffic on major arterial roads. The majority of those travelling by car did not even consider the possibility of using public transport, so their journey followed familiar patterns and routines.

Throughout the research period, visitors did not indicate any difficulties with their mode of transport in arriving at either of the two zoos. Since they had selected the mode of travel which best suited their individual circumstances, the expectations of their arrival to the zoo were in line with reality, and consequently visitors were not discouraged by any problems relating to their travel experiences.
Plate 4.6: The ‘Popeye’ ferry returning to the city after bringing visitors to Adelaide Zoo.

Plate 4.7: A Sydney ferry approaching Taronga Zoo.
4.8 Length of time spent visiting the zoo (hours)

Respondents to the exit survey were requested to indicate approximately the total length of time long they had spent in visiting the zoo. At Adelaide Zoo the mean was 3.9 hours (S.D. = 0.47), with 88% of people staying between three and four hours. In comparison, at Taronga Zoo the mean was 4.8 hours (S.D. = 1.3), with 75% of the groups viewing for periods ranging from three to six hours (Table 4.5, Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12: Duration of visiting times in the zoos.
Figures as a percentage of respondents in each zoo.

Source: Exit Survey Question 5.
Total 850 survey responses.
(Adelaide 450 – Taronga 400)
Reference: Appendix Table 4I.
Table 4.5: Duration of visiting times in the zoos.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Time</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taronga</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time in hours.

Source: Exit Survey Question 5.
Total 850 survey responses.
(Adeelaide 450 – Taronga 400)
Reference: Appendix Table 4I.

At Adelaide Zoo 2% of visitors spent two hours or less, and only 0.4% stayed for six hours or longer; in comparison at Taronga 3% of visitors spent two hours or less and 32% stayed for six hours or more. At both zoos, visitors who spent less than two hours were either young mothers who were members and visited the zoo with their children on a regular basis, or holidaying tourists whose activities were constrained by specified time limits.

The range of time spent visiting at Adelaide was considerably less than that at Taronga, with only 6% of Adelaide visitors exceeding four hours. Although Adelaide zoo is considerably smaller than Taronga, the main factor relating to this time period was the restricted parking in the streets around the zoo, which limited car parking to four hours. At Taronga, patrons could leave their vehicles in parking areas owned by the zoo, where parking restrictions did not apply.

At Adelaide those who visited for more than six hours were either involved with academic studies of some kind or were tourists who had planned on spending their entire day at the zoo and were intent on experiencing the maximum activities available. At Taronga, those who spent more than six hours in the zoo were either infrequent visitors who indicated that the elapsed time since their previous zoo visit was greater than six years or family groups intent on enjoying a full day of viewing together. In both zoos, these infrequent visitors took the opportunity of watching the bird shows or attending various feeding sessions and keeper talks as they considered that these activities were part of their overall experience.
4.9 Appreciation of the zoo

Survey responses showed that visitors rated the level of satisfaction of their visit to both zoos highly (Figure 4.13). Although the mean rating at Taronga (4.28) was slightly higher than that at Adelaide (4.22), there was no significant difference between the two zoos. Overall, 42.8% of visitors rated Adelaide as being excellent (giving a score of 5 out of 5), and 45.8% of visitors rated Taronga as excellent. Only 2% of visitors rated either zoo as less than satisfactory. International visitors rated both zoos slightly lower than either local visitors or visitors from interstate (Appendix Table 4J), with Taronga zoo being rated at 4.2 and Adelaide at 3.94. This degree of satisfaction was reflected in responses made in the surveys, some of which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Figure 4.13: Satisfaction ratings of the zoos.

Source: Exit Survey Question 16K.
Total 850 surveys.
(Adelaide 450 – Taronga 400)
Reference: Appendix Table 4J.
4.10 Memories of earlier visits

In general, visitors considered their visit to the zoo was memorable. Visitors not only recalled the events of the day in great detail, but also remembered events and happenings from previous visits, some of which had taken place many years previously. One of the defining features of visitors aged 60 years and older was their ability to recall incidents from earlier visits, often with precise detail. It was apparent that most adults had fond childhood memories of the zoo, particularly those who have lived in the city for their entire lives, where the zoo represented their only chance to see wild animals at close range.

