

Family group tourism experiences at Auckland Zoo:
Exploring social and conservation outcomes

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Abstract

Family tourism is the fastest growing form of leisure travel in global tourism, encapsulating a significant proportion of visitors to zoological parks. The definition of a 'family group' has changed dramatically over recent decades. This diversity and shifting nature of family groups must be considered in further tourism research. Motivations for visiting a zoo can differ significantly within a family group. Children often seek fun and active experiences involving interactions with animals and displays. According to several researchers, family groups visit a zoological park mainly for fun, recreational, and memorable 'family bonding' and learning experiences. The primary roles of the zoo are offering education, conservation, research, animal welfare, and entertainment. Visitors contribute a significant amount of the costs required to achieve these roles. Therefore, careful consideration must be given by zoo management to provide an entertaining leisure experience that incorporates their strategic objectives.

This research project aims to provide insights into family group experiences at Auckland Zoo in New Zealand. The shared family group experiences are compared with the organisation's strategic objectives. Much of the existing research provides a comprehensive understanding of family group motivations and zoo experiences from an adult perspective. This research, however, focused on experiences perceived by several members within each family group, including children. Children are important stakeholders in zoo tourism, and their perspectives and status must be recognised. Their experiences from a zoo visit will likely differ significantly from the adults within their family group. Allowing children 'a voice' in research grants them empowerment and citizenship rights, as supported by the United Nations Conventions of Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This is pertinent to this research as zoo policies, operations, and services directly affect children's experiences. As part of the UNCRC, children also have a right to be provided an experience and cultural environment where they feel safe and protected. This includes the need to make research 'child-friendly' and within their capabilities, to make a meaningful contribution to research where applicable. Children were engaged in the interviews by presenting them with play doh to create their favourite animals.

This qualitative research thesis followed a subjective epistemology and interpretivism paradigm. The data in this thesis was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with seven diverse family groups at the zoo, a total of 37 participants: 18 adults and 19 children. A 'whole-family' methodological approach allowed for a multidimensional data analysis. The data was analysed using thematic analysis and mapping with six main emerging themes and 18 sub-themes. The main themes from the thematic analysis were: infrastructure, fun day out, nature connectedness, personal discovery, family connections, and affordability. The findings are encouraging and offer some interesting insights into children's perceptions of their zoo visit and the importance of their inclusion in the 'whole family' approach to tourism research.

This thesis confirms that family groups' primary motivation to visit the zoo, is for a fun, leisurely day out. Conservation and education are deemed important roles of a zoo, however, although as some participants admitted, it was not their main reason for their visit. Children's comments have provided fresh insight into family group experiences at Auckland Zoo. The younger children (under the age of 10) gave 'unfiltered' comments and opinions about their experiences, which is one of the benefits of including children in future research. Not many participants, particularly the adults, thought they had learned much from their visit. The conservation role of the zoo was well mentioned by adult and child participants. Several improvement suggestions for educational signs, displays, and more interactive interpretation were given when asking about their learning part of the zoo experience. Overall, the findings in this thesis highlight the conundrum zoo organisations face in negotiating the balance between meeting visitor expectations and providing engaging conservation education and acceptable levels of animal welfare.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

16.10.2023

Signature

Date

Co-Authored Works

Way, S., O'Donnell, D. & Schänzel, H. (2023). Family group tourism experiences at Auckland Zoo: Exploring social and conservation outcomes for children. *3rd Critical Tourism Studies – Asia Pacific Conference*, Hanoi, Vietnam, 15 February.

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Ethics Approval

Ethics Approval 22/86 was received on 22nd May, 2022.

Chapter 1 Introduction

I first became interested in this research topic while doing an assignment for a Tourism Behaviour course, as part of the requirements for completing my Graduate Diploma in International Tourism Management at AUT. The assignment focused on analysing Trip Advisor customer feedback and making recommendations to management. I also have a personal interest in animals having completed a Diploma in Vet Nursing in 2018. As part of my practical training, I was privileged to spend a few weeks with the Auckland Zoo veterinary team at The New Zealand Centre for Conservation Medicine (NZCCM). This gave me invaluable insight into one of the major roles of a zoo organisation, that being animal welfare and conservation.

While doing research for the assignment mentioned, it became evident to me that there is a lack of qualitative research looking into family group experiences, specifically the inclusion of children's feedback. There was plenty of research into visitor motivations and the role of the modern-day zoo, however, not many linked the two together. Auckland Zoo's internal data shows that 69% of visitors are visiting with other members of their family. From my own experience as a zoo visitor, I realised how little I knew about the strategic objectives of the Auckland Zoo management and the extent of their conservation contributions on a local, domestic, and international scale. I grew up in Auckland and a family visit to the zoo was one of my many happy childhood memories. When I visited as a child, Auckland Zoo, like many others, was focused on providing a fun and entertaining experience. Elephant rides, chimpanzee tea parties, a solitary polar bear held in a concrete enclosure, and visitor feeding and touching certain animals, were all popular attractions. These practices have drastically changed in the last few decades as the strategic goals and focus on animal welfare and conservation have become paramount.

1.1 Rationale for the Thesis

The purpose of this research thesis is to provide insights into family group experiences at Auckland Zoo. Much of the existing research provides comprehensive understandings of motivational factors that attract family groups to visit a zoo. However, there is a lack of research comparing visitors' experiences with the zoo management's animal welfare

goals and strategic vision. This project will aim to interpret experiences perceived by several members within each family group, including children. A total of seven families were interviewed for data collection, to address the thesis research questions. One of the primary motivations for parents or caregivers to visit a zoo with children, is for the educational and entertainment options offered in a naturalistic setting. As a result, children play an important role in decision-making with respect to visiting a zoo attraction (Ryan & Seward, 2004; Turley, 2001).

Zoological Park managers are faced with a conundrum between providing a fun and educational experience for a wide demographic of visitors, versus maintaining their core mission of animal conservation, research, and animal welfare (Esson & Moss, 2013; Mason, 2007; Therkelsen & Lottrup, 2015). In the last 40 years, the global human population has more than doubled, while the number of vertebrate species has almost halved (L. Lockhart, personal communication, August 17, 2021). This has been a strong influence on the need for modern day zoos to make conservation their main focus and goal (Zoological Society of London, n.d.). Animal welfare is an important consideration for both zoo management and visitors and increasingly poses conflicting opinions. Zoos have made significant developments and improvements in their animal welfare standards. The most important focus has been on improving enclosure design to better mimic the animals' natural habitats. This has overall positive benefits for visitors and the animals (Woods, 2002). A significant amount of research has been conducted to establish motivating factors that attract family groups to visit a zoo. However, there is a distinct lack of research on the specific perceptions of the family group's experiences, compared with the zoo management's strategic objectives. This research seeks to address this imbalance and gap in research. From the extensive literature review done as part of this project, a gap was identified in two major areas, namely: (1) the inclusion of children as active participants in zoo visitor research, and (2) the comparison of visitor experiences with the organisations mission and values.

1.2 Research Questions

Developing an effective qualitative research question is a dynamic process which guides the researcher through the entire research thesis. A research question is the philosophical starting point of any research thesis and seeks to discover the essence of

reality and the nature of truth. Refining the research question is often required as the data is collected and analysed in a reflective and reiterative process (Agee, 2009). A qualitative research question seeks to answer the 'how', 'what', and 'why' with respect to the phenomena being studied. The research question(s) should provide a concise description of the purpose and aim of a research project, guiding the data collection and analysis methods to be used (Agee, 2009). This research thesis aims to provide invaluable insights into family leisure experiences at Auckland Zoo. The inclusion of children as part of the data collection is important as they are the main stakeholders of the zoo. Family groups account for the largest proportion of zoo visitors. Their comments are useful in comparing if their visit expectations/experiences align with the strategic objectives and animal welfare goals of Auckland Zoo. This thesis will benefit me as the researcher, other academics, and Auckland Zoo management.

Therefore, the research questions to address these gaps in the existing literature are:

1. What are the main experiences of family tourism groups, including children above the age of six when visiting the Auckland Zoo?
2. What are the similarities and differences with families' zoo experiences compared with their pre-visit expectations?
3. How do the visitors' experiences align with those of the animal welfare goals and strategic vision of Auckland Zoo?

1.3 Children's Inclusion in Research

The importance of respecting children's rights in research participation is highlighted by Canosa et al. (2022), whereby reference is made to the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The authors argue the importance of recognising children's rights in research and giving them due consideration for contributing their own knowledge about their experiences. This is pertinent to this research, as zoo policies, operations, and services directly affect children. They are therefore key stakeholders to any zoo organisation. The inclusion of children as integral members of a family group is also an important aspect of the 'whole family' methodology used by the researcher in the data collection for this thesis. It recognises the important role that children have in family decisions making and therefore their right to be included in family group research (Schänzel, 2010).

As part of the UNCRC, children have a right to be provided an experience and cultural environment where they feel safe and protected. (Canosa et al., 2022) highlight the need to make research 'child-friendly' and within their capabilities make a balanced and meaningful contribution to research where applicable. Allowing children 'a voice' in research allows them their rights of empowerment and citizenship (Canosa & Graham, 2022). Wall (2022) supports this argument by acknowledging the need for a shift towards more 'age inclusive' research, in particular the recognition of children as having a voice as 'socially constructed' individuals. He describes children's role in research as being "active participants in and interpreters of their social environments in their own right" (p.264). The author uses the term 'childism' to highlight the importance of including young age as an important demographic in research studies.

1.4 Zoo and Wildlife Tourism in New Zealand (NZ)

The number of wildlife attractions and aquariums in NZ is expansive, ranging from large zoos and wildlife parks/reserves to smaller privately owned farm-based and breeding attractions. The top 10 Zoo and Aquarium attractions according to Trip Advisor (Trip Advisor, n.d.) are listed below:

1. Pukekura Park, New Plymouth
2. Auckland Zoo, Auckland
3. Willowbank Wildlife Reserve, Christchurch
4. SEA LIFE Kelly Tarlton's Aquarium, Auckland
5. Wellington Zoo, Wellington
6. Orana Wildlife Park, Christchurch
7. Hamilton Zoo, Hamilton
8. National Aquarium of NZ – Napier
9. Brooklands Zoo, New Plymouth (as noted above - incorporated within Pukekura Park)
10. Time Tripper Queenstown

All the zoo attractions currently open in NZ feature in the top 10 Zoo and Aquarium Attractions, as do the two largest aquariums. Wellington Zoo is the oldest existing zoo in NZ, created in 1906. Hamilton Zoo is home to the largest walk-through aviary in the Southern Hemisphere (New Zealand Tourist Guide, n.d.). Pukekura Park is a large

botanical garden, first established in 1872. It covers a total land area of 52 hectares (ha) equivalent to 128 acres. It incorporates a fernery, display house, and Brooklands Zoo. The zoo has no entry fee and houses a large variety of animals including exotics, farmyard animals, birds, and reptiles. Some of the popular species include meerkats, kune kune pigs, alpacas, and capuchin (New Plymouth District Council, n.d.). Willowbank Wildlife Reserve pride themselves in a wide range of endemic wildlife, farmyard animals, exotics, and encourage children to engage in immersive activities, such as hand feeding with some animals, mostly the domesticated farmyard animals. The reserve was founded by a family 40 years ago with the purpose of providing an immersive and interactive visitor experience which focuses on NZ's natural heritage (Willowbank Wildlife Reserve, n.d.). Time Tripper Queenstown is a unique animal attraction which features an animated underwater show that tells the Māori history/legend of Lake Wakatipu and the creation of the surrounding region. It also features a live underwater attraction, where visitors observe typical animals found in the lake, such as slinky eels, trout, and diving ducks (Destination Queenstown, n.d.).

1.5 Auckland Zoo

Auckland Zoo is part of 'Tātaki Auckland Unlimited', a branch of the Auckland City Council. It is a non-profit organisation which has the primary mission of providing a science-based wildlife facility, focusing primarily on wildlife conservation, learning, and social cohesion (Auckland Council, n.d.).

1.5.1 Brief history

Auckland Zoo was opened on February 7, 1922, in a then semi-rural area in Western Springs, 6.4km away from the Auckland Town Hall. Most of the original animals were transferred there, from the first ever zoo in NZ, located in Symonds St, Onehunga. This was a private zoo known as 'The Royal Oak Zoological Gardens' set up by the owner, John Boyd in 1911. It was closed in 1922 by the regional council, due to numerous community oppositions about the noise and smells emanating from the animals enclosed within the grounds (World Press, n.d.). By the end of 1927, Auckland Zoo housed approximately 250 mammals representing 80 different species, over 1000 birds (130 species), and 24 reptiles (six species).

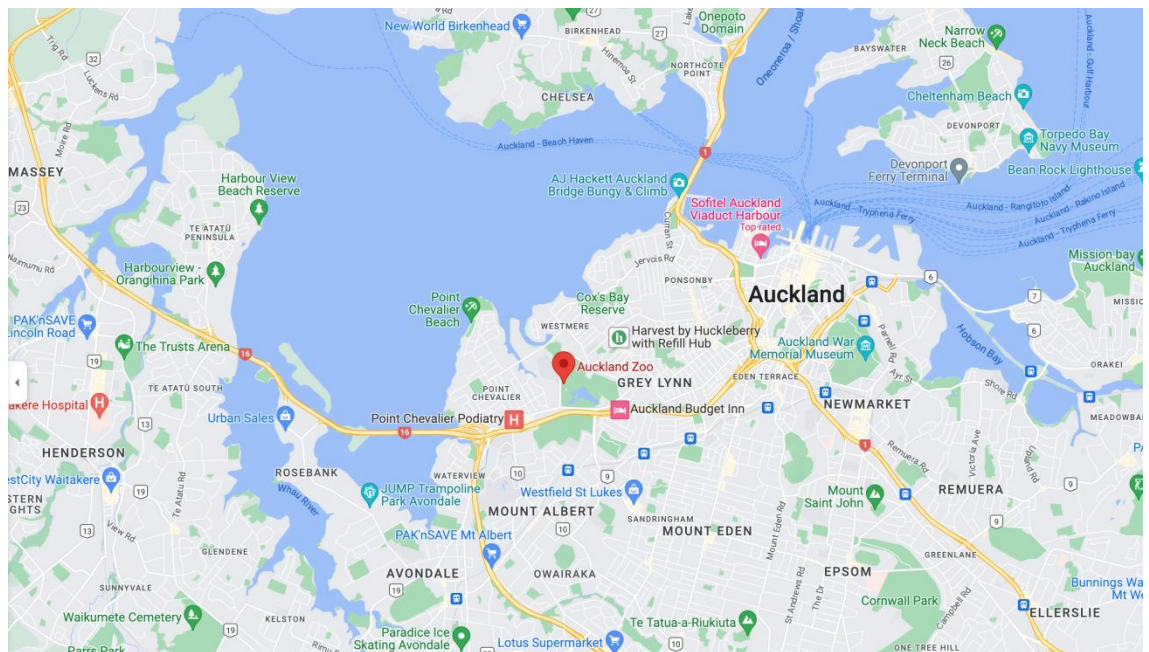
In the 1970's Auckland Zoo surpassed Wellington Zoo and became the largest zoo in NZ, expanding its land area by 20 ha. As a result, more trees/plants were landscaped around the grounds and a greater variety and number of animals were displayed. More recently, a significant development was the opening of the NZ Centre for Conservation Medicine (NZCCM) in 2006, which contained a veterinary hospital, quarantine area, and laboratory to collect, store, and conduct research (Auckland Zoo, n.d.).

1.5.2 Present day

Auckland Zoo is the largest zoo in NZ and as aforementioned, the second most popular attraction under the 'zoo and aquarium' category (Auckland Council, n.d.). It is located 6.5 km for the Auckland Central Business District (CBD) in Motions Road, Western Springs (see Figure 1 below). The zoo is set out over 40 acres of land and features over 150 native and exotic animal species (Auckland Council, n.d.).

Figure 1

Location of Auckland Zoo, West Auckland, New Zealand



Note: Adapted from Google Maps. Copyright 2020

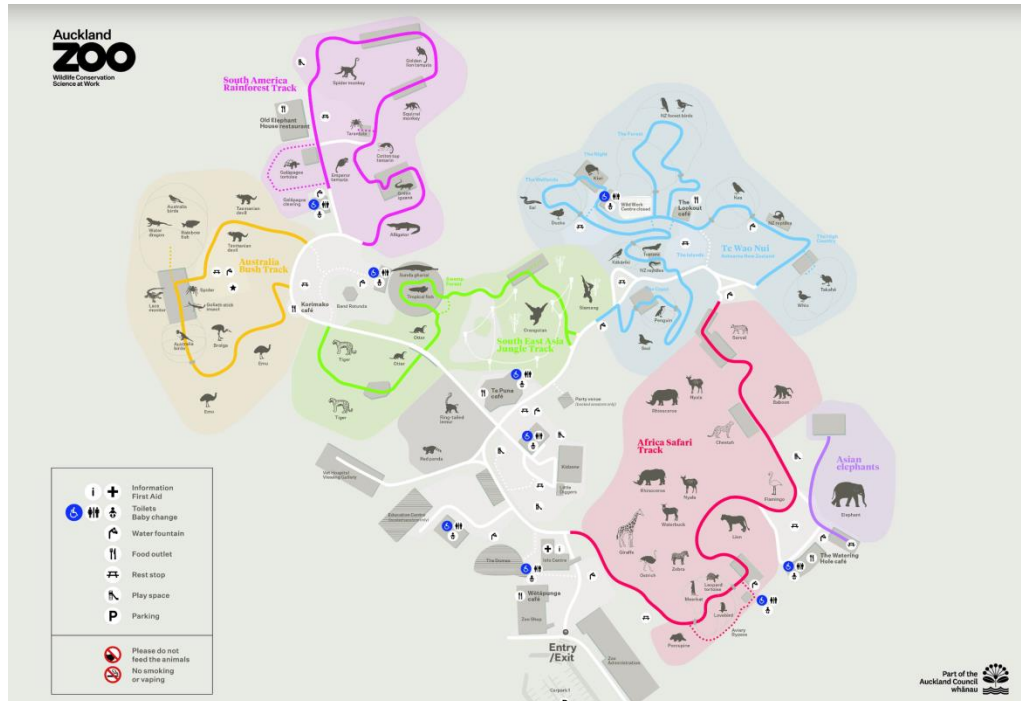
<https://www.google.com/maps/dir/-36.8738304,174.7648512/auckland+zoo+location/>

The zoo is divided into six main areas, determined by the species' geographical locations and enclosure types required for maximum animal welfare standards and visitor satisfaction. The six main areas are well highlighted on their current map available on the zoo's website (Auckland Zoo, n.d.). The map is designed for all age groups, providing

colour and pictures of animals to help children to explore and discover animals they are interested in observing (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2

Map of Auckland Zoo



Note: Adapted from *Auckland Zoo: Visit*. <https://www.aucklandzoo.co.nz/about-the-zoo>

These six main areas highlighted on the map are the:

- South American Rainforest Track
- Australia Bush Track
- Te Wao Nui
- South-East Asia Jungle Track
- Africa Safari Track
- Asian Elephant(s)

Te Wao Nui is a section dedicated to display and educate visitors on endemic animals of Aotearoa, NZ. It is further divided into ecological zones, namely:

- Coasts
- Islands
- Wetlands
- Night
- Forests

- High country

In 2021, internal data showed that Auckland Zoo captured a domestic market comprising 74% (2.58 million people) of NZ's total population. This was broken down further, to determine that 31% of their market lived in the greater Auckland region, with 39% living in the rest of the lower North Island, and the remaining 39% residing in the South Island. Furthermore, the data found that 69% of all visitors to the zoo were visiting as part of a family group (L. Lockhart, personal communication, August 17, 2021).

