

# Confronting back-of-house traditions and moving ahead for good animal wellbeing 24/7 across lifespan

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## Back-of-house habitat design traditions

Traditional zoo, sanctuary, and research facility designs often incorporate “back-of-house” (BOH) management areas, such as quarantine areas, night dens, and other similar areas into the habitat design for a wide variety of taxa.

While some animals have free access across a 24-hour period to all areas of the habitat, many spend the hours of the day when the facility is closed locked inside BOH areas for safety, legislation, or other reasons. With the amount of time caregivers are off-site, this can mean spending as much as two-thirds of the animal's time inside these areas.

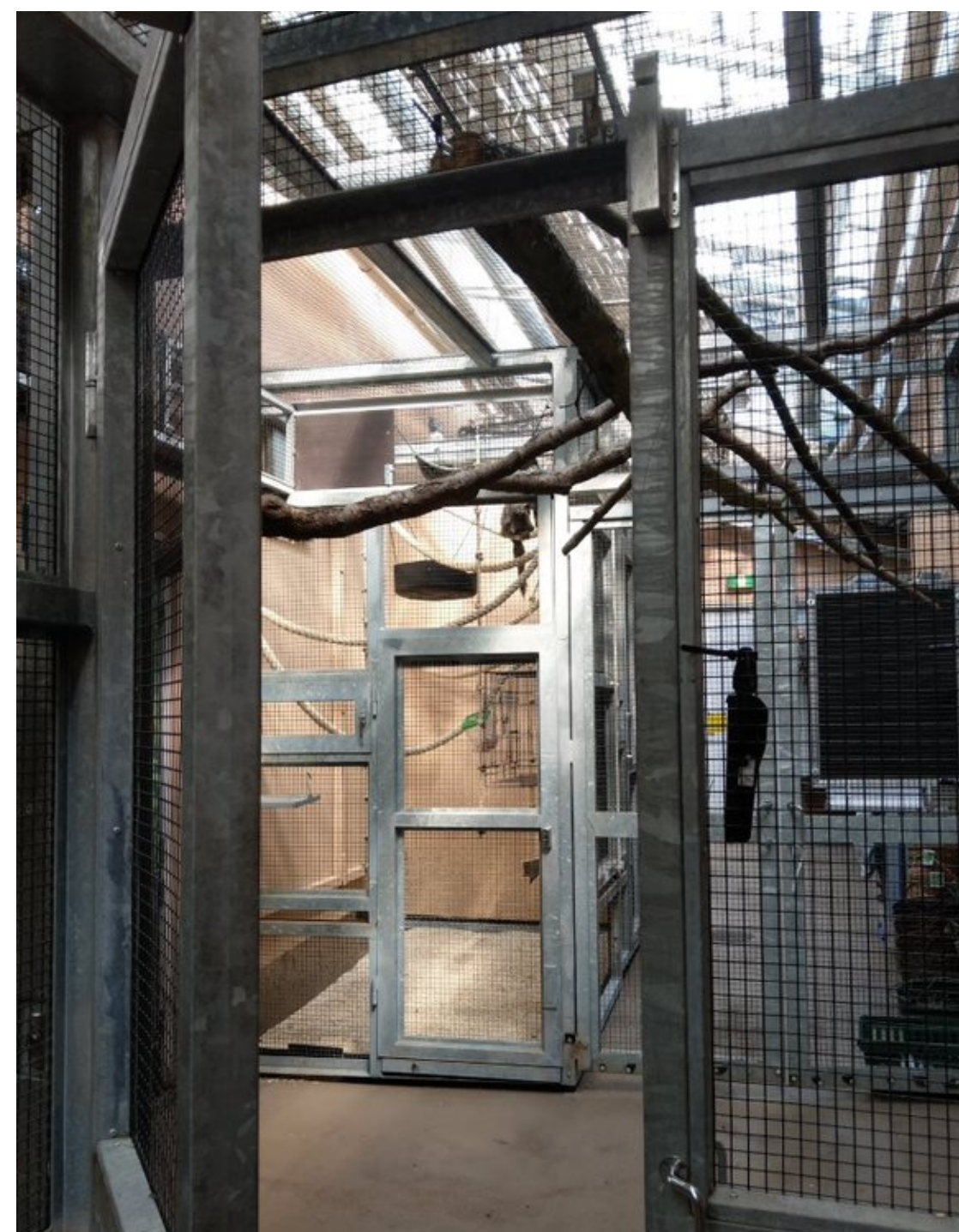
In many facilities, the quality of life provisions for animals in back-of-house areas are lacking, with traditional design that has historically focused on ease of access, cleaning, and reprovisioning for human caregivers rather than on animal welfare. Policy and practice surrounding these back-of-house and off-show areas are often lagging behind the progress seen for on-show areas of animal habitats.

### References

- Brando, S., and Coe, J. (2022). Confronting Back-of-House Traditions: Primates as a Case Study. *Journal of Zoological and Botanical Gardens*, 3(3), 366-397
- Brando, S., and Buchanan-Smith, H. (2018). The 24/7 approach to promoting optimal welfare for captive wild animals, *Behavioural Processes*, 156, 83-95.



**Figure 1** Chimpanzee back-of-house at Dehiwala Zoo, Sri Lanka, with an accessible area to see the stars. Shared by the zoo staff.



**Figure 2** Back-of-house corridors can be opened up to allow access at night. Photo Helsinki Zoo, Finland.



**Figure 3** - Back-of-house day room for great apes at Denver Zoo, Colorado, USA. Photo by Jon Coe.

## Bringing the outside to the inside

With animals spending such a significant portion of their day inside BOH areas, and considering that the needs of animals at night are not necessarily the same as their needs during the day, it is imperative that their wellbeing at these times is considered with provisions for the same level of complexity, choice, and control as is available in public-facing parts of their habitat.

To create BOH spaces that are positive from the perspective of the animal, we need to ask the right questions about what animals want to do, when they want to do it, and why these experiences and behaviours are meaningful to them.

## Looking ahead in habitat design

We can utilise various forms of technology as well as animal-friendly construction and design to support agency in animals, particularly at times when no caregivers are present, and monitor their wellbeing at night to evaluate what we are doing well and what needs to be improved.

BOH should be viewed not as separate from the habitat that visitors can see, but integrated into one habitat. Where possible, animals should have access to as much of the habitat as is safe for them across a 24-hour period, considering whether they are able to meet all of their own needs and preferences for most of the time.