At Adelaide, a number of visitors recalled significant experiences of previous zoo visits. These related to a range of memorable features, including George the orang-utan (who died in 1976), the elephant rides (which ceased in 1983) or the arrival of the sun bears Akbar and Dewi (in November 1994). A similar characteristic was noted at Taronga, where older people recalled the elephant rides (the last of which was given in 1976) (Plate 4.8), the miniature ‘harbour bridge’ (Plate 4.9), viewing in the catacombs of the old aquarium (which was closed in 1991), the old barred enclosures (Plate 4.10) or the magnificence of Chester the white tiger (who arrived in 1992) (Plate 4.11). Invariably, these recollections were accurate and included precise detail, indicating that the active process of memory is an important part of learning, as past experiences were connecting with the more recent visit. Whereas some memories were specific, such as seeing a particular animal for the first time, other memories recalled general experiences such as the sounds of children’s laughter.

Considering that the visitor, on average, spent so little time at each exhibit, it was surprising how much learning and understanding actually took place. One of the marvels of the zoos was that the brief encounters visitors had with the various exhibits appeared to assist in their learning and understanding, particularly since these encounters resulted in leaving visitors with a memory that was so often imbued with pleasure. Parents often expressed the desire that their children should appreciate the zoo in a similar manner to that which they themselves had experienced in their earlier years.

Memory ensures meaning and reinforces the characteristics of the zoo repeatedly, despite the fact that remembering never occurs in exactly the same way (Crane, 2006:103). It became apparent that each time people visited the zoo, the knowledge gained from their current experience was added to memories of their previous visits. Chris Westbury and Daniel
Dennett (2001) noted that every event has effects, and the chain of all effects continues essentially forever, but only certain events leave long-lasting memories. They indicated that each memory recalled was discrete in itself, and although connected with the past, was not an exact replication. It became apparent from the survey responses that adults who had visited the zoo frequently when younger perceived the educational value of the zoo more highly than those who were infrequent visitors.

The memory of a person’s first visit to a zoo is unique. After a number of visits, people form the general perception of what constitutes a zoo. This general knowledge, ‘schema’ (Bartlett, 1932), or ‘script’ (Schank, 1982), helps decide the behaviour considered appropriate for viewing in the zoo, in the same way that scripts develop for visiting a doctor or going to a restaurant (Stevenson, 1991). However, schema theory does not adequately explain why some events were remembered with precise detail. Falk and Lynn Dierking (1997) reported on the long-lasting memories retained by people who visited the zoo during their early years at school.

From their inception, zoos have been more than a place to display living natural creatures: they have manufactured an image of nature. They reflect a paradoxical character. They have been accused of displaying wild creatures while denying the same animals the connection about which they purport to educate. In collecting animals, zoos provide the shape and presence of an artificial environment which allows visitors a glimpse into the world of nature. Zoos offer a unique vantage point for their visitors. Like museums, zoos make available aesthetic pleasures which allow their visitors to recall memories and build up an inspiration for the natural world. Since the mission statements of most zoos include an aim to display and conserve endangered animals, it could further be inferred that an important purpose of the zoo should also be to keep alive memories of these animals in the minds of people.
Plate 4.8: Elephant rides were always popular at Taronga. Until they were discontinued in 1976, these rides had a most positive impact upon thousands of children and created pleasurable memories, which were often recalled in great detail. This image was taken in the early 1950s.

(Image GPO collection 1-50550 permission State Library New South Wales)

Plate 4.9: The miniature ‘harbour bridge’, an attraction for children at Taronga Zoo, removed in 1976, but often remembered as a special feature by older visitors in 2006. This image was taken in 1965.
Plate 4.10: The old barred enclosures, once common throughout the zoo, were often recalled by older visitors. This photograph of King Kong, the gorilla, was taken in 1959.

(Photograph A1200:L33883 National Archives of Australia)

Plate 4.11: Chester, the white tiger, who arrived at Taronga in 1992 from Nebraska Zoo, was extremely popular with visitors of all ages. With a weight ranging between 180 and 200 kilograms, his ice blue eyes, pink nose, beautiful black and white coat, enormous feet and graceful tail always attracted attention. Chester eventually died at the age of 18. This photograph was taken in 1999.
4.11 Reasons for visiting

The data collected from the survey responses indicated that a number of important elements influenced adult’s choice of a visit to the zoo as an activity to pass their leisure time and stimulate their interest. These motivational factors included:

- Feeling comfortable and relaxed in pleasant surroundings
- Visiting with family or friends, or social interaction
- Seeing specific animals, particularly those which are endangered
- Participating actively in an enjoyable activity
- Achieving something regarded as beneficial or worthwhile
- Responding to the potential to learn
- Appreciating new challenges and experiences