One of the aims of this research is to see if visitor experiences reflected the strategic objectives and animal welfare goals of Auckland Zoo. As stated on their website (Auckland Zoo, n.d.), Auckland Zoo's mission statement is:

- "To bring people together to build a future for wildlife".

This is followed by their vision statement:

- "A future where people value wildlife and species are safe from extinction".

Finally, as part of their values, their '7 Commitments' are listed as:

- Excellence in animal care and welfare
- Enhancing the well-being of our communities
- Nurturing a lifelong connection with nature
- Conserving wildlife in the wild
- Science, learning, training
- Te ao Māori
- Evolving the organisation sustainably

Auckland Zoo consider all visitors as 'friends', which emphasises the mutual respect they offer all stakeholders. They promote themselves and visitors as being jointly responsible as 'kaitiaki' or caretakers of the zoo and environment (Auckland Zoo, n.d.). Their conservation work has contributed over \$5.2 million for projects, which includes provisions within its own organisational operations, local communities, domestic organisations, and international projects. The main global reach of their conservation funding and fieldwork includes countries predominantly in the Asia-Pacific regions,

South America, and Africa (Auckland Zoo, n.d.). The time zoo staff attribute to all fieldwork comprises three main activities:

- Research (43%)
- Species recovery (43%)
- Pest Control (14%)

They also directly fund and provide resources for individuals and external organisations to carry out important environmental and conservation work around NZ and globally.

Funding for the ongoing operational costs, research, development, and conservation projects are primarily derived from admission fees, facilitating products, and donations. Last year, Auckland Zoo distributed funds to 23 projects. According to data on their website (Auckland Zoo, n.d.), fund distribution percentages according to location are as follows:

- Small grants - one third local & two thirds overseas (32%)
- NZ (21%)
- South Pacific (3%)
- Rest of the world (44%)

Local conservation within the wider Auckland region includes the formation of 'urban ark' – a collaboration with the zoo and environmental groups to help achieve continual monitoring and restoration of the environment, pest control (animal and plant), and education and advocacy programmes (Auckland Zoo, n.d.). Their website contains a comprehensive range of educational tools and links. They are aimed to predominantly connect and interact with younger audiences to aid one of their main missions – to “connect young people with wildlife, building a generation of conservation scientists for the future” (Auckland Zoo, n.d.).

In line with their own strategic objectives, Auckland Zoo is accredited by and affiliated with the Zoo and Aquarium Association (ZAA), the European Association of Zoos and Aquariums (EAZA), and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). These associations exist for the purpose of sharing knowledge among its members, including continuing conservation improvements, animal welfare, biosecurity, research and

development, socio-economic development, education and advocacy, and community engagement (Zoo and Aquarium Association [ZAA], n.d.).

Auckland Zoo is also under several statutory government acts and legislation, most notably:

- The Animal Welfare Act 1999
- The Animal Welfare Code of Welfare 2004
- The Hazardous Substances and Organisms Act 1996 (Auckland Zoo, n.d.).

The organisation has commercial partnerships with catering companies, exclusive environmentally sustainable food and beverage suppliers, equipment and building suppliers (L. Lockhart, personal communication, August 17, 2021). This is part of their environmental sustainability action plan, that seeks to reduce their carbon footprint by sustainable and efficient energy, water, and waste management. Other sustainable practices they use in their operations, include effective chemicals management, sustainable procurement of green building supplies, staff engagement and empowerment (L. Lockhart, personal communication, August 17, 2021).

As listed on their website (Auckland Zoo, n.d.), the facilitating products and services that Auckland Zoo offer as part of the visitor experience include:

- Guided tours
- School holiday experiences
- Behind the scenes experiences
- Photography workshops
- Birthday visits
- Private hire
- School visits
- Tertiary visits

The organisation is constantly reviewing their strategic objectives to transform Auckland Zoo to a standard that matches other world leading modern zoos. Currently, they are well into a 10-year development plan estimated to reach a total cost of \$130 million (Auckland Zoo, n.d.).

1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into six chapters and includes a comprehensive list of all references, figures, tables, and appendices that support the research thesis. The six chapters begin with the introduction, followed by a comprehensive literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion. Chapter one provides a personal background as to why this research topic was important to the researcher. It then provides a rationale for the thesis, followed by the research question(s) and a brief explanation for how the researcher decided on the specific question(s). Inclusion of children in research using whole family methodology, is a major driver for the thesis and the rationale for this is briefly explained. Wildlife tourism in NZ is discussed to provide context for how Auckland Zoo fits into this important part of NZ tourism. Significant history of Auckland Zoo is explained, followed by information and data about the present-day world class modernised organisation, Auckland Zoo prides itself in being.

Chapter two provides a comprehensive literature review and analysis of current literature relevant to the research questions. It highlights the trends in current research on the thesis topic and emphasises gaps in the literature which this research has tried to address. It begins with a broad history of zoos worldwide and the changes that have led to current modern day zoo practices. The role of the modern-day zoo is explored in more detail, discussing strategic objectives, the zoo's responsibilities towards conservation, and effective education and interpretation. Animal welfare and ethics is explained covering important considerations such as enclosure design, the human-animal bond, and support facilities and amenities. An overview is then provided of zoo experiences and their role as part of leisure tourism. Furthermore, zoo visitor behaviour is explored, as part of understanding the influence it has on the overall zoo experience. Finally, family group tourism research and the importance of it in the zoo context is discussed.

Chapter three provides a detailed explanation and justification of the methodological approach taken by the researcher to best answer the research question(s). It begins by outlining the qualitative research design of the thesis, detailing the rationale of the chosen paradigm, ontology, and epistemology. The method of data collection and sample criteria are discussed with a specific focus on the interview methods of using

semi-structured interviews, supported by a 'whole family' methodology. An explanation of the thematic analysis process and resulting thematic map is presented. Following this, a summary of limitations and ethical considerations while conducting this research thesis is discussed. Finally, a personal reflection on the data collection process is presented by the researcher.

Chapter four presents the findings from the research data, and these are supported by relevant quotes obtained from the seven family groups interviewed at Auckland Zoo. The findings are presented under the headings represented in the thematic map. The main themes – infrastructure, fun day out, nature connectedness, personal discovery, generativity, and affordability are further divided into the sub-themes to present the findings in a concise and logical manner. Where possible, quotes from the child participants are used to highlight the importance of their inclusion in providing new and fresh insights into zoo visitor experiences.

Chapter five provides the researcher's interpretation of the findings and links to the existing literature (or absence of), to support the arguments presented. The chapter is divided into three main headings, namely each research question. The sub-themes are used as sub-headings under the most relevant research question to clearly explain their relevance to the research findings and link them with the chosen methodology and thematic map.

In conclusion, chapter six synthesises the key findings in this research that addresses the overall aim of this research thesis. Following this, the implications of the key findings on the major stakeholders of Auckland Zoo is argued. The limitations of the thesis are then discussed and the contributions and recommendations for future research are proposed. Finally, the researcher provides a brief personal reflection on the overall research process.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

In a society increasingly disconnected from nature, the zoo provides a venue for us to link souls with wildness. If we continue to lock beasts up in barren enclosures, the heart of darkness will belong to [humankind]. Just as bear-baiting seems barbaric to us now, so will confining wild animals in cement bunkers seem to our grandchildren (Woods, 2002, p. 14).

This chapter provides a critical review of the literature available on tourism leisure experiences, specifically focusing on family groups visiting a zoo. It begins with a brief history of the zoo and its progression to current modern day zoological parks. Secondly, the role and strategic objectives of the modern-day zoo are outlined, with a particular focus on conservation and education. Following this, the importance of animal welfare and ethics is discussed with a focus on enclosure design and the significance of the human-animal bond. An overview of the tourism/leisure/recreational experience phenomena is summarised. Finally, zoo visitors' behaviour is discussed, specifically focusing on family groups and children.

2.1 The History of Zoos

The concept of a 'zoo' is believed to date back at least 4500 years ago to ancient civilisations, where historical records show that animals were kept by both the Roman and Chinese empires. They were kept by people who held positions of power and influence. Animals were kept as a symbol of status and wealth and used for private collections and entertainment provisions (Braverman, 2011; Carr & Cohen, 2011). This common theme of zoos as a symbol of status and power continued through the medieval period and more modern menageries around Europe throughout the 17th century. 'Menageries' was the term used to describe the private collection of animals that were on display for the public to gain a recreational, entertaining, and to some degree educational experience (Mason, 2007).

The first zoological park (garden) was opened to the public in Vienna, Austria in 1765. Its origins were a menagerie held by the ruling emperor at the Schönbrunn Palace. A similar zoo garden was opened in 1795 in Paris, also stemming from the Imperial menagerie and primarily aimed at providing educational opportunities for the public and

a means for conducting scientific research on the various animals on display. Zoos began to appear in America soon after with the first two being founded in Cincinnati and Philadelphia in the 1870s (Mason, 2007). Scientific research and education became as important to zoo organisations, as was their more traditional purpose of providing an entertaining experience (Roe et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2009).

The first 'modern day' zoo was opened in 1907 by Carl Hagenbeck from Germany. It featured barless enclosures to closely simulate the animal's natural environment. He believed that this would enhance human-animal connectedness and provide a more authentic experience for the zoo visitor. Removal of bars and cage like enclosures allowed a visual experience whereby minimal human intervention was visible, to create a more authentic visitor experience. The mission of the early modern-day zoo was to provide a place for visitors to feel immersed in an authentic experience. Braverman (2011) described this phenomenon as 'immersion design', whereby visitors feel an authentic connection with the animal in their natural habitat/landscape.

This concept of the modern-day zoo then spread throughout larger European and American cities during the 20th century (Carr & Cohen, 2011; Roe et al., 2014). Many initial zoo gardens were an extension of an existing public park area. The evolution of the public park was in response to the increasing urbanisation and globalisation occurring in Westernised developed countries. It allowed city dwellers to escape and gather some respite from their busy urban lifestyles (Braverman, 2011). Many people were unable to afford travel to international locations to observe animals in their natural habitats/landscapes, thus the zoo was a means to bring their habitat to them. Urbanisation and development of large cities resulted in many people becoming disassociated from nature. As a result, zoological parks provided a means for visitors to connect and appreciate wild animals and their environments (Roe et al., 2014).

Zoos then modernised many adapted set areas representing continents and environments, habitats, flora, and fauna like those encountered by the animal's origin in the wild. Initially many of the flora, fauna, rocks, and other habitat features were artificial as visual attractions, mainly for the benefit of the visitor experience. More recently, artificial features have widely been replaced by living flora and fauna as a means of improving the environment/habitat for animal welfare reasons (Braverman,

2011). Modernisation of zoos has also seen the placement of natural living flora and fauna in the outside areas of enclosures, along pathways and around the zoo entrance to enhance the public perception of its function as a nature-based attraction. This continuous flow throughout the zoo contributes to an overall authentic and immersive experience (Hutchins & Smith, 2003).

Animal welfare and conservation have become the most predominant agenda items for zoos in recent decades, shifting the emphasis from prioritising the needs of animals, over that of the visitors. Much of this shift in the focus of the zoo's role was a result of increasing public concerns about animal welfare and the purpose of a zoo, beginning in the 1980s (Roe et al., 2014). The debate started between community and international organisations, pro-environmentalists, and animal rights advocates (Clayton et al., 2009). Animal welfare has evolved alongside modernisation of zoos, with the most significant positive changes involving those in nutrition, research, medical intervention, and disease management, resulting in an overall increase in the average lifespan of zoo animals (Fennell, 2013). Animal welfare has become a major focus for the modern-day zoo and, according to Braverman, it should be the primary goal of any zoo management over any visitor appeasement efforts (Braverman, 2011). The public perception of animal welfare standards versus the strategic objectives of zoo management, often differs significantly and there is a gap in the research providing a comparative analysis. This thesis endeavours to explore the similarities and differences in experiences and perceptions, that exist between the organisation's strategic objectives, animal welfare goals, and family visitors.

2.2 The Role of the Modern Day Zoo

As recorded by The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), there are approximately 12,000 zoological parks throughout the globe. Zoos and aquariums contribute the third largest amount of revenue towards conservation efforts worldwide (World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, 2015). Approximately 700 million people visit zoos each year, accounting for a staggering one tenth of the global population (Scalfi et al., 2022). For this reason, zoos have major outreach capabilities to encourage people to consider their personal responsibilities towards conservation of nature and living species.

According to Tomas et al. (2003), the mission statements of leading zoos in America were dominated by three common goals: (1) product and service quality, (2) visitor's expectations (specifically positive outcomes), and (3) an entertaining/recreational experience. In the same study, when zoo managers were asked for their goal priorities, the majority said:

(1) product and service quality, and

(2) providing an experience for visitors that goes above and beyond the traditional role of conservation and wildlife education.

Managers stated they would ideally like to provide an experience incorporating a balanced combination of conservation, education, recreation, and entertainment. The most mentioned benefit from visitor experiences was learning new knowledge, closely followed by viewing a wide range of wildlife animals, they would not otherwise get an opportunity to watch from a close distance (Woods, 2002).

Zoos use their interpretation to instil an appreciation into visitors about nature, conservation, and the environment. Zoo education is also focused on providing visitors with knowledge and appreciation of plant and animal biodiversity, and the concept of stewardship (Lee, 2015). The scientific and research roles of the modern-day zoo incorporate: taxonomy, observation, veterinary intervention, psychological behaviour assessment/observation, captive-breeding, physiological monitoring, and genetic mapping (Roe et al., 2014). Research can include knowledge gained from close observation of behaviour, reproduction, rearing of young, social interactions (inter species), disease management, medication interventions, nutrition, and so forth. Research undertaken in the zoo setting can benefit all members of a species and make positive contributions to conservation in the wild (Mason, 2007).

In an effort to give smaller animals and invertebrates better representation, many modern day zoos have introduced specific areas which house a variety of interesting insects, amphibians, lizards and such like, particularly focusing on those which are endemic to the region/country (Catibog-Sinha, 2008; Keulartz, 2015; Shani & Pizam, 2010). Walpole and Leader-Williams (2002) describe the traditional larger animals seen in most zoos as 'flagship species' and question the actual importance or contribution to

their role in ecosystem conservation. The authors argue that they may perhaps be more important for the zoos' socio-economic benefits. The similarity they, especially animals, share with humans is believed to be one of the main reasons why visitors feel more of a connection and empathy towards them. Furthermore, smaller animal species generally are more cost-effective in terms of their upkeep, maintenance, and space required to house in enclosures (Keulartz, 2015). The bigger vertebrates are highly popular in the zoo setting, attributing their popularity to characteristics perceived by visitors as majestic, graceful, powerful, and beautiful (Skibins & Powell, 2013).

2.2.1 Strategic objectives and management of zoos

Aside from their focuses on conservation and education, zoo management need to consider such factors as strategic objectives, organisational structure and culture, collaboration with other zoos domestically and internationally, technology advancements, staff recruitment/training/retention, digital media opportunities, advertising and marketing, public perceptions/opinions, and local/ national governing bodies (Hutchins & Smith, 2003).

According to Patrick et al. (2007), an organisation's mission statement is:

a written declaration of the purpose of the organisation, which guides critical and strategic decision making. It divulges the unique reasons for existing as an organisation; focuses the allocation of financial resources; articulates the goals, culture, and strategy of the organisation, and reflects the ethics of the organisation (p.54).

In a study analysing 136 different zoo mission statements, it was found that education appeared in a resounding 87% of those statements. Most zoos have education as their primary strategic goal and argue that there is a grey area surrounding the education aspirations of zoo organisations, with respect to the goals of inciting positive environmental and conservation outcomes (Moss & Esson, 2013).

The public perceive many different roles of the modern-day zoo, thus requiring careful prioritisation of management with respect to their strategic objectives, mission, and values. The change in zoo management focus and vision has evolved in the last few decades, due to pressure from the wider community and government bodies over animal welfare, animal rights, conservation efforts (in-situ and ex-situ), and

environmental education and awareness (Carr & Cohen, 2011). Public opinion of early zoos was divided with many believing their existence was morally inhumane in particular with respect to capturing and removing animals from their expansive natural habitats, long periods of transportation, loss of their rights of freedom, and introduction to an 'alien' captive environment (Jamieson, 1985).

Collaboration with other zoo and aquarium institutions, is an important measure for zoo management to undertake and adhere to. Most modern zoos are affiliated with one or more associations, e.g., the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). Membership to association(s) provides two major benefits. It provides a wide support network on a national/international level and sets a universal high degree of ethical standards for which members are regularly accredited for (Hutchins & Smith, 2003; Keulartz, 2015). The members of an association share knowledge, research data/findings, resources both human and financial, and coordinate the movement of animals if required for breeding programs or animal welfare concerns (Nygren & Ojalammi, 2018).

One of the accreditation requirements as part of the membership with the WAZA is to regularly undertake self-evaluation of the zoo institution. This allows for monitoring of the zoo's effectiveness at providing a satisfying visitor experience. It also provides knowledge as to the extent their interpretation has caused any form of short or long term behaviour/attitude changes, towards ongoing sustainability of the environment and conservation initiatives (Khalil & Ardoin, 2011; So et al., 2020). Evaluation on site can be invaluable as part of the dynamic strategic management and helps identify the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Khalil & Ardoin, 2011). Evaluation of visitor experiences allows zoo management to critically monitor and develop its exhibits and programming (Klenosky & Saunders, 2007). By reporting their positive outcomes from public evaluations, a zoo may be able to justify to local businesses and governments, a solid case for continued or additional funding.

Zoo management need to find constant innovative ways to increase revenue to be able to achieve all their operational and conservation goals. Amenities which support their operations such as food outlets/restaurants, gift shops, playground rides, small

trains/trams, special occasion events, research grants, animal adoptions, annual/seasonal zoo membership, loyalty programs, and charitable donations are just some of the common methods employed by zoo managers to help achieve their strategic objectives and revenue goals (Catibog-Sinha, 2008). Brand image and marketing are invaluable tools required by zoo management to educate and make the wider community aware of the organisation's in-situ and ex-situ environmental and conservation commitments. Community and visitor engagement is paramount to the ongoing development and sustainability of tourist attractions. Moreover, the lack of engagement with academic institutions who play an invaluable role in ongoing research, needs to be addressed by zoo organisations (Leask, 2016). This is why this research is important in providing an ex-situ evaluation of the 'whole family' group experiences at Auckland Zoo (Schänzel, 2010).

2.2.2 Zoo's responsibilities towards conservation

Wildlife conservation "concerns the survival and viability of communities of living things and of the populations of the individual species which compose these communities. It seeks a justification in human responsibility for the world's wildlife" (Coppock, 1982, p. 271). Since 1996 up until 2007, the number of species deemed threatened by extinction rose by a total of 63 per cent with 8,462 species considered to be threatened or endangered (Shani & Pizam, 2010). According to WAZA (2015), over 13,000 different species are housed within a zoological park globally. Auckland Zoo alone houses more than 2,200 animals, incorporating 137 diverse species (Auckland Zoo, n.d.). These numbers are staggering and highlight the important role of in-situ and ex-situ conservation measures and responsibilities mandated to all zoos.