Respondents were asked to indicate in the surveys their main reasons for visiting the zoo. The data collected revealed that a variety of factors motivated the zoo visit, with each respondent indicating an average of 2.3 motivational reasons for coming to the zoo (Table 4.6). The percentages of visitors giving a particular response are depicted graphically in Figure 4.14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Visitor Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>2705</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taronga</td>
<td>2854</td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>5559</td>
<td>2383</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Question 4.
Total 2,383 survey responses.
(Adelaide 1,300 – Taronga 1,083)
Reference: Appendix Table 4K.
In the process of this research it became apparent that during a visit, visitors were faced with many alternatives that influenced their viewing behaviour. Competition existed between exhibit features, exhibit signs, neighbouring exhibits, and active versus inactive animals; features which were also identified by Bitgood et al. (1988). Bitgood and Donald Patterson (1987) noted that it had long been recognised that live animals attracted attention and put people in an appropriate mood for learning and understanding. Rita McManamon and Elizabeth Stevens (1995) showed that visitor impressions were clearly influenced by the way in which animals were exhibited. However, as Coe (1985) mentioned, zoos are faced with the challenge of displaying wild animals and providing a functional exhibit which is at the same time beneficial for the animal.

A high proportion of visitors gave a ‘people-related’ response as their reason for visiting the zoo, particularly since they came with children, members of their family, or with
friends. Of the total number of visitors surveyed, 91% involved people coming either with members of their own family or with other friends, suggesting that visiting was regarded as an opportunity for social exchange and involvement. These results were similar to the figure of 93% reported by Milan and Wourms (1992:130), who indicated that zoos have always been the focus of family outings.

Survey responses indicated that visitors considered that going to the zoo was a social event to be enjoyed with family and friends. The main stimulus for visiting the zoo centred around recreation and family entertainment, with more than 80% of those surveyed indicating they had chosen to visit because they were able to have a relaxing day of pleasure, fun and excitement in a place that could be visited with both family and friends. Responses indicated that people visited the zoo with a desire to enjoy the experience rather than achieve a specific aim. As a consequence being able to have a pleasant, relaxed time with the family was often of greater importance to visitors than the actual exhibits. Similar results have been observed both in the museum sector by Hood (1983) and in Edinburgh Zoo by Reade and Waran (1996a). Motivations for visiting were first explored by Margaret Chambers (1982), who indicated that most people visited the zoo for recreational reasons, and McManus, (1988, 1991) confirmed that the social aspect of visitation was very influential on the communication of ideas that could be experienced by viewing different exhibits. After conducting a survey at the Science Museum in London, Patrick Heady (1984) reported that only 20% of visitors were prompted to visit the museum for recreational purposes, and visiting with children motivated a further 20%. He also reported that 8% indicated that they were ‘museuming’, in that they were making a number of museum visits during the day. The findings from the present research were broadly in line with surveys which had been conducted in museums by Michael Alt (1980) and McManus (1991), who concluded that visitor interest was general and not focused in an academic style.

One of the major motivations for groups visiting the zoo was child-related. The expectations of visitors to the zoo were also predominantly child-centred, and it was noticeable that children consistently controlled the pattern and pace of the visit. Both Rosenfeld (1980) and Serrell (1988), who described the way in which the family visit to the zoo was linked to the presence of children, have previously reported this factor. On weekdays in non-holiday periods, the majority of visiting categories (63%) included children who were mostly of pre-kindergarten age. At weekends and holiday periods, when children of school age formed part of the family group, as expected the mean age of the children was higher.
Comments made by respondents to the surveys suggested that parents possibly recognised the zoo as an important arena providing the opportunity for broadening the young child’s mind with interesting experiences, while at the same time the zoo visit was seen as being ‘a sharing of quality time with the family’ (T209). Although the main reason for the popularity of the zoo was recreational, it did provide a focus for informal learning outside the home. The greater proportion of the zoo audience comprised family groups, and since children formed an integral part of these groups, their presence was possibly the most important reason for attending. At the Toledo Museum of Art, Hood (1981) observed that adults were more likely to choose leisure activities that were valued highly by the people most important to them.