Conservation measures by zoo organisations include captive breeding, animal welfare, environmental enrichment, reintroduction and support for in-situ conservation, and ex-situ conservation of species within their natural habitat (Fennell, 2013). Thus, it is important that the conservation theme is presented at all parts of the zoo, including supporting products/amenities such as cafes, and gift shops. Zoo organisations should adopt their own high standard of environmentally friendly operations, such as responsible energy consumption, waste disposal, and recycling. In this way, they are leading by example and 'practising what they preach', which is more likely to result in positive changes in attitudes and future behaviours of visitors (Hutchins & Smith, 2003).

Effective means of interpretation offered by staff and their communication skills and knowledge, as well as quality of the exhibits/enclosures are paramount to a positive conservation outcome (Wagner et al., 2009). To meet visitor expectations, zoo management need to constantly communicate with visitors and the wider community (Roe et al., 2014). The advent of the internet, and particularly social media, has provided an effective platform for regular communication. Zoo staff need to be well trained and diverse in their knowledge and skills. They need to be motivated and have personal goals which align with the organisational mission, vision, and values. Staffing needs to include professional scientists, researchers, conservationists, educators, zookeepers, veterinarians, administrators, managers with leadership and business acumen, volunteers, and so forth (Hutchins & Smith, 2003). Interactions with visitors between zoo staff and volunteers, contributed to initially strong intentions to change behaviour, being actively pursued post visit and long term (Hacker & Miller, 2016).

Visitors who had a positive experience with an enclosure and the animals, were more likely to support ongoing animal conservation (Swanagan, 2000). Positive conservation outcomes from a zoo visit may include passing knowledge onto others, considering the environment on consumer choices, taking part in conservation, and habitat restoration programmes/activities (Khalil & Ardoin, 2011).

The off-site follow-up of interpretation offered by zoos is essential if the visitors are expected to adopt new conservation and environmental behaviours post visit (Hughes, 2011). Onsite interpretation may not be sufficient to foster significant behavioural changes (Smith & Broad, 2008). Digital platforms and social media need to appeal to the original sense of empathy and connectedness the visitor had gained from their initial experience. In doing so, they effectively provide a means to extend the original experience and for visitors to relive positive memories (Wagner et al., 2009). The information provided post visit should also be presented in a way that all age groups can understand and promote continuing family conversations about animals and nature, long after the visit (Therkelsen & Lottrup, 2015). This highlights the importance of including children in all research conversations due to them being one of the main stakeholders in any zoo's organisation.

As pointed out by WAZA, 'knowledge is power' with particular focus on visitor awareness and understanding about the significant number of species under threat from extinction or habitat destruction (World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, 2015). Conservation education is deemed one of the major roles and strategic objectives for zoos and supersedes its earlier roles of entertainment (Leask, 2016). This thesis will determine if visitors' appreciation of organisational strategic objectives, consider the conservation message to be a key component of the visitor experience.

2.2.3 Effective education and interpretation

Education and conservation are two separate but important priorities for the modern zoo that co-exist and form a symbiotic relationship as part of the strategic mission and goals of zoo management. Both are strongly influenced by visitor numbers and expenditure (Gusset & Dick, 2011). The five main goals of zoo education are: creating knowledge and understanding, promoting affective emotions and attitudes such as empathy, providing inspiration, promoting positive environmental and conservation behaviours, and developing scientific and personal skills (Schilbert & Scheersoi, 2022). Specifically, WAZA outlines the need for informal and unstructured learning to successfully deliver the 'conservation message' to visitors (World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, 2015).

By providing education on conservation issues impacting on the animals and their natural environments, it is the zoo management's aim to promote visitors to adopt more sustainable environmental and conservation attitudes, and ultimately behaviours. These include recycling household and commercial rubbish, conserving power/energy, reducing paper usage, donating money and/or time towards conservation groups, taking more personal responsibility in pest eradication projects locally, and encouraging the planting of native flora and fauna (Braverman, 2011; Smith et al., 2008). This educational approach by the modern zoo, places a social morally centred approach to consumerism. Zoo organisations need to lead by example with their approach to conservation and sustainability, through providing a message using effective educational interpretation methods as well as sustainable operational standards.

A zoological park provides an ideal setting to address environmental issues such as climate change, better waste reduction methods, recycling, acid rain, ozone layer

depletion, air pollution and deforestation (Packer & Ballantyne, 2013; Taylor & Duram, 2021). Packer and Ballantyne (2013) argue the importance of using the zoo location to teach visitors essentially social science, considering that most environmental and wildlife threats are directly or indirectly related to human activities, or lack thereof. Enhancing visitor education with interpretative messages focused on the need for individual responsibility towards the environment, is important. However, at the same time this should not significantly detract from an overall positive learning experience (Mann-Lang et al., 2016). The balance required to deliver an overall positive message, requires a mixture of fun active participation underpinned with some serious facts and self-searching questions. Nevertheless, some of the messages will have negative connotations, particularly with respect to negative environmental impacts to elicit a strong response and change in visitor attitudes and behaviour (Wijeratne et al., 2014).

Informal education, also described as 'free-choice learning', allows the visitor to control their activities and interactions during their zoo experience (Carr & Cohen, 2011). Zoo staff have a responsibility to ensure their interpretation is delivered in a personal, contextual and visitor-centred manner (Khalil & Ardoin, 2011). Ardoin et al. (2015) add to the argument by describing this type of learning, whereby visitors' experiences become an extension of prior experiences and knowledge. Effective educational interpretation at a zoo should aim to promote questions and discussions among social and family groups about what they are observing and learning from their visit (Luebke & Matiasek, 2013). The beneficial experiences reported from their affective domains were introspection/reflection followed closely by emotional responses to viewing the animals, cognitive engagement, and staff interactions (Luebke & Matiasek, 2013).

Powell and Bullock (2014) refer free-choice learning to "self-directed, voluntary learning over which the individual exerts control, and which is subject to their interests" (p.391). They argue that apart from learning environmental sustainability behaviours, zoo visitors also experience other positive outcomes, such as improved sense of well-being, open minded approaches to problem solving, and creativity. Parrish (2010) further suggests that for most adults, a visit to a zoo, is for self-identity and well-being purposes. Several factors contribute to a person's self-identity, namely previous knowledge prior to the visit, life experience, sociocultural influences, level of curiosity and interest, and motivations/expectations. Added to this is a person's individual agenda which together

with their self-identity, are important influencers of the overall educational experience gained (Roe & McConney, 2015).

Pre-existing knowledge of the issues surrounding conservation of the animals and their natural habitats is considered an important adjunct to on-site learning. Most zoo visitors have some degree of basic pre-existing knowledge about animals and their habitats (Dove & Byrne, 2014). However, not many visitors have a deeper understanding around the complexities of environment degradation, ecosystems, or animal's physiological welfare issues. This gap in scientific knowledge of visitors often results in the creation of misconceptions about the zoo's role in conservation and animal welfare. In comparison, zoo staff predominantly believe that natural history and scientific knowledge are an integral part of conveying a successful conservation message (Fraser, 2009).

Orams (1996) expands on the concept of pre-existing knowledge by arguing the importance of cognitive learning with respect to visitor education at wildlife tourism attractions and defines cognitive learning as that which involves knowledge that allows visitors to "use information from their environment and their memories to make decisions about their actions" (p.86). He uses the 'dissonance theory' to explain a successful tool of interpretation to affect a change in attitude/behaviour. This theory suggests that if a person is provided with information that opposes their current belief/knowledge, they are more likely to change their personal approach and behaviours towards the issue being presented, such as the threat of animal and habitat extinction. This theory allows an active questioning and participation of visitors in producing a more positive outcome from the interpretation provided.

Esson and Moss (2013) discuss the potential risks associated with providing dissonant messages as part of the visitor interpretation. They highlight the potential that disturbing messages regarding conservation and environmental degradation will cause unease and tension between visitors and zoo organisation management and staff. As a result, one of the major roles of a zoo should be to create a sense of self-responsibility to visitors, with respect to their contributions (negative and positive) on the sustainable future of conservation and the environment. This is a major consideration for zoo management and presents a conundrum as to finding the most suitable balance of the interpretation provided.

An effective method used to enhance the overall interpretation provided at zoos, is to provide resources and educational tools that involve a multi-sensory approach. Sensory experiences and those which stimulate the mind are more likely to evoke a change in longer term attitudes and behaviours (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The addition of sound to the tourism experience has been shown to benefit overall visitor satisfaction. Such additions relevant to zoo education, include birdsong recordings, other nature sounds, and background music (Qiu et al., 2018). Some of the most positive outcomes of learning experiences involves the active learning through visual, olfactory, audible and tactile senses (Orams, 1996).

The addition of a video or digital presentation at an exhibit/enclosure accounted for an overall longer observation time, in comparison to enclosures with only signage as an interpretation resource Perdue et al. (2012). In their study, the authors argued that visitors gain more educational benefit when knowledge was imparted to them through video and live presentations. The time spent at an enclosure was found to be directly proportional to the level of technology used for interpretation. Visitors stayed longer looking at high tech videos and digital kiosks compared with written signs or photographic displays. Moreover, the length of time spent at enclosures and displays was found to correlate with knowledge gained and the ability to retain information longer. Live presentations were the most effective means of knowledge retention, largely due to the emotions evoked by the staff member presenting the information (Webber et al., 2017).

Most zoo visitors use their own leisure time and disposable income to visit a zoo, thus it is imperative they are provided with a fun and memorable visit. Ultimately, zoo visitors seek an entertaining experience (Hutchins & Smith, 2003). If education is a priority for zoo management, it needs to be provided in an entertaining and engaging manner. The term 'edutainment' fits into this description and seems apt for describing the two concepts with respect to a zoo's mission and vision goals. A more viable approach to the modern zoo management strategy is to equally balance and represent the four main components/roles of a zoo, conservation, research, education, and entertainment in an informal manner (Hutchins & Smith, 2003).

Fennell (2013), however, argues that some studies into the effectiveness of zoos in educating visitors is not ideal, and goes so far as to suggest that education is merely a 'smoke screen' to maintain good customer public relations. He suggests that family togetherness, enjoyment, and novelty seeking, outweigh educational opportunities in popularity of visitor motivations to the modern zoo. This thesis aims to address the gaps in comparing the family visitor experiences with the organisation's strategic objectives.

2.3 Animal Welfare and Ethics

Animal welfare incorporates the animal's physical, physiological, and environmental conditions/states. According to Ward et al. (2018), nonhuman animal welfare refers to "the state of the animal as perceived by the animal himself or herself with regards to their ability to cope" (p.23). Zoo staff play an integral role in assessing an animal's current state of welfare, with frequent recorded observations of their body condition, temperament, positive and negative behaviour traits, and their perceived affective states. It is a complex issue for zoo management due to the wide range of species presented, all varying in their genetic makeup, preferences, and the other characteristics/traits. Therefore, focusing on positive affective states in animals versus the negative affective states is the best indicator of overall animal wellbeing (Whitham & Wielebnowski, 2013).

Fennell (2013) describes animal welfare as morally correct behaviour towards animals, summarised by the five freedoms. These include:

- freedom from hunger and thirst
- freedom from discomfort
- freedom from pain, injury, or disease
- freedom to express normal behaviour
- freedom from fear and distress

Two further freedoms have been added from various associations, including the freedom from boredom, and the freedom to influence control over their own quality of life (Kagan et al., 2015; Mellor & Beausoleil, 2015). Minimal animal welfare standards are legally binding according to government regulations, with higher standards set for

association members as part of their accreditation procedures/requirements (Hutchins & Smith, 2003).

Zookeepers play a major role in maintaining quality animal welfare goals as they spend the most time in direct contact with the animal. A suitable zookeeper is one who can form a close bond/relationship with animals. They need to possess a calm and positive demeanour at all times, while having extensive experience and knowledge about the animal(s) they are responsible for (Ward & Melfi, 2015). A balance between knowledge and experience will ensure they have a positive contribution to the animal's overall welfare and behaviour (Claxton, 2011).

Another important advancement in animal welfare is allowing animals within enclosures choice of where they want to spend their time. This includes contact with the public for feeding or tactile interactions, whereby the animals are not forced by their keepers to be at a specific area for specific 'entertainment' roles. This has proven beneficial in reducing unnecessary physiological stress and promoting more natural social behaviour patterns (Hartley et al., 2019; Normando et al., 2018). Considerable advances have been made in internal zoo research which has developed a deeper understanding and awareness of animal welfare issues and goals. This is important for both solitary and herd animals, whereby they have the choice of social cohesion or social confinement within their enclosure (Hosey, 2005).

Visitor numbers and frequency are important determinants of psychological and behavioural stress traits as observed in primates (Fernandez et al., 2009). Stress related behaviour in primates was shown to increase particularly on weekends and holidays when crowd numbers were significantly larger. However, Davey (2007) proposes that not all effects of human presence at a zoo result in negative behavioural outcomes for the animals. In some cases, human presence will have a positive effect on animal enrichment and welfare. For example, some animals such as chimpanzees were observed to spend more time at the edge of their enclosure near the observation areas when visitors were present. A possible explanation given is that chimpanzees seek out visitor groups to provide them variation from their usual daily routine. This is an important management consideration whereby decisions need to be made on how to

either reduce potential stress or utilise the presence of humans as an enrichment contributor (Davey, 2007).

Modernisation of zoos has seen a large reduction of any direct human-animal interactions, specifically the activity of feeding the animals. Research has found that in most cases the risks outweigh the benefits towards animal welfare when animals are fed by visitors (Fernandez et al., 2009). Although animal feeding activities is an interactive activity which brings visitors psychological and social benefits, the potential detriment to the animals has seen this practice stopped at most modern accredited zoos (Davey, 2007). In some cases, nutritional deficits and diseases occurred when visitors were able to feed animals at the zoo due to many animals being fed artificial food pre-sold or even food they had bought themselves intended for human consumption (Fernandez et al., 2009).

2.3.1 Enclosure design

One of the most important considerations regarding animal welfare and ethics is the design of the enclosure (Andersen, 2003). The enclosure design is an important interpretation tool based on three pivotal features that are responsible for a positive visitor experience. These are: the visitor's own perception of the enclosure, the behaviour and perceived welfare of the animals, and more specifically the comparison of how the visitor perceives the quality of life of each animal compared with what they would expect in their natural wildlife habitat (Andersen, 2003).

First generation enclosures are those that were originally used to house animals on display and consisted of small, caged areas with hard substrates such as concrete. The second-generation enclosures saw the removal of the typical metal cages which were replaced by more natural barriers, such as moats and glass/plastic barriers. Animals were displayed not only as taxonomic figures but grouped together according to their global geography and basic natural wildlife habitats (Moss et al., 2008). The third generation enclosures which most modern zoos now aspire to provide, are commonly referred to as 'naturalistic' or 'panoramic' enclosures, bearing a close resemblance to the animal's natural environment (Finlay et al., 1988; Moss et al., 2008). There is strong correlation between the generation type of enclosure and positive public perceptions of the animal being observed. Public perception of the animal characteristics being

observed was significantly higher, if they were housed in a naturalistic enclosure (Fennell, 2013).

There is some debate as to whether animal visibility is decreased due to the third generation enclosures. Davey (2006a) concluded that the effect of decreased animal visibility had no significant effect on decreasing visitor numbers or exhibit viewing time. Another benefit of the larger naturalistic enclosures is the active searching for animals within an enclosure at multiple viewing areas, making the viewing experience a more interactive and realistic 'immersive' experience (Moss et al., 2008). One of the benefits of minimising the amount of glass at some of the newer enclosures, is that negative visitor behaviour associated with tapping the glass barriers was eliminated (Ross et al., 2012).

An important aspect of enclosure design is the regular provision of environmental-enrichment activities to encourage appropriate and natural behaviours such as exploration, interactive social behaviour, hiding areas, and regular exercise routines. The addition of temporary items for the purposes of enrichment, enhances animals' natural food seeking behaviours, engaging their senses of smell, touch, and sound. The addition of natural and artificial flora, fauna, and other items mimicking those of the animal's natural habitat, encouraged and stimulated positive species-to-species interactions (Ward et al., 2018). An important aspect of providing a 'naturalistic' species specific enclosure, is the attention given to ensuring the animals are within social groups similar to how they live in the wild (Hutchins & Smith, 2003). The overflow effect of an improvement in animal psychological and physiological well-being was observed to result in most visitors having a more enjoyable experience (Tofield et al., 2003).

2.3.2 The human-animal bond

The importance of the animal-human bond has been recorded throughout history. Whether or not used for companionship or as a means of survival as a food source, humans have had a close relationship with animals (Davey, 2006b; Orams, 2002). This instinctive human-animal bond which provides both with psychological comfort, has been described by some researchers as fitting into the 'biophilia hypothesis', which is a term describing a love of life or living things (Lee, 2015). A visitor's ability to gain a spiritual experience from nature often is related to respecting the power of nature,

enabling a sense of calm and tranquillity, and momentarily escaping their everyday lives (Leask, 2016).

A major benefit children gain from providing care to animals is a sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, calm and reassurance. Children can learn from a fairly young age how to test their morals with respect to animal welfare and in some cases extend this to question the complex theories of existence (Stainton, 2022). They can potentially develop nurturing attitudes and knowledge about different ecosystems and how they are all somehow related in the 'circle of life'. This has an important influence on their emotional and cognitive development in a unique manner not initially gained from adult parents or caregivers (Myers Jr & Saunders, 2002). The main motivation for families to visit the zoo is to provide the children with an educational, fun, and recreational experience and as an introduction to environmental connectedness, responsibilities towards animal welfare and conservation, and environmental sustainability (Roe & McConney, 2015; Taylor & Duram, 2021). By learning how to interact with animals and nature, children will learn and develop their own values from a tangible experience (Khalil & Ardoin, 2011). The importance of children in family group motivations to visit a zoo, needs to be further investigated and therefore this thesis seeks to collect perspectives from children directly.

2.3.3 Support facilities/amenities

Although animals are the primary attraction at a zoo, supporting facilities are an important adjunct in conveying and displaying the environmental and conservation interpretation. These include gift shops, eateries, playground areas, ablution facilities, and general walkways (Braverman, 2011). In a study at Fort Worth Zoo in the United States of America (USA) participants rated the amenity products as a significant factor in their overall satisfaction from their visit. They commented on availability of water fountains, restrooms, and cleanliness of restaurant/cafes and washroom facilities (Tomas et al., 2003). Although these products are not primary motivations for visiting a zoo, their quality and cleanliness pay an important role in overall visitor satisfaction and experiences. The entire zoo experience combines a mixture of consumerism via souvenir shops and eateries with experiences such as rides, keeper demonstrations, and interactive displays to create a collection of themes related to nature and conservation.

Zoo signage serves numerous purposes both directly at the animal enclosures and spread on the various pathways, play areas around the zoo. Signage provides interpretation about zoo sponsors, affiliated conservation programs, practical suggestions for how to get more involved with sustainability/conservation, and basic information about the animals and their natural habitats (Moss & Pavitt, 2019). Many signs include information about the risk of extinction to both the animal and their habitat. The use of signs to promote appropriate visitor behaviour towards animals and the surroundings within the zoo is an effective and subtle way to avoid adverse behaviour from visitors (Fernandez et al., 2009). Signage placement and frequency provides another conundrum for zoo management as to how much is too much and the wide range in literacy and age of visitors who read them or interact with displays. The most effective signs are those that have an initial bold 'attraction', which increases the chances of all visitors learning from their interpretation messages. Such signs should entice children and adults and provide a point of social cohesion, whereby adults read or explain the information to young children, therefore initiating questions and discussions during the visit (Andersen, 2003).

2.4 Zoo Experiences as part of Leisure Tourism

To understand the zoo visitor experience, it is important to explore the broader concept of leisure tourism. One of the major benefits of leisure tourism is the ability to escape from everyday routines, and the pursuit of novel and recreational opportunities (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987). This extends to positive changes in attitudes and behaviour as one of the long-term outcomes from their visitor experience. The authors concluded that relaxation and social interactions during their visit and sharing their experiences post visit are important aspects of leisure tourism.

Customer satisfaction from a leisure experience ultimately is determined by the visitor's psychological feelings, emotions, and attitudes evoked by their visit but also pre- and post-experience stages (Del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). The authors argue that tourist experiences and the degree of satisfaction gained from them has a significant contribution to their well-being and their general state of happiness. Pomfret (2021) divides the level of satisfaction into the hedonic (short term) benefits and the eudemonic (longer term benefits). Ideally, a leisure tourism experience should

incorporate elements of both these well-being states (Seeler et al., 2021). A visitor's emotions play an important role as most tourism destinations include sensory input, creative imaginations, and a sense of enjoyment. Cognitive views are also important and incorporate such things as an individual's expectations, and positive or negative opinions about their overall satisfaction, level of interest, degree of engagement, and attitudes gained from their experience (Orams, 1996; Pomfret, 2021).

Providing a leisure tourism experience at the zoo in addition to the product and service, allows organisations to provide important competitive variables. These include the formation of memories, emotions, an individual's intrinsic and extrinsic motives, stimulation of senses, cognitive arousal, and an overall quality experience (Oh et al., 2007; Pomfret, 2021). The extent to which the visitor benefits from value-added variables is dependent and proportional to the level of active participation taken by the consumer (Oh et al., 2007). This concept is described by Parrish (2010) as 'co-creation' whereby both visitor and staff play important roles in the construction and collaboration of an 'authentic experience'. Andersen (2003) likens the zoo experience to a theatrical performance, whereby "the animals are the actors, the exhibit design is the scenery, the theme or story being interpreted is the play, the visitor area is the auditorium, and the visitors are the audience" (p.76).

Similarly, the 'experience economy' brings together visitor consumption and visitor production (Andersson, 2007). It acknowledges that a tourism experience requires not just the tourism attraction/destination but is also influenced by the subjective psychological behaviour and attitudes of the tourist. This is unique to each individual and the value of a visitor's experience is largely determined by their needs and expectations of a commodity (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Oh et al., 2007). A transformative experience goes one step further, whereby the individual gains some degree of personal change in attitude or behaviour as a direct result of their visitor experience. In many cases, the transformative experience is coupled with a focus on a more sustainable delivery of a tourism product and service (Seeler et al., 2021; Taylor & Duram, 2021). It is what all zoo managers should aspire to achieve as part of their organisation's strategic objectives. In the specific cases of zoos, Birenboim et al. (2015) conducted a study on visitor experiences and concluded that in a semi-artificial environment such as a zoo, there are wide variations in visitor experiences. The authors

specifically noticed differences in experiences due to the animal species, the enclosure design, and the degree of human-animal bond permissible.

2.5 Zoo Visitor Behaviours and Experiences

Prior to the 1970s, very little research was published on visitor behaviour at zoos with most research focusing on animals. As modern zoos underwent a dramatic change in their roles, research on zoo visitors began to emerge in the mid-1970s (Davey, 2006b). This was largely in response to zoo management acknowledging their important role in education. The most popular demographic group to visit a zoo were women (mainly mothers) between the ages of 25-35 (Khalil & Ardoin, 2011). In a study conducted at Wellington Zoo, over 70% of the survey participants were women (Mason, 2007). Similar portions of women respondents were found in other studies at Hamilton Zoo, Jersey Zoo, and North Carolina Zoo (Ryan & Saward, 2004).

Faerber et al. (2021) concluded that the following issues were most prevalent to zoo visitors in order of importance, namely: emotions, perceived global experience, entertainment/fun/enjoyment, and cleanliness of the enclosures and surrounding areas. Some visitors found the zoo experience to evoke positive and happy memories from their family or group life from previous activities together. As a result, many felt that the zoo visit and environment provided a unique bonding experience with others in their family/social group (Luebke & Matiasek, 2013). Similarly, Clayton et al. (2009) concluded that the main contributors to a visitor's cognitive experiences during a zoo visit were the enclosure design, animal visibility/activity, and observing platform distance from the animal being observed. Emotional effects from the visitor experience were observed to be an overall increase in empathy and connectedness with the animals and a social identity and responsibility gained with respect to the sustainability of the environment and species survival, in their wild habitats.

Ballantyne and Packer (2016) concluded that the four most significant factors participants attributed to a positive experience included the opportunity to see live animals they have not seen before, good perceived welfare, enclosure design that mimicked the species' natural habitat, and being able to observe animals being active. Other contributory factors included those related to the animal being observed (colour, rarity, activity), enclosure qualities (design, signage, location, size), actual visitor

demographics and personality types, and the degree of human-animal bond permissible (Birenboim et al., 2015; Davey, 2006b). Collectively, these resulted in cumulative positive experiences gained throughout the duration of a zoo visit. Furthermore, visitor attention span and interest in exhibits declined over time. Upon visitors becoming fatigued, they tended to be more selective of the exhibits they visited, with some exhibits receiving a larger volume of visitors in the first couple of hours (Davey, 2007).

2.6 Family Group Visitors

Family groups represent one of the largest markets for any tourism attraction/destination (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). One of the main reasons for this are the positive outcomes gained from family groups doing activities together as a means to having memorable and bonding experiences (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). The commonly used phrase 'the family that plays together, stays together' rings true with respect to family groups' involvement in tourism and leisure activities (Wu & Wall, 2016). Family groups can gain benefits of social cohesion when participating in leisure activities in environments different from those they are usually exposed to (Fountain et al., 2015). The family group is the social unit in which many people spend the most time socially interacting. Collaboration is key to a successful family day out (Turley, 2001). Alongside the pursuit of a cohesive positive family experience is the strong potential for various degrees of interpersonal conflicts within the family or more extended family groups. As such, compromise is a key component within the social context of a family group experience (Carr & Cohen, 2011).

Family visits to a tourist attraction, provide a sense of 'escapism' as a group from their day-to-day lifestyles. The family group has changed significantly over the last few decades and includes inter-generational families, solo-parented families, gay and lesbian couples with children, and blended families (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2014, 2015). Furthermore, family structure and demographics have changed remarkably with many parents' childbearing at an older age, families in general having less children, and more gender-neutral roles within parents with respect to providing an income and providing childcare. Contributing to these factors, is the increase in average longevity of humans, due to advances in medicine and scientific advances in disease prevention. This in turn has changed the structures of families from a more horizontal (1-2 generations) family

group to a more vertical make up consisting of up to 3-4 generations (grandparents and great-grandparents) (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). The variation in family groups makes a precise definition of family difficult, but they all share a similarity of social cohesion and supportive networks (Schänzel et al., 2005). Children, in particular are important decision makers in any family based activity and therefore need to be given equal consideration in tourism research and marketing (Schänzel et al., 2005). Currently there are significant gaps in tourism research with respect to listening to and respecting children's thoughts and opinions.

Traditionally, most research involving family groups was dominated by the mother's thoughts and opinions. Mothers are in most cases more emotionally attached to their children, and responsible for maintaining the family social cohesion (Schänzel & Smith, 2011). The authors noted that in general, fathers are responsible for promoting and providing physical activities and fun when family groups visit tourist attractions/destinations. Generally, fathers tend to have a role of 'generativity' whereby they take on responsibilities to impart their knowledge onto the next generation(s). They tend to use a tourism leisure activity as a time of bonding with their children by imparting informal teaching and incorporating fun activities. Instead, mothers take a more passive role, with many taking a break from their everyday tasks and gaining positive, fun, and relaxing experiences (Fountain et al., 2015). Despite the intention of a family zoo visit being a leisurely and fun activity, it can also involve a considerable amount of work (in most cases by the mother) to plan the trip, such as organising transport, tickets, food and beverages, all-weather gear (Hallman & Benbow, 2007). Fathers are the minority adult in much of the research and need to be given more attention. A 'whole family' approach to research is desirable to gain a full and comprehensive insight into family group characteristics and dynamics (Schänzel, 2010).

Family groups visit the zoo primarily for a fun and enjoyable day out which encourages family bonding by the creation and sharing of memories. The provision of family orientated activities is thus an important consideration for family visitors including amenities such as play areas for children to exercise and relax (Klenosky & Saunders, 2007). The authors concluded from their study that children, who were part of a family or other social group, greatly increased the probability of that group visiting a zoo. Younger children within a family group required particular consideration by zoo

management in the provision of 'child friendly' amenities, education, and health and safety measures (Pomfret, 2021). Children also contribute towards a longer dwelling time at exhibits, a higher rate of spending on retail products, and ongoing involvement with environmental and conservation schemes and practices which enhance sustainability. Most children felt that animals played an important role in their everyday lives and their relationship with animals mattered to them (Zwinkels et al., 2009).

Grandparents are playing an ever-increasing important role in family group dynamics. The bond between a grandparent and grandchild is 'special' and considered to benefit both parties. One of the main attributors to the 'special bond' created between grandparents and grandchildren, is the limited time spent together engaging in fun and enjoyable activities. When they do activities together, they make the most of their time together, and regard their time together as a 'treat' (Gram et al., 2019). Zoo visits provide an ideal opportunity for grandparents to engage in generativity and pass on their knowledge and experiences to the younger generations (Schänzel, 2022).

Children account for a large proportion of zoo visitors and what they learn today determines the behaviour and actions of future generations (Khalil & Ardoin, 2011; Taylor & Duram, 2021). According to the latest data from AZA, 69% of global zoo visitors are part of a family group, with 57% of all visitors comprised of children below the age of 12 (Association of Zoo and Aquariums, n.d.). Children tend to show the strongest affiliation/interest in the animals compared with their parents/caregivers, possibly due to the relative absence of previous exposure to wildlife. Zoos provide parents with a safe and accessible means for children to view animals which many do not have the means or opportunity to visit in their natural wildlife habitats (Mason, 2007).

Knowledge gained by children's experiences is invaluable to zoo management in developing and targeting an important part of the visitor market. Children need to be respected for their unique knowledge and perspective that they can bring, as part of tourism research, rather than being spoken for by their adult parents or caregivers and valued for their contributions (Therkelsen & Lottrup, 2015; Tipper, 2011). Marketers need to appeal to both adults' and children's needs with respect to attracting visitors to their destination/attraction. Children have marked variations in their cognitive abilities, motivational interests, concentration periods, and energy levels within the age ranges

of 6-17 but also when compared with adults (Schänzel et al., 2005). The conundrum that exists within family group zoo experiences is that often the parents seek a recreational experience focused on relaxation, compared with children who are more likely to seek out adventure-based activities. Ideally, a family experience needs to be 'harmonic', devoid of unnecessary stresses and disagreements (Gram et al., 2019).

Interactions and discussions with adults while being immersed in nature, encourages children to seek out answers and engage in critical thinking skills (Callanan et al., 2017). Connection of their current thinking to previous experiences is an effective means of making their experience more relevant and meaningful (Kahn Jr et al., 2009). Klenosky and Saunders (2007) note some of the impacts that learning at zoos has on children. These include observations that children "learn and appreciate nature, fostered the development of stewardship ethic, provided ideas for school projects, and laid the groundwork for helping their children learn about basic human functions such as reproduction and childbirth" (p.325). This thesis included specific questions to explore what children feel they have learnt from their zoo visit and how they foresee that new knowledge being used or expanded on in the future.

2.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to critically discuss the research literature on family tourism experiences at a zoological park. Managers are faced with conflicting challenges to balance the need for provision of an entertaining and educational experience, versus maintaining their core mission of animal conservation, research, and well-being. The marketing and interpretation provided by modern day zoos seeking to raise environmental and conservation awareness, is often contradictory to the motivations and experiences of family group visitors.

The question of animal welfare around the ethics of captive wild animal tourism further complicates public opinion and interpretation of the zoo management's objectives. Animal welfare is an important consideration for both zoo management and visitors and increasingly poses conflicting opinions. Auckland Zoo relies on visitors to provide revenue for their day-to-day operations, animal welfare, and global conservation funding. For this reason, balancing their marketing and strategic management objectives against perceived demand is a complex process.

Motivations for visiting a zoo can differ significantly within a family group. Children often seek a fun and active experience involving interactions with animals and displays. One of the primary motivations for parents or caregivers to visit a zoo with children is for the educational and entertainment options offered in a naturalistic setting. As a result, children play an important role in decision-making with respect to visiting a zoo attraction. However, education, environmental awareness, and conservation are not deemed high priorities for families to visit a zoo. There appears to be a gap in the literature addressing the differences between visitor expectations/experiences and the zoo organisation's vision and mission objectives, hence the purpose of this thesis.

This thesis aims to interpret experiences perceived by several members within each family group, including children, using a qualitative research approach. The family experiences will then be compared with the Auckland Zoo's strategic objectives and welfare goals.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The literature review highlighted several key areas where gaps exist in the research which this thesis seeks to address. This chapter begins with a discussion on the design of the thesis, chosen research paradigm, ontology, and epistemology. The rationale for using a qualitative interpretative approach for this thesis is further explained. Following this, the data collection methods are discussed, with particular focus on the use of semi-structured interviews and the 'whole family' methodology. After this, the sampling criteria and data collection are explained, followed by the thematic data analysis approach taken. This is followed by a discussion on limitations, including potential bias and reflexivity, and ethical considerations. Finally, this chapter concludes with my own personal reflection of the entire thesis process.

3.1 Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research as defined by Kitto et al. (2008) is "concerned with the systematic collection, ordering, description and interpretation of textual data generated from talk, observation and documentation" (p. 243). Interpretation of the data brings together the social and human realities that exist in the world (M. Crotty, 1998). It is a valuable theoretical perspective to use as an approach for exploratory qualitative research such as this (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). One of the main objectives of the researcher providing their own interpretation to the data collected, is to explore reasons why things were said and also to a certain degree, why things were omitted (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). A qualitative research design was chosen for this thesis as best to answer the research questions. Qualitative research incorporates elements of interpretative methods, involving an empathetic approach to construct results that are non-linear, multi-dimensional, and contextual in their meaning (Stiles, 1993; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The relationship forged between the researcher and participants is one of the most important determinants of the depth of self-disclosure around the research phenomena (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

This thesis aims to explore in depth data from participants to add new perspectives of the 'whole family' zoo experience, which includes the voices of children (Schänzel, 2010; Way et al., 2023). Qualitative research design was chosen as the most appropriate

approach through careful consideration of the research question, ontological and epistemological perspectives, and the most appropriate research paradigm. These will be explained in more detail below.

3.1.1 Research paradigm

A research paradigm combines ontology and epistemology to find the best approach and motivation required to acquire the knowledge/data to best answer the research question (Kankam, 2019). A paradigm can also be referred to as a 'theoretical perspective' which combines a set of world beliefs within a chosen discipline to guide a researcher to the most appropriate topic, research methodology, and data presentation (M. Crotty, 1998). The most appropriate paradigm I have chosen for my research question is interpretivism. This paradigm provides a broad and flexible approach to my research topic and encapsulates descriptive and useful data which are influenced by each participant's different positions/values within society. A relativist interpretative approach used in this research helps me gain knowledge about the participants' ethics, morals, and political and social values (Levers, 2013).

The use of descriptive interpretivism helps in understanding perceived value/experience family group visitors hope to gain, and specifically determine if they align with their pre-visit expectations. As defined by Kankam (2019), "interpretivism is an ontological point of view which looks at reality or truth as a social formation or construct of the mind's inner feeling" (p. 87). The interpretivist approach for my research allows me to incorporate an empathetic, and personal influence on the participants interviewed and to a lesser extent those observed within their natural setting. This does introduce a level of uncontrolled bias towards the data collected due to my own beliefs of what reality is, for which the interpretivist paradigm is well suited. This is further discussed below (see section 3.4.1).

The descriptive interpretivist paradigm used provides reasoning on how people understand their experiences, but has some limitations in explaining why (Gray, 2018). Answers as to why people decide upon certain motivational factors is beyond the scope of my thesis design, however, it would provide another opportunity to pursue further research on this topic.

Interpretative Constructivism

The constructivism process is closely related to interpretivism and allows for results from the data analysis which are realistic and believable to numerous stakeholders, who seek to benefit from the research conclusions (Stiles, 1993). Interpretative constructivism is an epistemological approach to research which focuses on a subjective truth, whereby meaning and knowledge is not discovered but rather constructed by the participants and researcher. A single phenomena may produce multiple truths and meanings depending on an individual's understanding and perception about the thesis subject (M. Crotty, 1998).

According to M. Crotty (1998) constructivism is "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed within an essentially social context" (p.42). It associates objects with a human being's conscious state and how the individual interprets their surroundings and engagements with their experiences and situations (M. Crotty, 1998). Meaning is constructed around existing objects versus the creating of new realities. The data collected in this research project focuses on an 'experiential orientation', whereby the participants share their thoughts and feelings about their zoo experience in a realistic perspective (Terry et al., 2017).

Constructivism using Inductive Methods

The inductive method is used in this research analysis which helps to limit subjectivity bias and any pre-conceived ideas about possible outcomes by the researcher. It is a 'bottom up' method of collecting and analysing data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Induction processes involve the collation of data through multiple sources and using the data to find common meanings and patterns (Gray, 2018). Identifying the patterns and themes which emerge from inductive approaches to data collection and analysis, the researcher is then able to develop a theory to give context to the findings (Blackstone, 2018). This limits researcher bias by focusing on the data collection to analyse the data without testing a hypothesis, despite having my own thoughts about the research outcomes.

3.1.2 Ontological perspective

Ontology is traditionally the philosophical starting point of any research project and seeks to discover the essence of reality and the nature of truth (McLeod, 2019). Ontology is the understanding of 'what is' with respect to reality and the true nature of being (M. Crotty, 1998). It provides a 'theoretical perspective' on how an individual perceives the universe through their observations and experiences (M. Crotty, 1998). The ontology used for this research that best fits with the research question is a relativist ontology. This approach to qualitative research recognises the relationship between existence and human consciousness, acknowledging that many truths exist, due to the complex individual nature and thoughts of human beings (Levers, 2013). Relativist ontology is strongly related to subjective experiences, whereby human consciousness affects the perception of objects and experiences (Levers, 2013). For this thesis, it allows me as the researcher to explore and interpret the data from all participants, accepting that there is no 'correct' answer or truth. The data will enable me to provide insights and give meaning to a multitude of different perceptions of the family group experience at Auckland Zoo.

3.1.3 Epistemological perspective

According to M. Crotty (1998), epistemology is "concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (p.8). It follows on from ontology and provides an understanding of how as a researcher I can acquire accurate and valuable knowledge from legitimate sources to discover the multiple realities as outlined in the ontology. Epistemology applies a philosophical approach to research which enables the researcher to determine what knowledge is reliable and adequately addresses the research questions (Gray, 2018). Epistemology describes the relationship between the researcher and participant, showing how they obtain their knowledge to seek answers to their research question(s).