Survey responses established that the expectations of visitors at both zoos are predominantly child-centred. Rosenfeld (1982), who observed that children consistently controlled the pattern and pace of the visit, also noted this factor. Both Whittall (1992) and Joy Mench and Michael Kreger (1996) wrote that ever since zoos first opened to the public they have been visited as a focus of family trips. Several survey responses indicated that it was important ‘for children to learn about animals’. In some surveys, grandparents who had brought grandchildren to the zoo indicates that they hoped the child would develop an appreciation of the zoo in the same way as they had done. Damon Holzer and David Scott (1997) noted that people who visited zoos as children were more likely to seek educational benefits when they visited zoos as adults, although they were unaware of any studies that examined the linkages between childhood zoo visitation with parents and adult zoo visitation.

Overall, 23% of respondents gave one of the main reasons for visiting the zoo as the desire to see specific animals (Figure 4.15). This response was higher at Taronga (31%) than at Adelaide (17%), and was linked to the greater number of international visitors specifically wishing to see Australian native animals. This response was higher than the figure (17%) obtained by Milan and Wourms (1992:130) at the New York Zoological Park, although their conclusion was obtained from surveys that requested only one response, which could possibly account for the lower figure. This response may have reflected a visitor attitude that observing animals in a zoo was anticipated and was only to be expected, so that this factor was not even considered worth mentioning.
At Adelaide, the most popular animals visitors specifically wished to see were the big cats (lions and tigers); at Taronga the most popular were large animals (elephants and giraffes). Constructed in 2002, the new lion enclosure at Adelaide provided excellent viewing, and the new South East Asian Rainforest exhibit which replaced the old cat cages (constructed in 1925) provided improved and clear viewing of tigers in natural surroundings. Similarly, at Taronga, the new elephant enclosure opened in 2007 provided outstanding viewing for visitors from a number of vantage points. Survey responses indicated that visitors to both zoos preferred larger animals, although smaller animals such as the meerkats and the otters were often regarded as being ‘cute’. In both zoos, visitors indicated a marked preference for looking at elephants. Because of the limitations of available space, a decision has been made no longer to display an elephant in Adelaide. At Taronga, because of legal appeals, occupation of the newly developed elephant enclosure was delayed during much of the research period. Ward et al. (1998) found that exhibits of larger animals were more popular than those of smaller animals. They also found that visitors to Zurich Zoo expressed marked preference for larger animals over smaller ones. However, they also pointed out that data should be collected separately for children and adults, since children showed a preference for larger mammals.
Although the location of the zoo was considered an important factor in visiting, a marked difference was noticeable between the two zoos, with the number of respondents who indicated this location factor as a motivation for visiting Taronga being twice that for Adelaide. This higher proportion was linked with the greater number of international tourists visiting Taronga. The location of Adelaide zoo was seen as an important factor in motivating visiting. This was particularly apparent with those who saw the zoo as a convenient location to bring friends or relations visiting from interstate or from overseas, or for those who were engaged with some other leisure activity nearby. No respondents at either zoo indicated that they were attempting to make a visit to another zoo or wildlife reserve on the same day. Because of its location, practicalities almost certainly excluded this possibility at Taronga. In Adelaide, however, a number of responses indicated a planned second leisure interest after the zoo visit, either to a cultural activity in the city or to a sporting event at the nearby Adelaide Oval.

Survey responses indicated that each visitor made a choice to visit the zoo from a wide array of competing forms of leisure activities. Most family visits were made for pleasure or to have an enjoyable and relaxing day with the family. A small proportion of visitors came because of the reputation of the particular zoo, or because it was highly recommended. In all cases these were tourists visiting from interstate or overseas, which accounted for the higher figure obtained in Sydney.

A number of people expressed emotional reasons as their motivation for visiting the zoo. People indicated that they enjoyed looking at the meerkats and often commented that they were ‘cute’ or ‘fun’, and because of their constant activity were enjoyable to watch. The presence of newly-born animals always created considerable emotional attention in both zoos. At Adelaide, in 2006, the arrival of two young female gorillas on loan from Taronga Zoo created considerable attention, not only because this was the first occasion in the history of Adelaide Zoo that gorillas had been on display, but also as the result of considerable media exposure generated by The Advertiser and Channel Seven. Primates such as the siamangs, (Plate 4.12), baboons, and to a lesser degree the chimpanzees, were visited because of anticipated activity and the perceived antics of the animals. At these enclosures the responses were both moving and poignant as comments were made by visitors which regularly referred to what were seen as the ‘human-like characteristics’ and behavioural patterns ‘just like us’. Families with young children often expressed a desire to see specific animals which had been popularised in documentaries such as The March of the Penguins (2006) or which were
favourite animations. These included Aslan the lion from *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, Timon the meerkat from *The Lion King* (1994) and the lemurs from *Madagascar* (2005).