Reality of an object is not absolute and therefore is influenced by individual experience and interpretation. This allows for a more inclusive approach to participant recruitment, resulting in a range of different viewpoints and opinions about the same phenomena being researched (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The result of this is a more comprehensive set

of data to provide answers to the research questions and new knowledge and understanding. This is highly relevant to my thesis and will help provide insights into family group experiences using a 'whole family' methodology to ensure all family members over the age of six years are given equal opportunities to participate (Schänzel, 2010). Interpretative research focuses more strongly on the subjective epistemological paradigm approach to research data collection and analysis compared with that of an objective nature (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This is an important aspect of my research thesis as it allows for multiple truths and opinions which are collected through interviews and then interpreted by myself as the researcher.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Children are an important part of this research as they are integral members and decision makers in a family unit. The 'whole family' approach to data collection is not used enough in tourism research where children have rights to be heard (Schänzel, 2010). According to Schänzel and Yeoman (2014), "research in family tourism is limited, fragmented, and individualised, thus not accounting for the diversity of family forms, sociality of family groups and multidimensionality of family experiences" (p.343). Gender, age, and social connectedness within the family group are all important considerations for this thesis. Their experiences from a visit to Auckland Zoo is likely to differ significantly from the adults within their family group. As argued by Stainton (2022), visiting a zoo enables them to receive a formal educational experience/encounter with wildlife tourism. Such encounters can potentially provide children with insightful education on such issues as animal welfare and environmental sustainability.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews enables a gathering of linguistic-rich data. This is different from quantitative data collection methods which focus on gathering data presented mostly as numerical statistics. It investigates the 'what', 'how' and 'why' questions, providing an in-depth set of data to seek answers to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Knox & Burkard, 2009; Stiles, 1993). The use of open-ended questions which are pre-determined before data collection begins, enables the collection of semi-uniformed themes across data which can be compared in the data

analysis stage of the research (Knox & Burkard, 2009). It further ensures the participant's freedom to voice their thoughts and experiences in their own words (Blackstone, 2018). Interview questions therefore should not be at all leading towards a predictable answer to avoid any potential researcher bias (Altinay et al., 2015). Semi-structured interviews allow some flexibility to the researcher allowing points of interest to be probed and explored. This ensures a wide scope of emerging themes (pre-existing or new) and variable recollections/stories from the participants (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

In developing the questions for the interviews, careful consideration was given to ensure the questions asked were going to provide data to answer the research questions and fulfil the aim and objectives of the thesis (Gill et al., 2008). The main interview questions were the same for each interview but served the purpose of an interview guide, as each interview tended to be different (see Appendix A). As shown in Appendix A, the questions were the same, but the sequence changed in each interview to try and make for a friendly and informal discussion.

During the interview process, probing questions were used to follow up on the interview questions, to elicit more detailed information relative to the research topic/aim (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). Such questions as 'why is.... your favourite animal?' 'Can you tell me more.....?' 'So just to clarify.....?' The order of the questions were asked differently for some interviews to ensure a good flow of conversation (Altinay et al., 2015). Some questions (see Appendix A) were more specifically targeted at children to address the inequalities in communication levels that naturally exist between children and adults.

The interview location was decided by me, the researcher after several days of non-participant observation. For each family group interview, the location was within the outdoor seating area outside the main café. This location was not chosen due to its lack of surrounding noise and distractions, but primarily due to its popularity as a resting place for family groups to enjoy a snack or meal (Blackstone, 2018; Gill et al., 2008). Prior to using the café as a meeting point, I tried recruiting participants outside the ticket entrance. Although a lot of interest was shown and potential participants were given a small handout with a brief description of my research and my contact phone number, none of them contacted me during their visit to meet for an interview. The benefits of

conducting the interviews on-site during or towards the end of the family group visit was the ability to gain more reflective emotive responses which are captured 'in the moment' and therefore giving the data authentic context to the experiences shared (Bardon & Harding, 1981). One of the benefits from a researcher who is not employed by the organisation, is the removal of any hesitation from the participants to make comments about things they were not so happy with or for which they could see areas of improvement.

Each interview was recorded on an audio dictation device with the participants' permission. The ability to record the interviews allowed for me as sole researcher to focus on giving all participants their undivided attention. I was able to make field notes immediately following each interview particularly noting any body language and general visual demeanours shown by the participants. Body-language and other forms of non-verbal communication are important adjuncts to the semi-structured interview process (Knox & Burkard, 2009). It also allowed for an accurate transcription of the interview which was an important initial process in the data analysis (Blackstone, 2018). Non-verbal communication provides a greater contextual meaning to the visitor experiences being shared.

3.2.2 Field notes

Field notes are an important element of interviews and were taken before, during, and after the data collection from interviews (Altinay et al., 2015). I visited the zoo over a three-week period (4-24 April, 2022) for observation, to familiarise myself with the setting. I spent time observing family groups and how they interacted with each other during their visits. I took note of the signage and interpretation throughout the enclosures and pathways, to gain a good knowledge of the type of interpretation offered. My initial observations were important in deciding on the best place to position myself initially with my signs and the most suitable interview location.

Each day I was on location with the purposes of conducting interviews, I took notes of the crowd size, weather, patterns of family groups, and any other relevant factors which contributed to either a successful recruitment day or one in which a lack of interest in participation resulted in no interviews. Observation and the taking of relevant notes prior to conducting the data analysis equips the researcher with a solid background

knowledge about the location and visitor typology (Altinay et al., 2015). Although field notes were made from non-participant observation, it was not a data collection method deemed necessary for the analysis stage of my project. Rather, a preparation step to ensure as a researcher I had a deeper understanding and empathy towards the participants used for the interviews.

3.2.3 Sampling criteria

Due to the random recruitment of participants, the sampling process is one which involves nonprobability sampling (Blackstone, 2018). This method of sampling is unpredictable and those selected may or may not be an accurate representation of the larger population (Blackstone, 2018). This is an acceptable sampling method to use in exploratory qualitative research, where the aim of the research is to gain an in-depth understanding of a smaller number of participants versus a more generalised nomothetic data collection as seen in quantitative research (Lewis, 2015).

In accordance with ethics requirements, recruitment of participants was achieved by using a sign to gain initial interest of family groups. Initially a large A1 sign was used, close to the ticketing entrance to attract attention and initialise possible interviewee discussions (see Appendix B). If a family group was interested in taking part of my research, they were given an A5 pamphlet with a brief description and my contact details to arrange a time and meeting place at a suitable time (see Appendix C). The sign was effective in raising curiosity and interest, however no families made further contact to proceed with interviews. As previously mentioned, from information gathered through initial observations, I decided to move my position to an area beside the main café where family groups were more settled and taking time together for a rest and refreshments. I replaced the A1 sign with a smaller A3 sign (see Appendices B & D) which had coloured photos of animal families. This was successful in attracting children to have a closer look and as a result their accompanying parents/caregivers. Recruitment was instant at the area near the main café and attracted much interest when family groups appeared more relaxed and willing to spend time being interviewed.

Once information sheets, consent/assent forms were completed, a range of snacks, colouring books, nature puzzle books, and play doh were offered to the family group as a koha for their time and effort given. These proved to be successful methods of gaining

an initial rapport with all participants (Gill et al., 2008). The play doh especially aided the creativity of the children within the family groups and acted as a conversation starter as well as keeping the children busy with an activity during the interview (see Figure 3 below). It allowed for a unique perspective into the children's perceived experiences during their visit. It also allowed for a more active and creative participation in the research process (Canosa et al., 2016).

Figure 3

Examples of play doh creations of animals by children during interviews at Auckland Zoo



Interviews were conducted on weekend days and school holidays to ensure a wide range of family groups were present. Due to much adverse weather and limited older children visiting on Saturdays (mainly attributed to participation in school sport programmes), the interviews were conducted over a period of 2.5 months. The interviewing commenced on May 13, 2022 and the final interview was undertaken on July 30, 2022. In total, there were seven family group interviews, comprising 36 participants: 17 adults (12 female and 5 male) and 19 children (9 girls and 10 boys between the ages of 6-17). Table 1 below gives a full list and description and profile of all participants. Each family was interviewed together with every member, including children over the age of six being encouraged to participate. This aligns with research by Stafford et al. (2003), acknowledging that children have a right to be included and 'heard' in the research process. This is particularly pertinent for this research thesis focusing on 'whole family'

research (Schänzel, 2010). Data collection was ceased upon deciding that sufficient in-depth data had been obtained to provide detailed and varied answers to the research questions, which met the rationale for this thesis.

3.2.4 Sampling profile

As mentioned, a total of 36 participants took part in the data collection phase of this project. They participated by their own free choice and interest from my display poster. The family groups were diverse in their compositions and motivations for their visit. Several family groups were multi-generational with many using their visit to catch up with family members residing in domestic locations outside the Auckland region. All family members, except one, had previously visited Auckland Zoo, with varying degrees of regularity. One family were seasonal ticket holders and all others paid for their entry each visit.

The family compositions are shown below in Table 1. Each family group is assigned a pseudonym, in this case a native NZ bird, insect, or reptile. The initial bracket after each participant is the shorthand initials of their position within the family group used in the following chapters. The children's ages are provided after the initials mentioned above.

Table 1*Participant Profiles*

FAMILY GROUP COMPOSITION	HOMETOWN LOCATION	TIME SINCE LAST VISIT	TICKET TYPE
Tui			
Grandmother (GM)	Auckland	20 years	One day family pass
Mother (M)	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Daughter (D) - 8	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Son (S) – 6	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Cousin (C) – 6	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Kererū			
Father (F)	Auckland	1 month	Annual family pass
Mother (M)	Auckland	1 month	Annual family pass
Daughter (D) - 16	Auckland	1 month	Annual family pass
Son (S) - 10	Auckland	1 month	Annual family pass
Fantail			
Grandmother (GM)	Dargaville	10 years	One day family pass
Aunty#1 (A1)	Whangarei	15 years	One day family pass
Aunty#2 (A2)	Whangarei	12 years	One day family pass
Son (S) - 6	Palmerston North	2 years	One day family pass
Tuatara			
Mother (M)	Hamilton	18 months	One day family pass
Son (S) - 8	Hamilton	18 months	One day family pass
Daughter (D) - 12	Hamilton	18 months	One day family pass
Aunty (A)	Wellington	3 years	One day family pass
Uncle (U)	Wellington	3 years	One day family pass
Niece (N) - 6	Wellington	3 years	One day family pass
Nephew (Ne) - 8	Wellington	3 years	One day family pass
Kea			
Mother (M)	Auckland	First visit	One day family pass
Daughter#1 (D1) - 14	Auckland	First visit	One day family pass
Daughter#2 (D2) - 12	Auckland	First visit	One day family pass
Daughter#3 (D3) - 9	Auckland	First visit	One day family pass
Son (S) - 6	Auckland	First visit	One day family pass

FAMILY GROUP COMPOSITION	HOMETOWN LOCATION	TIME SINCE LAST VISIT	TICKET TYPE
Takahē			
Grandfather (GF)	Mount Maunganui	1 year	One day family pass
Grandmother (GM)	Mount Maunganui	1 year	One day family pass
Father (F)	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Mother (M)	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Son#1 (S1) - 14	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Son#2 (S2) - 12	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Son#3 (S3) - 8	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Daughter (D) - 6	Auckland	6 months	One day family pass
Wetapunga			
Grandfather (GF)	Auckland	8 months	One day senior pass
Step-Grandmother (GM)	Auckland	8 months	One day senior pass
Granddaughter (GD) – 10	Auckland	7 months	One day child pass

Despite the small number of participants used in the data collection, the number is valid due to the in-depth interviews obtained and time spent building a good rapport and ease of discussion with the families interviewed. A smaller number of participants/interviews allowed for more in-depth probing, resulting in more insightful, reflective, and authentic data (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). As argued by Crouch and McKenzie (2006), quality of the interviews is often more of a consideration than quantity in qualitative research, to gain insightful meanings and understanding of the participants experience.

3.2.5 Data analysis

The main aim of data analysis in any research thesis is to condense a large amount of information into concise and informative portions. This information needs to be presented and explained in common themed patterns (Blackstone, 2018). The use of thematic analysis supports the relativist ontological approach to this thesis, acknowledging that there are many truths to be gathered from the data, allowing for flexibility and subjectivity in the analysis process. In this way there are no strictly correct or incorrect findings. (Terry et al., 2017).

Thematic Analysis of Core Categories and Themes

As defined by Vaismoradi et al. (2016) a theme is “used as attribute, descriptor, element, and concept. As an implicit topic that organises a group of repeating ideas, it enables researchers to answer the research thesis question. It contains codes that have a common point of reference and has a high degree of generality that unifies ideas regarding the subject of inquiry” (p.101). The formation of themes requires interpretation of the participants’ thoughts and experiences by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this reason, it is a subjective, interpretative, and constructive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Theme formation is a reiterative method of data analysis, requiring the researcher to follow a cyclical analysis of the coded data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Formation and criteria for the development of a theme can be dependent on its uniqueness compared with existing literature, its relationship with other codes/themes, and its relative importance to the phenomena being researched (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). As mentioned above with semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis provides the researcher with flexibility while providing in depth and meaningful data which can be related directly to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2019) outline six phases required for an effective reflexive-based thematic analysis in qualitative research (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4

The six phases of Thematic Analysis



Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006).

The initial phase of familiarisation involves reading through the transcripts and writing down casual notes that provide points of interest and any possible common threads that may initially be evident. The second phase is the generation of codes where a more focused approach to the data set groups is required. Any data deemed significant in answering the research question is placed into groups that share similar meaning and context. The next phase involves the construction of codes into sub-themes and themes. During this phase, editing of the data sets determines what information is relevant to the thesis topic and starts to form a logical story with links to an overall core theme

(Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Any data which is irrelevant to the research question should be discarded during this phase (Terry et al., 2017).

Thematic mapping using flow diagrams to show the inter-relationships between codes and themes is a useful tool at this stage to identify patterns and condensing data sets into common themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The next two phases require the revising and defining of the themes. These phases ensure all data sets within themes are relevant to the core concept of each theme by comparing and re-checking their relationship with the entire transcript contents. During this phase, the researcher identifies direct quotes from participants which help define the themes and answer the research question. Carefully chosen quotes provide compelling evidence to the researcher's argument (Terry et al., 2017). The final phase involves writing the report and if necessary, making any final adjustments to the themes and researcher interpretation, ensuring they answer the research question in a robust and transparent fashion. The reiterative process described above allows for the researcher to establish a detailed immersion and engagement with the data (Terry et al., 2017). Initially coding is on a semantic (surface) level but towards the final phases of analysis, the themes are more latent (incorporate researcher concepts and assumptions) in their orientation and meaning (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016; Terry et al., 2017). As explained by Connelly and Peltzer (2016), thematic analysis should ultimately "bring out what is meaningful from the data, to explore relationships between ideas, and to offer insights into the data" (p.52).

Phase One: Familiarisation.

The first stage of thematic analysis started with me transcribing each interview word for word within 2-3 days of each interview. This allowed for recollection of key points and general demeanour of participants throughout each interview. Once all transcriptions were completed, I printed out each interview allowing a wide margin on the right-hand side to make initial notes of my interpretation of the data. I methodically focused on each sentence and where appropriate, gave my perception and interpretation of each participant's comments. This initial stage of the data analysis allowed me to totally immerse myself in the data and started the initial coding and theming process.

Phase Two: Initial Coding

Before starting phase two, I re-read through the interview transcripts and notes made during the first phase. Any new ideas or thoughts were made, and initial common codes/themes were written in my research journal as a list. I then printed out a second copy of the interview transcripts and underlined statements that corresponded to a specific code. At this stage there were no pre-determined codes or limits on the number of codes used. I made the decision to use manual coding for my complete data analysis versus using computer aided software programs such as NVivo. These programs are more useful with larger amounts of qualitative data. Once initial coding was completed, I used large blank pages with each part of the research question as the page header. I then grouped the codes under the most relevant research question.

Phase Three: Formation of sub-themes and themes.

Using the pages created in phase two, I then condensed and combined the codes into common or similar themes. I used different coloured highlighters initially to group similar codes together. The similar codes were then listed manually on separate pages of my research journal and any codes or sub-themes which were closely related were combined into a more incorporative and general theme. At this stage, some codes deemed irrelevant to the research question/aim were discarded. The theme choice was not just on those common recurring pieces of data, but also more importantly on anything of interest providing new knowledge or insight. The focus at this stage was ensuring the significant and unique input from children was included as a sub-theme or theme. Each theme was then thematically mapped to show their relationship with the final chosen themes. An example of the thematic map for the themes/sub-themes is shown below for nature-connectedness in Figure 5 (below).

Figure 5

Example of initial subthemes relating to final general theme of nature connectedness.



Figure 5 (above) shows one of the initial chosen main themes (nature connectedness) and the sub-themes initially chosen from my transcript interpretations. I did this for each main theme initially (see Figure 6 below).

Phases Four & Five: Revising and defining themes.

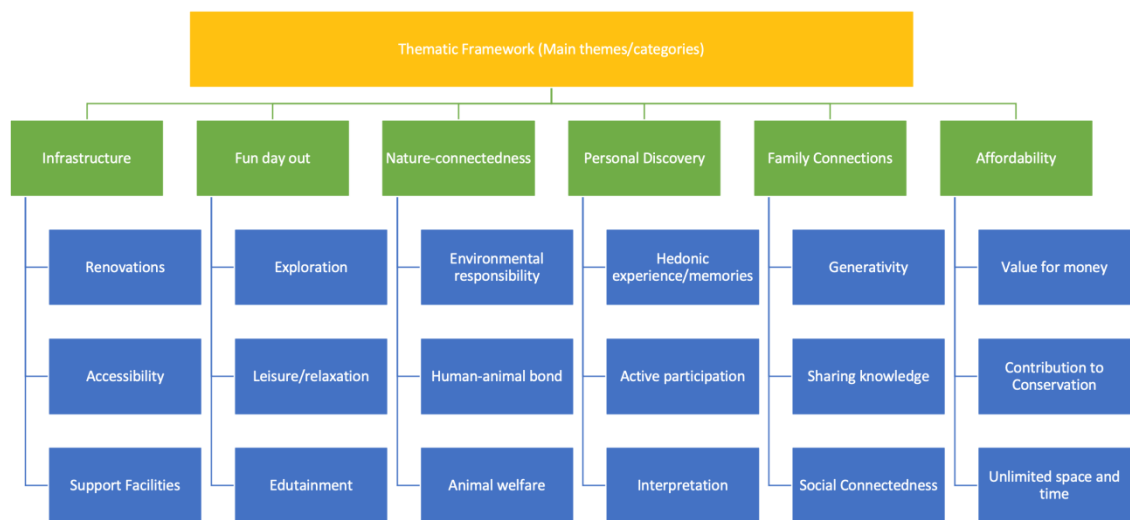
Revising and defining themes is a dynamic iterative process throughout the entire research data collection, analysis, and writing of the research thesis. As part of the initial process, once coding and initial sub-themes were created as described above, I then reviewed and highlighted the most compelling and appropriate quotes to support the emerging main themes. The quotes chosen were checked against the research aims and questions to ensure they provided a robust argument supporting my interpretation of the data collected. During this phase, I further combined sub-themes with similar or overlapping meanings, so each general theme had three sub-themes which became the headings for my findings and discussion (Chapter 4 & 5).

The example given above in Figure 5, was condensed to include only three sub-themes as shown in the thematic map below in Figure 6. The sub-themes I decided to exclude from the thematic map were: authentic natural experience, respect, and sustainability. They were close to other sub-themes and combined under other headings. I did this for all the main themes which resulted in a total of three sub-themes only. Some of the sub-themes were combined under the same original theme and others were included or combined with a sub-theme with a different main theme (see Figure 6 below). One of

the sub-themes (hedonic) was combined with a different sub-theme related to the general theme of 'personal discovery'. This was changed after writing the findings whereby most of the comments around personal discovery involved a positive and enjoyable experience. Similarly, sustainability data was recorded and grouped under the environmental responsibility sub-theme. Finally, respect became part of the human-animal bond and therefore was moved to support the data in that section.

Figure 6

Thematic Framework: General themes and sub-themes.



As shown above in Figure 6, the six main themes are shaded in green, and each theme has three sub-themes (shaded in blue) totalling 18 sub-themes. The sub-themes were changed as part of the ongoing iterative phase during the data analysis as some comments blended into several options.

Phase Six: Writing the report and iterative adjustments.

This phase incorporates all the preceding phases and is one of the most important to the final findings and conclusions from the thesis. It was an ongoing process that allowed for constant reflection and questioning of the meaning of data sets and their significance. Given the time frame and robust data collected from family interviews, I decided that staff interviews were beyond the scope of this thesis and by using the Auckland Zoo's stated mission, vision, and values, the main aim of the research could be adequately answered.

3.3 Limitations

3.3.1 Potential bias and reflexivity

The interpretative paradigm used in this qualitative research is subject to bias from the researcher's own opinions and ability to understand the participants' comments and intent (Stiles, 1993). The researcher bias stems from the subjective nature of the data collection and the effect of their own thoughts, beliefs, background, experiences, and perceptions on the answers given by the participants (Stiles, 1993; Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

Reliability is an important consideration closely related to reflexivity. As defined by Stiles (1993), reliability refers to the "trustworthiness of observation or data; validity refers to the trustworthiness of interpretations or conclusions" (p.601). Instead, reflexivity is where researchers "openly acknowledge the influence that the relationship among the researchers, the research topic and subjects may have on the results" (Kitto et al., 2008, p. 245). The researcher needs to put to one side their previous knowledge and mindset about the central questions being asked to minimise their influence/bias on the data collected (Knox & Burkard, 2009; Terry et al., 2017).

I limited any potential researcher bias by focusing on my current role as a researcher on family tourism. Although having a vet nurse qualification and previous work experience at Auckland Zoo I did not inform the participants of my previous connections. My interpretation of the participants' comments was based on my knowledge gained from a thorough literature research completed prior to commencing the interview process. The data analysis was done manually as explained in Section 3.2.5. This may have added more researcher subjective bias compared with the NVivo software. As this was my first research thesis conducted and a relatively small and manageable data set, I felt more comfortable using manual methods of data analysis. As children's comments were quite different from adults, I feel that by analysing the data manually, I was able to gain a better perspective and interpret their cognitive functioning. The interview style with children was a casual discussion and did cause the interviews to go off topic sometimes. Letting children just talk produced some of the most valuable data.

3.3.2 Sample frame bias

As argued by Altinay et al. (2015), any samples, regardless of the total number, will deviate to some extent from representing what is truly representative of the generalised population. This is commonly referred to as sampling error and no research escapes it. The social composition of family groups is complex and incorporates many different socio-cultural factors. The sample bias thus cannot guarantee complete validity of the thesis but rather, provide insight on children's input to the research and incorporating the 'whole family' approach. This research aimed to gather in-depth data from a small sample size, which by no means is representative of all family group visitors to a zoo. This is why qualitative thematic analysis is the most appropriate way to analyse the data as it looks for common patterns and themes (Altinay et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the sampling method I used could be described as a form of 'convenience sampling' whereby participants are chosen because of their convenient accessibility (Altinay et al., 2015). Due to recruitment being done at times when family groups were more likely to visit the zoo, that being weekends and school holidays, this may introduce a degree of sampling bias and exclusion of such family groups as tourists, and home-schooled children. . Due to the semi-structured interview as the data collection method, non-English speaking families, despite being representative as part of the general population, were excluded. The sampling method was also self-selecting in many aspects as due to ethical considerations, participants could not be actively approached and would have to indicate their interest to the researcher before any initial conversation took place about recruitment. In this way, much of the control of sampling was beyond my control as the researcher (Altinay et al., 2015).

3.3.3 Ethical considerations

Evaluative rigour takes into account any ethical or socio-political processes that are applied to the data collection and analysis (Kitto et al., 2008). Ethical approval was required for this thesis in collaboration with the AUTEK and Auckland Zoo management to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants and Auckland Zoo operations were maintained (see Appendix E). A detailed information sheet was given to one adult within the family group providing a brief purpose and outline of the thesis (See Appendix F).

As defined by Blackstone (2018), informed consent is “a subject’s voluntary agreement to participate in research, based on a full understanding of the research and of the possible risks and benefits involved” (p.29). Although children may be considered more vulnerable participants, this is no grounds for excluding them from taking part in the research process, if extra consent and assent protocols are followed (Blackstone, 2018). A consent form was given to each adult within each family group (See Appendix G). A separate parent/guardian consent form was given to an adult within each family group to sign permission to interview any children between the ages of 6-17 (See Appendix H). As a mark of respect and to achieve power equality, all children were verbally explained the purpose of the interview questions and be asked for their verbal consent which were duly recorded on the consent form. This aligns with research by Stafford et al. (2003) acknowledging that children have a right to be included and ‘heard’ in the research process. This is particularly pertinent for this research thesis focusing on children's inclusion in tourism research, using a ‘whole family’ methodology (Schänzel, 2010).

3.4 Personal Reflection

The comprehensive literature review I undertook at the beginning of this thesis highlighted the gap in the literature and hence the need for further research. Initial observations were invaluable in gathering background information to prepare me for the family group interviews. Listening to some of the family conversations at various enclosures and the ticket entry confirmed some of the literature whereby children had a major influence on decision making within the family group. Seeing families of all generational backgrounds and compositions, confirmed the need to conduct ‘whole family’ research to include all stakeholders.

I found recruiting family groups initially difficult despite a large amount of interest shown. This was due to several factors including adverse weather conditions, the unpredictable energy levels of children, concentration capacities, dynamics of all family group members, and day of the week/weekend. Trying to encourage family groups to contact me for an interview prior to exiting was not conducive, as by the time the family had decided to leave, they were ready to go home. For this reason, after a couple of unsuccessful initial recruitment days, the plan to create interest near the main café was a success. This was the main rest area where most families stopped for a break and food

during or towards the end of their visit. The children especially were much more settled then at the beginning or end of their visit and the initial excitement/stress of organising the day had dissipated.

The use of signage to gain initial interest was useful. Interestingly, having changed the initial larger A1 sign to a smaller A3 with pictures and colour added attracted the children, closely followed by their parents/caregivers. The photos of an adult rhino and baby and an adult orangutang and baby was a great way to engage with the children and establish initial rapport (see Appendix D). I had the mini play doh kits on display on top of the sign, which also generated much initial interest from inquisitive children.

I learned a lot about the interview process after my first family participants and found the interviews flowed well and were more of a friendly conversation. The offers of play doh, colouring books, and snacks was invaluable for gaining a quick rapport with the participants. The play doh was a great conversation starter as well keeping the children occupied in one place that encouraged all family members to contribute. During the interviews I did not take any notes but rather gave my full attention and focus to the participants. Transcribing each interview, myself within a few days, was invaluable for initial immersion into the data and the beginning of the analysis process. The interviews were all clearly audible on the recording device and the outside location at the seated area proved to be free of background interference.

One of the frustrations with the participant recruitment and interviews was the random nature and composition of family groups. It was not possible for the purposes of this project to choose a broad spectrum of family group compositions, based on race, membership status, or location. However, for the purposes of learning the research process I feel the number of participants was sufficient to provide valuable and emerging themes. The inclusion of the children and their input to the data made this thesis different from other available literature and I do believe has addressed a gap in leisure tourism research which I hope will encourage further inclusion of children's perceptions in the future. One of the things I mentioned to the children when introducing myself and briefly explaining the purpose of my interview, was that they as a large proportion of all zoo visitors are the experts, therefore their opinions and thoughts are very important.

The thematic analysis process was the best choice for my research project. The six phases as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) followed a logical process. The relatively small sample size allowed me to code, theme, and categorise the main concepts manually and was a good introduction to performing a detailed but concise data analysis. Having done some training on the automated software NVivo prior to beginning my data collection, I was aware of some advantages the program offered, but feel confident I have followed all steps to reach an appropriate level of findings and conclusions to answer the research question.

Finally, one of the biggest challenges with my project, was to limit my personal bias in interpreting and giving meaning to the participants' comments. It was tempting to predict the nature of the comments and possible emerging themes and avoiding this was at times difficult.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the main purpose of the thesis, which primarily was to address a gap in the literature surrounding 'whole family' group experiences at Auckland Zoo and comparing the family group experiences with the zoo's strategic objectives and welfare goals. Focus was specifically on the inclusion and importance of children's opinions and thoughts. After careful consideration, a constructivist-interpretivist approach was used in the thesis design. Semi-structured interviews were the main method of data collection used, with a total of seven families interviewed, comprising 19 children and 17 adults. Thematic analysis was chosen as the most appropriate data analysis method to best answer the research question and satisfy the thesis objectives and aims. Qualitative interpretative research, despite all efforts from the researcher, does not escape some form of research bias and possible limitations to this were suggested. Ethical considerations are an important part of any research design and particularly pertinent in this thesis with the inclusion of children as participants. Ethical approval was obtained from AUTEK in May 2022 and all recommendations strictly adhered to throughout the entire thesis process. Given the subjective nature of qualitative research and constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, my personal reflection added some rigour and reflexivity to my project, which aims to benefit me, as the primary researcher and those who read this thesis.

Chapter 4 Findings

This chapter provides a detailed explanation with supported quotes from the seven family interviews conducted for data collection for this thesis. Although focusing on the ‘whole family’ approach to the thesis, in particular quotes from children participants predominate. As outlined in Section 3.2.5, six main themes and 18 sub-themes were formed as part of the thematic analysis methodology (see Figure 6 on page 54). Firstly, the theme ‘infrastructure’ is discussed. Secondly, the findings relevant to the theme ‘fun day out’ are summarised. Following this, quotes and interpretation for ‘nature connectedness’ gained by participants from their zoo experience is provided. Focus is then shifted to a more individual experience of the participants where the fourth theme ‘personal discovery’ gives examples of how the zoo visit affected or contributed towards, the participants’ overall satisfaction. This is followed by data specifically supporting benefits of the visit for family cohesiveness under the theme ‘family connections’. Finally, the theme ‘affordability’ presents opinions from all participants about whether their zoo experience provided them with a perceived value for money. All the data presented in this chapter seek to answer the three research questions as described in Section 1.2. The quotes and paraphrases provided to support the findings are followed by the family name and the participant’s position within the family unit in brackets as displayed in Table 1 (on page 48).

4.1 Infrastructure

4.1.1 Renovations

All families commented at some stage of the interview about the current ongoing renovations at Auckland Zoo. They found some positive and negative consequences from the large infrastructural improvements and upgrades. Family Tui (GM) felt that possibly more up to date informative signage and mapping would be beneficial to limit confusion, due to the frequent changes. *“I think probably it could be better signage before the renovations because there is a lot of building, so it’s confusing”* – Tui (GM). One of the main points raised by several family groups was the limits of continuous flow and accessibility around the zoo due to the ongoing renovations. Despite the disruptions, most participants were understanding and enjoyed the changes thus far.

The two regular family group visitors looked forward with anticipation to the new additions and improvements with each visit. It stimulated a level of curiosity and sense of exploratory adventure.

4.1.2 Accessibility

Accessibility was one of the common sub-themes emerging from the adults, in particular the grandparents and those who were the group driver. Car park availability was mentioned as an issue by every family group. Some did not have an issue, as they appreciated there was no easy or quick solution given the lack of space available to expand car parking options. Due to the zoo being conveniently located adjacent to Western Springs and MOTAT, in general people accepted that they often faced a lengthy walk from their car to the zoo entrance.

You can't fix that, but I know when the kids were little, parking was a bit of a nightmare because you've got to get the buggy and everything...and the toddler so it was a big drama, but yeah...what can they do? It's the location – Kererū (M).

This comment suggested that the limited parking contributed to some of the anticipatory anxiety in the planning phases of the family zoo visit.

Mobility was of particular concern for Tui (GM) who was using crutches, having sustained a broken arm and a sprained knee from a previous fall. She felt that the mobility scooters were not suitable for her with only one viable arm.

I was going to borrow the mobility scooter but then I realised I can't ride it with one arm. So, I was thinking in terms of mobility....it would be really good if they had another mobility place further down so people who are old like me who get to the bottom and think oh heck, how am I going to get up - Tui (GM).

Despite mobility issues, she did think the general ease of getting around the zoo was straightforward and paths were easy to follow.

Several adults within different family groups commented on the sufficient rest areas spread throughout the zoo complex. However, some also highlighted the lack of covered rest areas to protect against weather elements such as rain, wind, and sun, though rain was not mentioned as a hindrance to motivations to visit the zoo for personal purposes.

The Kea family was more concerned that the rain might cause animals to seek shelter and not be as easily visible.

And that's why we thought we couldn't have a rainy day because all the animals would be hiding - Kea (M).

One family (Kererū) lived close to the zoo which was one of the main reasons they visited on average once a month and up to once a week when the children were younger. Accessibility therefore was the main pull motivation for their continued loyalty, providing reliability to entertain the 'whole family'. They considered the zoo to be an iconic Auckland attraction and an integral part of their community. They felt it offered something for everyone and had an inclusive aspect for all sectors of the surrounding community. Kererū (F) went as far as suggesting Auckland Zoo to be a crucial contribution to Auckland's inner-city infrastructure.

Fantail (GM) made an interesting comment regarding accessibility and her frequency of visits. Her last visit was ten years ago, as she lives in Dargaville. She commented that if she lived in Auckland, she would purchase an annual pass and visit often.

Support Facilities

All families agreed that the support facilities available around the zoo complex increased and improved over time. In fact, most adults suggested that support facilities were the most significant improvement. They are an important adjunct to ensuring a fun family day out. Refreshment locations, buildings, and a variety of available choices were the most dominant positive change. Rest areas and toilet utilities were also mentioned often as being of an acceptable to good standard.

Probably better toilet facilities and better refreshment facilities. There are places to sit and relax sort of (pause)...to take a break – Tui (GM).

Volunteers were often mentioned in a positive light with respect to ease of accessibility and sufficient resources on hand to help with their day. Tui (GM) found the advice from volunteers helpful with finding exhibits and tracks throughout their visit. Several families mentioned the fact that the volunteers would often approach them in non-threatening ways to offer support and assistance.

There was a lovely volunteer up at... it must have been up where the bird aviary was, and she guided us. It would be good to have another one down like where the rainforest is - Tui (GM).

When families were asked about what kind of improvements would make their experience better, many referred to infrastructure and support facilities. Some suggestions were practical while others, especially from the younger children, tended to be creative and based on what they had experienced at other attractions and in books/digital media.

Rollercoasters, and rides to go underwater but you don't get wet. – Tui (C).

Kererū (M) felt that the supporting facilities were adequate, however rather than having such a large centrally located café, it would be ideal to have more spread around the zoo to avoid queues. She included the 'dotting around' of other supporting facilities/attractions such as mobility aids, restrooms, covered rest areas, picnic tables, and playground areas.

I know we'll walk for a bit and then we'll go...come on we'll go to the playground. And then we'll walk for a bit and the kids will play on the pagoda or whatever it is called.... and then we'll walk for a bit and there is the playground by the monkeys...and we'll talk for a bit and then there is an ice cream stand...so having things dotted around is fantastic – Tuatara (M).

Several families commented on the variety of food available in the main cafeteria and were pleased to see child friendly options as well as a choice between traditional café 'treat food' versus more healthy options.

The Takahē family bought their own food to have a picnic in the main rest area outside the café. They commented on how they appreciated the zoo supporting this activity with a bag area near the entrance where they could leave their food and extra clothing. They felt this was a measure of goodwill as this facility encouraged people to bring their own food and store it, so they had easy accessibility around the exhibits. It removed some of the pre-visit anxiety of having to carry around everything they had brought. Despite bringing most of their own food, part of their visit included buying ice-creams as a 'treat'.

4.2 Fun Day Out

Enjoying a fun family day out together was the most common aim of all the family groups. Clearly, the comments indicated that happy children equate with happy adults and thus a happy family experience. The parents and other adult family members all agreed that the zoo visit provided an excellent opportunity to get everyone out of the house and away from their usual routine, which often involved mention of children spending a significant amount of solitary time at home on their digital devices.

Yep, there is a shocking lack of Minecraft (laughter) - Takahē (F).

The zoo experience gave the family an opportunity to interact together through the sensory experiences and sharing of food and treats.

4.2.1 Exploration

A common emerging sub-theme in the data was from the several comments made by adults within the groups about how observing the animals, especially with respect to seeking out their 'favourite' animals, was not a priority for most. This was in high contrast to children when asked the same question and their responses were emphatic and expressive.

When children were asked what they enjoyed the most about the day, they initially referred to the visual observation of their favourite animal(s). Several children commented that they were enjoying spending time with their families. The most popular animal mentioned by children was the flamingo, followed by primates (orangutans, baboons, spider monkeys), kiwis, rhinos, giraffes, elephants, meerkats, and otters.

Because it's nice and colourful.....and it's beautiful and reminds me of my Mum – Tui (D).

This comment was in response to asking Tui (D) why she liked flamingos the most. In the Tuatara family groups, three out of the four children interviewed liked observing the flamingos the most. The reasons given included that they were 'extra special' and 'so goofy'.

I know (um) we were particularly excited about seeing the flamingos...they are a particular drawcard I think for these two kids - Tuatara (A).

Interestingly, both her children had designed flamingos from the play doh given to the families at the beginning of the interview. Despite only having one colour each (not pink), they still designed their favourite animal. Another child modelled the play doh into a red-tailed lemur using blue to clearly depict the 'red rings' for which the lemur is famous for and aptly named after. This is shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7

Play Doh model of red-tailed lemur.



Children were most attracted to animals that were active and had unique and distinguishing features and characteristics; for example, the pink colour of the flamingos and their ability to stand on one leg for long periods. Two of the younger children participants made joking references to the standout rear end of the baboons.

We saw the red bum bum (giggling) – Tui (S).

Kea (D1) was fascinated with the zebras and the fact that each zebra had its own unique patterns as likened to human fingerprints.

All family groups mentioned one of their main priorities/motivations/expectations from their visit was to observe the newest species addition – the tiger. Only one family saw the tiger, while the others expressed their disappointment in their expectations not being met. Many acknowledged this was due to tigers being nocturnal animals, who tend to spend most of the day resting. The children especially were disappointed, and the Kererū (S) came up with a creative practical suggestion to ensure the Tiger could be visible during the day:

One thing they could do to make it better would be to remove the bed from the Tiger cage...remove the bed during the day and put the bed back at night (laughter) - Kererū (S).

I was wondering (um) ...why tigers need so much grass? Why are they so lazy? - Takahē (S2).

The comments showed a lack of understanding as to why the tiger and some other animals, were not always visible. The adults were more aware of the reasons and came up with more logical and practical suggestions.