![Plate 4.12: A young siamang playing in its enclosure at Adelaide Zoo.](image)

*My children really enjoyed watching the siamangs at play. It was so interesting and they did not get bored, so we spent a lot of time there (AS11).*

Although the educational function of several zoos has increased over recent years (Wineman et al., 1996), this research found that few people come to the zoo with an educational purpose in mind and only 13% identified education as a primary function of the zoo. However, many parents brought their children on the assumption that the trip would be educational and consequently did not consider this factor worth mentioning specifically. Most survey responses suggested that people visited the zoo with more of a desire to enjoy a pleasant experience than to achieve a specific set of goals. This approach provided interesting contrasts in terms of educating visitors. The task of educating visitors was on one hand made easier, in that groups of people were more open to potentially interesting experiences. On the other hand it was made harder, in that visitors were not necessarily motivated to actually learn, in some cases stating, ‘We did not come to the zoo to learn’ (T174).
Hood (1991) noted that although it had often been a common perception that people visited museums primarily for learning, most people visited a museum to share their leisure time and to enjoy themselves. J. Mark Morgan and Marlana Hodgkinson (1999) found that adult visitors to the zoo attended for the purpose of recreation, education for themselves (or the members of their group), and to develop some form of understanding of the world of nature.

Few people visited the zoo with an explicit aim to improve their education; instead they came to be entertained. This entertainment was as simple as watching elephants playing together in their ponds, or the sun bear dismantling a log stuffed with honey and food rewards, or the otters methodically breaking their ice blocks into pieces to extract fish. Visitors came to the zoo to have a good time with the family, to enjoy themselves and relax, with little thought, if any, given to the opportunity of viewing endangered animals or contemplating their conservation, let alone the thought of improving their own levels of education, developing their knowledge or becoming somewhat wiser. Survey results clearly indicated that in terms of motivation for their visit, educational expectations did not feature highly. Only one response (from a total of 4647) indicated that the motivation for coming was linked to conservation: ‘We came to support the conservation efforts of the zoo’ (A211).

In summary, visitors came to the zoo in the anticipation of having a pleasurable, relaxing and enjoyable day. These visitors seemed to accept that as this pleasant, social quality provided the opportunity for discovering something new, along with the development of some form of understanding, the level of enjoyment relating to their visit could only be enhanced. Overall, the zoo visit was not accidental or unplanned; each visitor made a choice from an array of competing forms of leisure activity. In Adelaide, one respondent reported having visited the zoo to ‘fill in time whilst waiting for further medical tests’ at the nearby hospital (AS38); at Taronga, only one response from 2243 surveys indicated that the visit was totally unplanned: ‘I intended going to Manly, but caught the Taronga ferry by mistake, so I thought I would have a look at the zoo’ (TG23).
4.12 Frequency of zoo visitation

The mean length of time between visits was 4.2 years. Some people visited the zoo on a regular basis (some every fortnight); others visited very infrequently (more than a decade between visits). Since recurrence of visitation assists the zoo in being sustainable, it seems important that an understanding of the frequency of visits be developed. Following her research in museums, Hood (1983:52) concluded:

There are three distinctly different audience segments … based on their leisure values, interests and expectations: frequent participants, occasional participants and non-participants.

Earlier research (Frede, 2003) showed that some people visited the zoo frequently and others infrequently, although the specific boundary delineating these two classes was not determined. To establish the frequency of visitation, visitors were asked to indicate in their survey responses when they had last visited the particular zoo and when they had last visited another zoo. Since the surveys for this research were distributed only to those visitors who were already in the zoo, no attempt was made to consider people who never visited zoos (exploring the thoughts of non-participants would require further detailed study at some other institution). It was difficult to assess the frequency of visits to individual zoos accurately, since many international and interstate visitors were visiting the zoo for the first time. Although a number of visitors indicated that they had not previously visited the particular zoo, only 2% of visitors indicated that this was their initial visit to any zoo. Survey results indicated that approximately one third (35%) were visiting Taronga for the first time, a sector composed almost entirely of tourists and visitors from interstate or from other countries. In comparison, 13% of visitors had never previously visited Adelaide Zoo. Among the respondents who indicated they had never previously visited Taronga, 60% came from overseas and 28% from interstate. At Adelaide, 25% of equivalent visitors were from overseas and 60% from interstate.