I think it would be useful if there was a video playing of what the Tiger looked like when it was walking around, so we could at least see that - Takahē (GM).

The Takahē children thought this was a good idea however said they would rather see the tiger in 'real life'.

4.2.2 Leisure/relaxation

One of the most important aspects of the leisure experience, according to the respondents, was the playgrounds and interactive displays. In some cases, the playgrounds were as popular as the animals and one of the first activities children wanted to do. This was evident in initial observations made at the entrance, as well as highlights mentioned. Several adults commented on the playground providing a form of exercise for the children, as well as allowing the adults a rest/break from entertaining

them. Several adults also pointed out that playgrounds provide the younger children, under six years old, with activities to occupy their interest. Tuatara (M) pointed out that the animals and exhibits are not always as appealing for younger children. She suggested more playgrounds spread around the complex would provide an entertainment balance for all members of the family.

I think half the appeal of coming to a place like this is the playground kind of stuff. Especially with the kids – because they are very active. Because what happens for this guy at age four (pointing to youngest son) is still a lot that he can't see... I don't know if it's just lack of trying or just height or just people getting in the way. He's just like, definitely a playground person - Tuatara (M).

Expanding on the discussion around the popularity of playgrounds, the Tuatara family all contributed to ideas about improvements. These included trees to climb, tunnels, and swings.

The Meerkats were a hit – (D1) did like the little meerkats and the tunnel you could go under and feel like you were in the middle of it - Kea (M).

The Kea family enjoyed the immersive tunnels at the meerkats' enclosure with dome viewing from a ground level perspective. This provided a combination of play, exploration, and unique viewing compared with most other exhibits.

Several families found one of the main benefits of their visit was the expenditure of energy and the opportunity for the family to exercise together.

So, we all get to burn some energy – at all different levels. So, with people bored of the walking, we get to have things along the way that are exciting... like, there may be animals, and then the playground. There might be then some food... you know as you go around there will be different things - Kererū (M).

Some families commented on the suitability of the zoo as a safe environment specifically mentioning for their children. The absence of road traffic and minimal criminal activity were two of the most common mentions as to why a day at the zoo was fun and able to give parents/caregivers peace of mind about their family's safety.

Just kids being able to look at animals walk, run, and be safe. It's a reasonably safe place here. You know there's some places you might

want to go to you know where it's just a safe family place. It's not a place for people to roar around having parties or doing wheelies in the middle of the road. It's just a happy place – Tui (GM).

Similarly, Fantail (GM) felt a sense of community togetherness that is not always seen in large crowd gatherings. The observation of other family groups having a fun day out seemed to have a 'snowball effect' and create positive energy free from any apparent conflicts.

4.2.3 Edutainment

Many children, usually unprompted, commented at some point throughout the interview, how they absolutely loved the zoo. I then asked if they would come back – to which most replied with an emphatic positive response. This suggests that as an entertaining and fun option, the zoo visit did not give them a chance to get bored or that they had stayed too long. It also showed how even children can develop a sense of loyalty to an organisation after a fun and positive experience. One child went so far as to suggest they would come back *"every single day"* -Tui (D).

Most of the adults in all families had a basic understanding of what they believed were the main strategic objectives and welfare goals of zoo management. However, most admitted that their primary pull motivation factor for visiting the zoo, was an entertaining and enjoyable family day out.

I probably should say conservation and education but actually.... it's just fun – Tui (GM).

Although some members of the Takahē family felt conservation was an important role of the zoo, edutainment was the most agreed and popular motivation for their visit.

To see the animals and to give you an understanding of the animals around you and how you can help look after them - Takahē (D).

It's helping conserve species that are endangered...providing people with a small insight into birds and animals from a part of the world most people don't get to see, like jungles, deserts, etc. - Takahē (GM).

Tuatara (S) felt the main role was to protect animals and so people were able to observe the animals and how they acted and behaved. To him, the visual aesthetics and characteristics of the animals were ultimately what motivated people to visit. Tuatara

children (D) felt that education was the main priority, which was supported by her mother.

Educating our kids about animals and habitats and how very similar they are to us and how they deserve our care. Like when you see the orangutans you see the way they interact with each other and the way they eat with their hands. I heard a family say, "oh my goodness it's so weird how they eat with their hands". It's like us...it's like yes – that's the point, that's the whole point of you being able to see them right in front of you...cos, then you can relate to them yourself - Tuatara (M).

4.3 Nature Connectedness

4.3.1 Environmental responsibility

An interesting emerging commonality among the older aged parents and especially grandparents, was their response when asked if they had a change in their attitude and planned behaviours towards conservation and the environment. All but one said that they had not had any significant change in attitude as a direct result of their current visit. Most explained that their age meant that they had saturated their knowledge in terms of environmental sustainability. Children seemed to have fewer comments about environmental responsibility and for some, it was not a consideration during their visit. An example of one of the responses, when asked if their visit had prompted any change in attitudes towards the environment:

I've loved nature most of my life, so not really - Takahē (S3).

Kererū (M) felt she and her family gained active learning about environment and sustainability during their visits, particularly due to the zoo 'leading by example'. She felt that their recycling efforts and environmentally responsible use of materials improved her own recycling attitudes and behaviours. She tried to support other businesses that followed similar conservational and environmentally friendly practices.

But also, other cafes as well...I mean I don't know what other recyclable products are out there because I don't work in the food industry but when I come here, I see that for instance, you can get bamboo forks. - Kererū (M).

Fantail (GM) had a spiritual experience and had a constant reflective smile during the interview. Her last visit was a decade ago and she explained that her last visit was more

of a 'sad experience' with reference to the perceived poor animal welfare and small cage like enclosures. She was particularly enjoying the plants and nature aspect and showed a genuine connection with nature and the environmental provisions within the zoo complex.

I LOVE the way they have done up the enclosures (smile). There has been a lot of thought...from the last time I came to Auckland Zoo which was many years ago. It was quite a sad experience, yet today it is beautiful - Fantail (GM).

Wetapunga (GM) was impressed with the tidiness around the zoo and the different bins for rubbish and food waste. She noticed how the public would pick up and dispose of their rubbish responsibly.

I think it's a lot more environmentally friendly than when I was last here because there are a lot more bins spread out. The waste is separated out – I mean it just reinforces stuff we already know - Wetapunga (GM).

One of the most common environmental behavioural changes mentioned by family groups was the awareness of the damaging effects palm oil extraction has had on wildlife's natural habitats. Two families gave the example of Cadbury Chocolate which the zoo stopped selling 8-10 years ago, due to palm oil being one of the ingredients used. *"Palm oil in nearly absolutely everything – even their pies and their popcorn too. It's probably in their chopping boards (Laugh)"* – Kererū (S). This family found that with the zoo leading by example, i.e., 'walking the talk', they felt compelled to make the same purchasing decisions on an everyday basis.

4.3.2 Human-animal bond

As described in section 4.3.1, the favourite animal species overall for the children participants was the flamingo. Another animal mentioned as a favourite was the rhino. Several participants mentioned the threat of extinction of the rhino. Others enjoyed seeing them in their family group with recently born offspring.

Well, they had a little baby which was clinging to its Mum which was super cute – Tuatara (D).

Several families mentioned the importance of observing the kiwi during their visit. Most felt the kiwi had significant personal meaning to them as an endemic species, but mostly due to its symbolism as a natural and cultural identity to New Zealanders. It is a species that most participants had pre-existing knowledge about, but few had seen one in its natural habitat. The children were fascinated by the chance to observe the kiwi. The success rate of being able to observe the kiwi was high, with most saying how active they were, which was a surprise to them.

Yeah, we've seen ...we've walked through and seen most of it. We saw the kiwi...we liked the kiwi. He was super active, and he was running around. He was much bigger than you think....and he was fast - Kea (M).

Takahē (S2) discovered that otters were much bigger than what he had preconceived ideas about. Conversely, Takahē (S1) felt that the spider monkeys were much smaller than he thought.

There's those little....there's a monkey and its palm could fit on the tip of my finger – Takahē (S1).

Often the children participants would say that they liked a particular enclosure. When asked to expand on their reasoning, often the enclosure popularity was due to a particular animal within the enclosure. For example, several participants liked the African enclosure because of the rhinos, despite it also housing emu, giraffes, and zebras. Similarly, the Southeast Asia enclosure was mentioned as a highlight mainly due to the orangutans. Fantail GM did mention all animals within the enclosure and particularly liked the giraffes and zebras.

4.3.3 Animal welfare

Most adult participants admitted that they understood the main role of the zoo was conservation and animal welfare, however this was no-one's primary motivation for their visit. Ultimately, most family groups were at the zoo more for edutainment opportunities as a group.

Obviously, I think....I mean it's nice for the kids to see animals that we can't normally see. But outside of my own personal interests, I guess it should try and be a facility that's trying to look after animals that are

either endangered, or need help breeding, or...but there should be a scientific reason rather than for people to just look at them - Kererū (F).

On reflection, Kererū (F) added a counter argument to highlight the significant improvements Auckland Zoo had made in animal welfare over the years. He also suggested the enclosure designs and appropriateness of species were superior to a zoo he had recently visited in the United Kingdom.

Well, I remember in zoos in Scotland just watching the animals pacing back and forwards like the polar bears. That's not happening here so far. It's not cold enough for polar bears – Kererū (F).

Takahē (GF) also felt an ethical obligation for the zoo to consider animal happiness and welfare, especially for the larger species.

Fantail (A1) mentioned the enclosure design as a highlight of his day, in particular the rhino enclosure. He felt it looked as he imagined it – desert like and barren. He had seen documentary footage and pictures of them in their natural habitat prior to his visit. In contrast, Tuatara (M) felt this enclosure was barren and did not offer enough shelter or hiding areas for the animals. She also felt the enclosures were too small, particularly for the big cats (lions, tigers, and cheetahs). She commented on how sad they looked but when asked to expand was unsure of why she thought they looked sad. The assumption that the bigger animals are more likely to suffer from boredom was mentioned by two other families.

Yeah, they can't stretch their legs or run top speed or anything like that - Tuatara (Ne).

I don't know, it's just really depressing that they are all held in captivity, yet at the same time, it is helping them. Like I mean, a runway strip or something for the Cheetah would be great (laugh). Because they can't actually reach their top speed – they can't run around – Tuatara (S).

This comment highlights the imaginative thinking of children for solutions that although seemed logical, were impractical given the space restrictions of the larger animal enclosures.

Often memories were used as a comparison when the adults shared their emotions and thoughts on animal welfare. In most cases, comparisons resulted in a positive

improvement observed, however as shown in the quote below, a few comparisons had negative comments associated with them.

Oh...like the polar bears just.... and the enclosures that were brick and paint chipping. I just didn't like...I just remember this really atrocious area where animals being...you know how people complain about how they captured and whatever.....so it felt like it back then....so today it doesn't feel like that...it feels like they are at home...not quite like exactly how it would be but it's definitely healthier than it was – Fantail (GM).

4.4 Personal Discovery

4.4.1 Hedonic experiences/memories

As part of the hedonic and memorable experience, several adults reflected on previous visit experiences, discussing positive and negative perceptions of previous visits. Some reflected on their early visits as children with their parents and siblings. Others reflected on earlier memories within the same family group when their children were younger.

Bring back the old train. Years ago, they used to have a train here....and the train would go round and round. And that was probably a health and safety issue as well...it's been over 20 years (laugh) - Tui (GM).

In the above comment, the Tui (GM) was reminiscing on her experiences as a mother taking her grandchildren's mother to the zoo and the fun things they did together. She was looking at her grandchildren as she spoke in a way as to make sure they were listening. It was her way of passing memories and knowledge down the generations by 'story telling'. Interestingly, later in the interview when the mother returned from the café, she mentioned the train as a possible improvement, relating to her childhood memories. It demonstrates the lifelong effect the zoo can have on individuals.

There are so many things in the world going on so actually coming here helps take your mind off, like the big life questions....and there's nothing, you know preachy around the place – saying you've got to think this or do that - Takahē (F).

The above comment described how Takahē (F) found the zoo visit as a sense of escapism from everyday issues and concerns within the family and presents a more global scale. He appreciated that any messages or suggestions in the interpretation were delivered in a non-invasive manner.

One of the main contributors to a fun visual experience, particularly from the children, was seeing the animal(s) active. Several children explained the otters as their favourite because they were always busy and visible, and feeding occurred frequently, including the addition of ice blocks with food inside as a form of enrichment.

Last time we were here we saw the otters eating the fish. They had salmon - Takahē (S2).

Several fathers from the family groups commented on their favourite animal and favourite part of the experience. Overall, fathers had more to say about which animal they enjoyed and why. Takahē (F) initially said the iguana was his favourite animal, but then added on the Tasmanian devils and turtles as animals he enjoyed observing and learning about. The children liked the lemurs, spider monkeys, and the alligator.

I liked the lemurs...I've never seen a lemur before...they look like they were doing yoga -Takahē (S3).

Takahē (S3) explained that lemurs were often in stretched out positions for lengthy periods and that yoga is a very relaxing activity. He had seen his mother partaking in it during lockdown from a demonstration video. He related a human relaxation activity to that of an animal.

A teenage female in the Kererū family recalled memories from a previous school trip. The purpose of the visit was educational while using the zoo as a backdrop and theme to create an advertisement for her media studies paper. Her recollection of an enjoyable previous experience may be due to the combination of two interests she shared being combined, i.e., animals and media studies.

4.4.2 Active participation

A common question and suggestion children had was around the tactile interactions with the animals. There are not many opportunities around the zoo to have a close interaction with any of the animals, mainly due to animal welfare considerations. The older children seemed more understanding and accepting of this. Some of the younger children specifically mentioned that hugging or patting an animal would have improved their overall experience. Examples of animals that children want to have close interaction with, include giraffes, monkeys, elephants, penguins, and flamingos.

Do monkeys hug you? Cos I really want to hug one – Tui (C).

This comment referred to an activity that children would like to engage in with reference to their previously mentioned favourite animal. Tui (S) suggested he might like to get close to and even touch an eel.

Kererū (D)'s favourite part of her visit was the bird aviary due to its immersive design and ability to get close to the birds and surroundings. The human-animal bond formed by the immersive experience enabled her to feel 'at one with the birds'.

I like the bird thing where you can walk with them - Kererū (D).

Both the mother and daughter felt the experience seemed more real and evoked happy feelings that were beyond those experienced by just simple observation from a distance.

4.4.3 Interpretation

A few participants commented on the lack of information on the signage and compared the amount of information to that of other zoos and aquarium attractions throughout NZ. When asked to expand, it became evident that it was not necessarily an issue of the availability of the signage, but more that the presentation and placement were not ideal.

They should probably talk more about conservation...and what everyone can do about that....it probably wouldn't be a whole lot as an individual in NZ... but like influencing the global supply chain. I guess making people more aware like what kind of companies are sourcing their.... like you know, places that are contributing towards habitat destruction – Tuatara (D).

Similarly, Kea (M) felt that her teenage daughters did not gain much benefit from the interactive displays. She felt they were aimed at the younger children and her daughters were not compelled to take an active involvement, compared with other similar attractions they had been to overseas. Following on from this comment, she was quick to counteract her argument by rating the enclosure designs as superior in quality and one of the highlights from their visit. She agreed that the zoo needed to ensure a balance of providing edutainment options for all demographics. One of her suggestions was to make the admission fee for children and adults a similar price, especially for larger families like hers. She argued also that a capped total admission price should be set for

any large family group. However, she admitted this would be hard to administer due to the wide-ranging composition of the modern-day family groups.

A few suggestions from both adults and children were made to overcome either the disappointment of not seeing the tiger at all or ways to ensure a better chance of observation. One adult did point out that there was a sign to explain why possibly the tiger may not be visible which was helpful. Suggestions of improvement included the following:

The signs say they spend a lot of time sleeping. The signs could improve a little - Tui (GM).

Takahē (S3) suggested that signs displaying the feeding times and peak activity of animals would be helpful to plan the day better.

So, you could say like, we'll go and see the hyenas and then we'll go and see the lions because they are getting fed at this time – Takahē (S3).

They need to have more mentions of habitats and things. I know I have seen at another zoo that they mention about the rhinos and the fact they are hunted for medicine and have a strong stance on it, whereas you don't feel that here, do you? – Tuatara (M).

There is in fact information available at Auckland Zoo about the plight of rhinos, but in this case, it may have been missed or overlooked. Children minding can often distract the adult parents/caregivers from noticing some of the interpretation on offer.

Some signs explained why animals were no longer being kept at Auckland Zoo – mainly for the benefit of returning visitors who may have questioned their absence. The elephants were the most mentioned as although one does remain for now, the zoo has made the decision to relocate it, for welfare reasons, given that they are herd animals. These signs gave a concise but strong message as to the priority Auckland Zoo gives to animal welfare, over entertainment/observation purposes.

It was nice to see the sign about why they are moving the elephant...what's better for the elephant over what's best for the people...I think it's sad that the elephant is going but it's a better place for them - Tui (GM).

This comment suggests that the sign was helpful in creating a more empathetic attitude as to the zoo's main role of animal welfare prioritisation over providing what the visitors perceive they want to observe/learn.

One of the most useful and well mentioned interpretation aids, was the paper map given out at the ticketing entrance. This map is designed with pictures of animals and different colours indicating the different geographically themed areas. They are designed for both adults and children. Due to the current renovations and inaccessibility of some parts of the zoo, management constantly update new versions of the map. The one being used while undergoing my research, included suggested routes depending on time availability around the zoo. The Kererū family as the only regular visitors, commented on how they noticed there were changes and new additions to the map, which they thought were useful.

Another useful interpretation tool mentioned by Kea (D1) and Kea (M) was the use of video presentations to explain some of the zoo's mission and values.

We watched a good video, didn't we? And they had this whole story about how the keas were sick. D2 in particular really liked that story – we watched the whole thing – Kea (M).

The use of a video to show the entire conservation efforts to help the kea, showed the process of capturing, transporting, treating, and then re-releasing the kea back to their wildlife sanctuary/habitat. The video showed the kea's vulnerability in the wild and provided an effective learning tool.

Overall, the volunteers were the most mentioned interpretation tool by the participants. Some of the facts learned have already been mentioned in section 4.3.1. One of the volunteers used hand puppets of some of the animals to attract children initially and provide an interactive fun way to learn about different bird species. Tuatara family had a nice connection with one of the volunteers who spent time teaching them a few Māori words for the animals. The one mentioned and remembered, was the Māori word for penguin (kororā). The volunteers were given credit by several families for giving directions to specific animals they had not yet found. Some of these included the red pandas, kiwis, and porcupines.

4.5 Family Connections

4.5.1 Generativity

One of the standout observations when conducting family group interviews, where grandparents were part of the family composition, was their generally relaxed and calm demeanour. The pleasure of spending time with their family and the nature-connectedness experienced was common for all such participants. In most cases, they had contributed financially to the admission fee and food/gift shop ‘treats’, which had a positive emotional and spiritual effect on their wellbeing, family connectedness, and overall experience. Three of the family groups included grandparents who were from a different location than other members of the family, thereby making their time together a special family reunion. One of the highlights for grandparents, was just being able to observe their family having fun together. In all family groups interviewed with grandparents, they had nothing remarkable to share when asked what the most memorable thing or animal that they observed during the visit was. All said spending time with the family was by far the highlight of their day.

The best part is the kids really enjoying, doing, and seeing animals, getting out in the fresh air and having fun.... that's the best part....yeah, they've had a good day-they've loved it. Gets them out of, I mean off the TV, off the games, off the phones - Tui (GM).