The distribution of the frequency of visitation to a zoo reflected two peaks (Figure 4.16). That there appeared to be one reasonably homogeneous population which visited a zoo at least once every two years and one where the length of time since the previous visit was greater than two years.
Figure 4.16: Frequency of visiting a zoo.

*Time elapsed since last visit to any zoo.*

Source: Survey Question 2.
Total 2,383 survey responses.
(Adelaide 1,300 – Taronga 1,083)
Reference: Appendix Table 4M.

For the purposes of this research the frequency of visiting was determined as being the time since the last visit to any zoo. Frequent visitors were those who had visited a zoo at some time during the previous two years; infrequent visitors were those who had not visited a zoo for more than two years. From this research, approximately two-thirds (63%) of the zoo visitors were classed as ‘frequent’ visitors and one-third (37%) as ‘infrequent’ (Figure 4.17).
The responses to surveys revealed that frequent and infrequent visitors reflected a number of differences in their perceptions of the zoos. Three of these differences were explored to determine comparisons between the two sets of visitors; namely the length of time spent in the zoo, the motivations for visiting and the frequency of visiting.
4.12.1 Length of time spent in the zoo

Infrequent visitors stayed in the zoo for longer periods than did frequent visitors (Figure 4.18). Survey comments suggested that one of the reasons for this additional time was an attempt to see the entire zoo on their one day of visiting. The shorter times for frequent visitors were linked with zoo membership; many were young mothers who brought their children to the zoo on a regular basis, with the intention of staying for only a short period of time. For non-members the cost of entry, particularly at Taronga, is not so low that people are able to come frequently, especially when the additional costs involving travel and parking are added. Zoo membership assists in overcoming this financial barrier.

Figure 4.18: Time spent in the zoo compared with frequency of visitation.

Source: Exit Survey Question 5.
850 survey responses.
(Adelaide 450 – Taronga 400)
Reference: Appendix Table 4O.
4.12.2 Motivations for visiting

Previously (Section 4.10) it was shown that although most people initially visited the zoo as a recreational activity, a number of other factors also influenced their motivations for visiting. Survey responses showed that frequent visitors recorded more reasons prompting their visit to the zoo than did infrequent visitors. Infrequent visitors usually provided just one reason for their visit, that being recreational (Figure 4.19).

![Figure 4.19: Number of reasons for visiting zoos compared with frequency of visitation.](source)

Source: Survey Question 2.
2,383 survey responses.
(Adelaide 1,300 – Taronga 1,083)
Reference: Appendix Table 4P.
4.12.3 Ranking of the zoo

This research found that frequent visitors to the zoo ranked the zoo more highly than did infrequent visitors (Figure 4.20).

![Figure 4.20: Mean ranking of the zoos in terms of frequency of visitation.](image)

Survey responses indicated that only 2% of visitors ranked the zoo as less than satisfactory (Figure 4.13). The majority of these (88%) were infrequent visitors to the zoo, and due to their lack of knowledge of the zoo many of their comments were inaccurate or reflected incorrect understanding. Although the survey questions did not specifically request complaints relating to the zoo, some respondents took the opportunity of expressing such complaints — although in both zoos the majority of these complaints related to the services and/or prices at food outlets.

In comparison, frequent visitors showed a high level of appreciation of the zoo. Many responses made use of the personal pronoun, referring to ‘our zoo’ or commenting ‘I like my
Frequent visitors considered that the main function of the zoo was to breed valuable species in an effort to preserve those that are endangered in the wild. Whilst accepting that the zoo has an important educational role, frequent visitors did not regard the zoo highly in terms of the interpretation and communication of educational messages to the general public. Frequent visitors saw the zoo as modern and dynamic and valued it strongly.

Responses of infrequent visitors tended to remain impersonal, referring to ‘your zoo’ or ‘this zoo’. Although infrequent visitors rated the zoo at a lower level than did frequent visitors, these infrequent visitors still valued the zoo highly with a mean score of 3.8 out of 5 reflecting their level of appreciation. Infrequent visitors were sometimes pleasantly surprised by their experience in the zoo, particularly if they had initially arrived with low expectations. Hood (1983:52) reported that that occasional visitors to museums seemed closely to resemble non-participants in their leisure values. Infrequent visitors often regarded the zoo as being outmoded.

This research identified the features shown in Table 4.7 as characterising some of differences between frequent and infrequent visitors.

**Table 4.7: Features of frequent and infrequent visitors to the zoos.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequent Visitors</th>
<th>Infrequent Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On average, visit the zoo at least once every two years</td>
<td>On average, last visited the zoo more than two years previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit for shorter periods</td>
<td>Visit for longer periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate visits</td>
<td>Join visits organised by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a number of motivational reasons for visiting</td>
<td>Usually provide only one reason for visiting the zoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know zoo well from recent visits</td>
<td>Knowledge sometimes years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank the zoo highly</td>
<td>Value the zoo as important for others (particularly children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regard the zoo as dynamic and modern</td>
<td>Consider the zoo outmoded and old-fashioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider the zoo a leader in research and conservation</td>
<td>Consider the zoo a place for relaxation and amusement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider zoo exhibits as natural</td>
<td>Consider zoo exhibits as unnatural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank individual exhibits highly</td>
<td>Rank individual exhibits lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceive inactive animals as resting and behaving naturally</td>
<td>Perceive inactive animals as being ‘bored’ or ‘unhappy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoos are part of their self-perception</td>
<td>Go simply as a ‘zoo visitor’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.13 Summary

Although both the zoos studied were open to the public every day of the year, their respective audiences were extremely diverse and variable. Both zoos attracted a wide range of individuals who characteristically differed widely in their aspects, motivations, interests and expectations. As visitors wandered around the zoo grounds, they followed their own agenda as they searched for something that attracted their attention and subsequently interested them. Zoo visitors were predominantly local residents, but they also included some who had travelled from country areas, and tourists from interstate or overseas. Visitors included those who planned their visit well in advance and those who came simply out of interest as the result of an impulsive, spontaneous decision. Visitors included people who visited on a regular basis every few weeks, mingling with those who had not visited any zoo for more than two decades, or in some cases, never before.

The demographic profile of visitors in Adelaide and Taronga Zoos reflected a number of similarities. In both zoos, the female: male ratio was almost 1:1, with slightly more females visiting (56%) than males. The mean age of these visitors was 24.8 years, with 67% of the sample population aged between 10 and 40 years. Teenagers were the least represented class. In general, these audiences comprised small groups averaging 3.6 people at Adelaide and 3.2 at Taronga, the slightly lower figure reflecting the higher proportion of couples visiting in Sydney. These figures were similar to those obtained by Phillpot (1996:195), who reported that 54% of visitors to the Jersey Wildlife Reptile Centre were female and 70% were aged between 20 and 69 years. One main difference was that Phillpot found that couples were the prevalent group, whereas the main visiting category at both Adelaide and Taronga was family groups with young children (mostly under the age of ten). These family groups tended to follow purposeful, personal agendas during their visit. Responses gathered during this research indicated that these family groups visited zoos mainly for entertainment reasons, with little thought given to education and learning. Although initially they may have followed a purposeful agenda, their visit subsequently appeared to be more geographically influenced as they moved from the point of entry to an exit. Little attention was paid to the various components of exhibits, and unless an animal interacted with something in the enclosure, the animals on display remained the centre of most attention. Visitors to Taronga spent an average of 4.2 hours in the zoo; visitors to Adelaide spent less time, with the majority spending just under four hours, a time that corresponded with the limit in nearby parking areas.
People choose to visit the zoos because they were regarded as places that could easily be visited with family and friends. Most responses indicated that people arrived with a desire to enjoy their experience rather than to achieve a specific aim, but because the visit subsequently provided a relaxing time of fun and enjoyment, distinct possibilities for learning existed. In terms of motivation, visitors did not consider educational factors highly; only one respondent reported being motivated by an interest in conservation. It should not be inferred, however, that visitors did not learn anything, nor that they did not appreciate the conservational approach of the zoo. These results simply emphasised that visitors came to the zoo with the intention of having a good time with the family, relaxing and enjoying themselves. Little consideration, if any, was given to notions of improving their education, or developing a better understanding, let alone the opportunity of viewing endangered animals or contemplating their conservation, despite the fact that visitors seemed subconsciously aware of these beneficial advantages. In the reporting of motivations and attitudes, survey responses of visitors to both zoos were broadly similar. It was noted that although some definite similarities existed between the two zoos, some marked differences were also apparent. Consequently, the findings from any one zoo may not necessarily apply to other zoos generally. It may be possible to conclude that a particular survey was indicative of a general trend, but any such conclusions need to be viewed with caution, particularly where local conditions may have influenced responses.

It was evident from the responses that people who visited zoos infrequently were highly likely to be unaware of ongoing programmes, particularly the use of environmental enrichment devices for optimising animal care. Survey responses indicated that infrequent visitors who had not seen recent advances in the zoo layout were unaware of current programmes and operations. A similar lack of awareness was observed at Taronga in 2001, when, following its opening in December 2000, 78% of visitors were unaware of The Creatures of the Wollemi exhibit (Frede, 2001). At Adelaide a number of infrequent visitors were unaware that elephants had not been kept in Adelaide Zoo since Samorn had been sent to Monarto in 1991, displaying this lack of knowledge of zoo policy by asking questions such as ‘Where are the elephants?’ or ‘What happened to the elephant?’ Reade and Waran (1996a) observed similar behavioural patterns in their research at Edinburgh Zoo.

Whereas regular visitors often deliberately sought out zoos, for the infrequent visitor, time spent in the zoo was often opportunistic, spontaneous or an afterthought. These visits by infrequent visitors were often motivated by external factors such as the invitation of a friend
or the interests of children or grandchildren. Although the high number of frequent visitors might suggest that a zoo was well known within the community, it could not be inferred that the zoo was necessarily known for any of its research or conservation activities.

Zoos were seen as unique in that they provided their visitors numerous different social benefits and advantages. Adults visited the zoo because they were offered some form of experience – either something new which they had not seen previously, or something pre-existing that recalled a pleasurable experience from the past. To overseas travellers, the zoo provided the opportunity of seeing rare Australian native animals (Plate 4.13). To families, the children’s section offered a hands on experience with a variety of animals (Plate 4.14, 4.15). To people who lived locally the zoo offered a relaxing time of enjoyment which was often thought of as being inspirational, while at the same time it was accepted as providing educational benefits. The zoo was also regarded as a source of pride for many locals who took the opportunity to bring friends and relatives from distant places. This research also showed that although the main motivation for visiting the zoo was one of leisure and entertainment, visitors were well aware of the various additional benefits that could be gained by visiting the zoo.

A primary purpose of modern zoos is to educate the public about the animals on exhibit and to encourage the conservation of natural habitat (Markham, 1990). It has been suggested that once in the zoo environment, learning is unavoidable (Wolf & Tymitz, 1981). Although this learning can develop through a number of different behaviours, mostly it occurs through observation. The activities of live animals attract attention (Frede, 2003) which contributes to increasing the length of time people spend watching the animals on display and puts people in the appropriate mood to learn (Bitgood et al., 1986, 1988; Wolf & Tymitz, 1981). In broadening the appreciation that people have for their environment, zoos are better able to express their conservation message. Visitors are likely to leave not only with an increased affinity for their natural heritage, but also with greater insight into conservation and animal welfare issues. It is an unrealistic goal for zoos to attempt to replicate perfectly nature in a captive setting; instead, some attempt should be made to provide their animals with as many biologically and ecologically relevant stimuli as possible (McManamon & Stevens, 1995). Although zoos were not initially visited for their educational value, as visitors observed animal activity there seemed to be a sense of discovery, of learning new topics and extending their knowledge of various animals.
Who are zoos for? Initially, this might appear to be an unnecessary question, since there is a tendency to assume that zoos are for everybody. However, if zoos, as public institutions, aim to attract as wide an audience as possible, then the question arises, do they succeed? Although studies may be carried out to quantify answers to both these questions, interpreting the data can be fraught with problems, particularly since the incorrect use of statistics may be used to support or denigrate almost any argument. The significance of zoos in Australia is demonstrated by the fact that so many people visit them each year. Throughout this research, it was apparent that the inherent nature of the zoo directly affected the level of visitor experiences and that across the different categories of visitors, the value attributed to the experience varied. These values were dependent upon the individuals’ perception of the particular zoo. This chapter has developed an understanding of the people who visited the zoo, but the results gave little indication of their activities or their appreciation of what they saw. This is examined in the following chapter.

Plate 4.13: The Tasmanian devil enclosure at Adelaide Zoo, a popular exhibit with international visitors.
Plate 4.14: The children’s section at Adelaide Zoo, an area popular with families with young children.

Plate 4.15: Backyard to Bush – the children’s section at Taronga Zoo.