Thank you Auckland Zoo...thank you for those people who have put in the effort....the planting, the enclosures, choosing the plants and where they have placed them. That's been my favourite thing. I mean I have loved the animals but to see all this today has been exciting, so I love that - Fantail (GM).

The Fantail (GM) showed a real appreciation for the authentic experience and the chance to enjoy nature.

When the Fantail family group was asked about what they perceived as the main role of the zoo, the (S) was prompted by the (GM). This initiated a good learning discussion among the group. The (S) was then able to recall that the red panda benefited from living in a zoo environment to preserve and prolong their lifespan, by avoiding attacks from natural predators. His favourite thing about the red panda was that they ate grapes and used superlative adjectives to explain this fact which he found surprising – “they

absolutely loved grapes". The fact that grapes were one of his favourite foods must have been an influencing factor as to why this new knowledge was so interesting to him.

I mean apart from the obvious – I mean the animal welfare, we heard (looks towards S) ...what animal did we hear lasted a lot longer because they were living in the zoo? - Fantail (GM).

The (GM) was referring to the red panda and reminding the Fantail (S) of one of the other interesting facts he had learned. In the same interview. Fantail (GM) described the joy of watching her grandchildren enjoy all that the zoo offered. It was the primary motivation for her visit and her standout favourite part of the experience. It was an opportunity for a family reunion whereby the (GM) enjoyed seeing and learning the changes in the family dynamics as the children were older from the last time, she saw them there. When asked if she learned anything new today, she replied by saying that she was too busy watching the children.

I learned how quickly the children can get away from you – Fantail (GM).

The grandparents from the Takahē group had come up from Mount Maunganui and were another extended family group using the zoo location as a meeting place. It provided them with a relaxed environment where they could all meet up over a long period. All members would be able to find enjoyable activities avoiding any boredom or family conflict. The gathering in an open-air environment was important for the adults for ongoing COVID-19 concerns in crowded areas, as well as getting the children active and off their devices.

One of the family groups (Tui) was at the zoo to celebrate an important family occasion and milestone for their younger brother, turning five. This was the primary motivation for an inter-generational family reunion bringing family together from several locations around the North Island (see Table 1 on page 48). This is a further example of how the zoo location was used as a family get together, meeting place, and source of entertainment.

4.5.2 Sharing knowledge

Several children participants commented on how they felt one of the main roles of the zoo was to provide and spread information about the animals on display. They felt that

as an ongoing part of their experience, they then pass on the knowledge gained, effectively in a snowball effect. In this way, the children felt their visit was an educational opportunity in which the animals were a 'vehicle' to spread knowledge and awareness about their species. Several children commented on the role of the zoo as being a place where they could see animals they don't see 'normally'.

Maybe spreading information about the animals – Kererū (D)

Um, to see the animals....and to give you an understanding of the animals around you and how you can help look after them – Takahē (S1).

Keeping the animals safe from....you know, like poachers – Takahē (D).

One of the other major roles considered by the child participants, was the ability to see animals that they could not otherwise observe in their daily routines. For many the awe and wonder of a three-dimensional view was one of their highlights of their visit. Children especially were able to see animals up close that many had only seen through books or digital media. They made some unique and interesting observations of such detail as the thickness of the animal's fur as was the case with the orangutans.

And then we saw it start to climb up, so we had a good look at its fur, and it was amazing - Takahē (GF).

The Kea family was impressed with the wide range of bird species and enjoyed seeing and learning about new bird types.

Yeah, there's a bird that looks like a pukeko that isn't actually a pukeko, you know the one that's bigger than a pukeko...because we see pukeko a lot. That was new – we didn't realise there were those - Kea (M).

The Kereru parents made interesting comments about a misconception their son had voiced about koalas and what he had learned from fellow classmates. This highlighted the important role the zoo has in educating truths, versus those gathered from friends, classmates, or digital platforms. In this case, Kererū (S) believed that koala bears were poisonous due to influences from what he perceived about all animals from Australia. He mixed facts about the numerous poisonous species found in Australia and with his creative mind. He had been told by a classmate that koalas carry a certain disease and misinterpreted that information by believing that they were poisonous if touched.

He thinks that spiders are dangerous so there's this thing that Australia is dangerous – Kererū(F).

Several children participants were keen to share their experience and new knowledge from their visit with friends and teachers post visit. Fantail (S) had already thought of some questions to ask his teacher regarding the life expectancies of a few of the animals observed and some other animals, e.g., black bears that were not present at Auckland Zoo. He could not wait to pass on the knowledge he had gained to his friends and schoolteachers. It instilled such excitement that he was sharing new facts with other visitors when in a crowded area at some of the exhibit observation platforms. The most memorable fact he learned was:

That....hyenas eat bones and when they move on turtles look for them and eat the bones to make their shells stronger – Fantail (S).

4.5.3 Social connectedness

Family Tui were using the zoo as a special event location to celebrate a 5-year-old's birthday, with immediate family members and extended family. The use of the picnic and rest area outside the main café, provided perfect surroundings to spend time out enjoying time together over a birthday cake and other special treats.

Kererū (F) commented how they enjoyed a certain sense of adventure and exploration with each visit to see what had changed and observe new enclosure designs and species. Kererū (M) found the most enjoying aspect of their visit, was escaping her usual role as a mother and the children being entertained without too much effort/input. This was evident with several family groups particularly when other adults were present to help look after the children. When commenting on the enthusiasm of the volunteers she explained that:

So sometimes that makes it really interesting. I am a tired Mum, so I don't really care (laughter). But they all interact with the children and get them excited about something. So, I think it's a real benefit – Kererū (M)

Both mothers from the Fantail family group were the sole care givers for the visit, so when asked how their day had been, their initial response was to explain the day had been tiring.

Yeah, I was going to say – I've been too busy to read the signs, to do anything - Takahē (M).

The Kea family were the only participants who had previously observed some of the animals in their natural habitat. They had lived overseas in the United States of America and travelled throughout Africa. For this reason, their expectations were slightly lower than the other participants. Their main purpose for the visit was for the youngest to experience observing the animals for the first time.

Our expectations were met. We didn't have very high expectations, so I mean like it was fun. Yeah, we've had fun. We've talked about the different animals – it's a good conversation starter, you know, around different kinds of animals and different kinds of habitats. We've seen some of the animals in their natural habitats in our travels, and so there is a little bit about being in a zoo that is a bit strange and artificial with the animals -Kea (M).

The family was re-living some of their previous life experiences. The fact that they had observed animals in the wild prior to their visit, may have introduced a potential bias in their attitudes and beliefs about the zoo's role in animal welfare. Seeing the animals in a more restricted environment in some ways, opposed their pre-visit subconscious images of what their habitat or enclosure should look like. One of the points they made was that the adverse behaviour of some visitors contributed to their concerns and empathy towards the animals. The example given was the use of flash photography and phone torches by visitors to the kiwi enclosure. There are clear signs prohibiting the use of both and the mother particularly voiced concerns for the rights of the animals as living creatures.

I get that it's a zoo and it's an exhibition, but they're also living creatures, so you know. How would you feel if you were sitting and relaxing in your lounge, and someone came and banged on your window? – Kea (M).

Several of the family groups were using their zoo visit as an opportunity to reunite with relatives. The Fantail family were from three different locations around the North Island – Dargaville, Whangarei, and Palmerston North. The main family from Palmerston North, were on their way to a holiday destination just north of Auckland, so used the zoo location as a break in their travels and a chance to meet with extended family at a

central location. It was a convenient meeting place which allowed for all members to spend some fun quality time together.

We are heading to Auckland and instead of a big, long drive, we stopped like to have adventures – Fantail (S).

Most of the social connections and comments were related to the group the visitors were spending the day with. However, there were two family groups where the adult participants commented on the community benefits of the zoo.

Well, the zoo is obviously very popular...and so it is just a very good community facility. People love, you know...well it's just one place people love to come - Wetepunga (GF).

The Wetepunga family were two grandparents spending some quality time with their granddaughter, whereby providing an entertaining and enjoyable day was their main priority. They also had fun learning new facts and took part in joint self-learning.

My granddaughter and I learned something about the giraffes which we read off the sign. They have an extra special pump in their throat because they have to pump blood up their neck.... from the throat to the brain.... we learned that - Wetepunga (GF).

Wetepunga (GF) is very proud of the opportunity for interactive learning with his granddaughter. She was excited to pass on what she had learned during her visit to her father when she got home. The first thing she wanted to share with him was that she had been to the kiwi house.

4.6 Affordability

4.6.1 Value for money

All families believed that their entrance fee was reasonable and provided a satisfactory level of value for the cost. Much of this was attributed to the fact that there were no zoo-imposed constraints on length of the visit other than their opening hours. However, most families commented on the 'over-priced' food with most bringing their own supplies for snacks and lunch. Some may have perceived the cost of food as out of reach and expensive.

Yeah – the food was expensive – it was \$56 for three sausage rolls, a pie, and drinks...that’s crazy (laugh) - Tuatara (M).

I think with a large family like ours we just find the food and drinks at a venue like this can be quite expensive. So yeah, it’s hard to think you can kind of go for lunch or anything. That’s why we bought our own drinks and stuff. We ended up with an ice-cream but not a meal or anything - Kea (M).

Regardless of this, all families purchased food from one of the zoo eateries during the visit. Two families purchased all their food at the zoo, while the others bought items such as drinks, ice-creams, and slushies as part of the ‘traditional’ experience of having a consumable treat. Several adults commented that the value for money was especially evident currently, with reference to the cost-of-living crisis as an after effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation. A couple of families appreciated that it was not an affordable or accessible option for others and considered themselves quite fortunate. This was due to low socio-economic demographics and the stereotype of many of those people living in the southern areas of Auckland, some considerable distance away from the zoo.

It feels like it’s expensive....that’s because we’re lazy and got big kids...we could do it cheaper – yes, but they want an ice cream and they want a treat – Kererū (M).

These comments suggest that as people who can afford the relatively expensive food, it is worth it as a treat for the family to share but a luxury, especially for the mother who is spared from her usual routine at home of pre-preparing food for a packed lunch or snacks to take. This allows her to escape from her daily tasks and roles and enjoy purchased food within the zoo as a break. It may allow family bonding by sharing a meal together without distractions, such as devices commonly experienced in their usual daily routine.

The one family who had a seasonal pass and were frequent visitors mentioned that when they came 10-12 years ago when their children were young, they had an annual pass which they believed was an affordable fun family activity for their low-income budget. When the children were young, they had less disposable income as a family. Therefore, the value for money the zoo offered was perceived as greater, when money was a precious and tightly controlled commodity. The Father suggested that as the

children grew older, visits became less frequent, and he envisaged them currently using their season pass once a month. He also explained that different members of the family would go at different times and because the children were old enough to leave at home, sometimes just the parents would visit as a form of 'time out' and a chance to do something together.

Yeah, that's why we always used to come...like, when D was born, we had like no money and so we would get one zoo seasonal pass every year and so we'd come every weekend, so we'd just walk around and that was it – Kererū (F).

And then like we would tire her out enough to come back and for her to go to bed – Kererū (M).

These comments suggest that exercise options that the zoo provided combined with animals for interest, were a great parenting aid to allow enjoyment while inducing excursion and energy burning to result in better sleep. Another comment regarding the value of the visit referred to other places families could go such as public parks. They did not think they had an entertainment or leisure value comparable to the zoo visit experience.

What the (heck) are you going to do with your toddlers on a rainy day – when you can't afford much, say like going to the mall? I think that role of the zoo is quite importantparks are pretty boring compared to this - Kererū (F).

4.6.2 Contribution to conservation

Although the adult participants had a greater understanding and pre-existing knowledge about the zoo's important roles in conservation, some of the child participants had some very in-depth understandings. Mostly the children referred to the local and regional conservation efforts within Aotearoa NZ. Most were unaware or did not mention the wider international conservation roles of the zoo.

Um....so when animals are sick, they bring them into the zoo for people to look at and....for a couple of days or years, and then you guys release them out and you keep doing that when you find like...injured, sick or yeah. - Fantail (S).

It makes you realise that when you see all these wild animals, you realise how important it is to protect them - Wetapunga (GF).

Wetepunga (GF) felt that monetary contribution from sales and food was an important means to gather revenue for the purposes of conservation. Seeing the animals in real life gave him emotional empathy to ensure species such as the rhinos and elephants became less endangered because of the organisation.

Most families acknowledged that money was important to enable the zoo to operate and participate in its wider global conservation efforts. Not many made specific mention of them personally contributing, other than the admission fee and money spent at the support facilities such as the gift shop and cafes. When asked what environmental actions participants could take on a personal level in their everyday lives, Tuatara (S1) felt that donating money to the zoo was what he felt would be the biggest help. He did not focus on consideration of a change in his attitudes or behaviours.

Unlimited Space and Time

All family groups during some stages of their interview, expressed that one of the major benefits of the zoo as an attraction, was the unlimited time allowed to observe the animals and interpretation of what they saw. They all commented about the vast space and suitability for families due to the lack of perceived overcrowding. Many noted that the Auckland Zoo visit can literally last from half to a full day if desired and provides a constructive, non-repetitive fun day out for the family. Kererū (M) specifically compared the spatial element with Kelly Tarlton's and felt that the much smaller space for observation made visits to the aquarium much more stressful.

I actually found going to Kelly Tarlton's really stressful and expensive because it's so tight – and everyone goes in together - Kereru (M).

Similarly, the Tuatara family group compared Auckland Zoo to other attractions within Auckland and their home cities. They chose the zoo as a meeting place because of its better accessibility, interpretation, and value for money.

But like this is incredible – you can spend a whole day here and there's less hills – Tuatara (A).

All families commented to some degree on the freedom of choice with where and what they did during their visit. The comparison to other attractions with limited space was a common comparison used to highlight their argument. The almost unlimited time available meant a less stressful and more leisurely experience.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter followed the themes and sub-themes determined in the thematic analysis, of the data collected from seven family group interviews at Auckland Zoo. For each of the 18 sub-themes, a description of comments from all participants was accompanied by relevant quotes followed by my interpretation. The quotes and interpretations used in this chapter were chosen according to their relevance in answering the research questions and objectives of this thesis. One of the main objectives of this thesis was the 'whole family' methodology, particularly the inclusion of children as major stakeholders of Auckland Zoo. The children's comments are invaluable given their cognitive ability to say exactly how they think and feel. Their inclusion in this thesis has provided unique data and findings not seen in the current literature. This will be discussed in the next section with reference to similarities of the findings with contemporary research and gaps in knowledge discovered by this thesis.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This discussion chapter provides interpretations and explanations of the findings in the previous chapter. These are supported by existing literature where applicable or highlight findings that are significant to the main aim of this research thesis, by providing new insights to address gaps within the current literature. The chapter is divided into the three research questions informing this thesis to address the findings that relate to them. The subheadings used under each research question are the themes and sub-themes described in the methodology chapter, grouped under the most relevant research question. This chapter predominantly focuses on findings that involve the 'whole family' approach, and in particular, the contribution and significance of the children's comments.

1. What are the main experiences of family tourism groups visiting the Auckland Zoo?

The themes discussed that best answer the first research question are those involving infrastructure and family connections. Each theme is dissected into the sub-themes (see Figure 6 on page 54) and discussed in more detail. Firstly, the infrastructure theme discusses the sub-themes of renovations, accessibility, and support facilities. This is then followed by the theme of family connections, which is subdivided into its corresponding sub-themes, namely generativity, sharing knowledge, and social connectedness.

5.1 Infrastructure

5.1.1 Renovations

The current and ongoing renovations at Auckland Zoo were mentioned by most families. Only adults commented on the positive and negative impacts of the renovations. Children were not bothered by the potential disruptions from infrastructure changes, as this did not detract from their overall enjoyment and fun. Young adults and children tend to show a greater interest in viewing and observing animals they have not seen before and exhibit a stronger emotional affection and empathy towards their perceived views of animal welfare (Powell & Bullock, 2014). This highlights the main expectations children concentrated on during their zoo visit. Overall, the participants felt the renovations were a necessary part of Auckland Zoo's ongoing commitment to improving

the visitor experience. Most comments felt that the existing improvements in enclosure design and size were a step in the right direction of improving animal welfare.

5.1.2 Accessibility

Accessibility is an important issue for any tourism attraction. Concerning a zoo, consideration must be given to a wide range of demographics and providing a safe environment that is accessible to all visitors, where age and physical fitness/disability should not provide barriers to an individual's visitor experience (Abdulraheem et al., 2022). Tui (GM) was the only participant with a disability who did find the available wheelchairs difficult, due to the one 'small' size available and only one location to access them near the ticket entry. She felt if they were available at the opposite end near the 'kiwi enclosure' that would be helpful for people like herself who chose not to use one at the beginning but experienced mobility difficulties throughout their visit. Although accessibility is often associated with disability, it has different connotations as one of the sub-themes in this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis, it is about providing easy access for multi-generational families. As shown in Table 1 (on page 48), the number of female adult participants in this thesis was 12, with only five male adult participants. This equates to a 70.5% proportion of adult visitors being female. For purposes of privacy and respect, the ages of the adults were not recorded as part of the research data collection. The higher proportion of female adult visitors to the zoo confirms the findings in previous studies (Association of Zoo and Aquariums, n.d.; Khalil & Ardoin, 2011; Mason, 2007; Ryan & Saward, 2004).

Visitor loyalty and visitor frequency were limited by the location in which family groups lived. The most frequent visitors were those who lived near the zoo, as accessibility was convenient and not an issue. The less frequent were the family members from other locations within the North Island (e.g., Hamilton, Dargaville, Mount Maunganui, Palmerston North), who were using their zoo visit as a chance to spend leisure time with their families.

We are up from Wellington, and we are looking for things to do in Auckland and our friends and their kids live in Hamilton, so we decided to meet at the zoo and have a fun time – Tuatara (M1). This concept of visiting friends and family (VFR) is a growing trend in tourism. It provides socio-cultural benefits, combining mobilisation and social

connectedness at a chosen tourism destination (Shani, 2013). This phenomenon has increased in recent years, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Yeoman et al., 2022).

The limited car parking available near the zoo was a commonly mentioned issue raised by adults. As parents are the organisers of the visit, it was an issue which caused an increase in stress, however, did not contribute to an overall negative experience. Most of the comments highlighted this well-known issue due to the central urban location of Auckland Zoo.

Generally, accessibility around the zoo was deemed to be adequate. However, several participants commented on the difficulty they had in finding the kiwi enclosure. It is located at the far end of the zoo; hence some groups had not been that far yet. One adult did suggest that being an important endemic species, it might be better located towards the zoo entrance. Another participant suggested that they have kiwi footprints painted on the pathways to direct visitors to their enclosure. This method of interpretation has been used successfully around other parts of Auckland Zoo as noted in my preliminary field notes. It has been used in Phoenix Zoo in a study to determine the most successful forms of interpretation used on a specific track to encourage the engagement of children in specific themed exhibits and enclosures (Edney et al., 2023; Gill, 2013).

5.1.3 Support facilities

Some of the most popular attractions at a zoo, are the children's playground and other areas where children are entertained by amenities not directly related to observing the animals. Many adults said that the use of the extra amenities for recreation and leisure, particularly for children, was part of the 'central experience' of their zoo visit. This was for two main reasons: (1) the children's own enjoyment and pleasure and (2) a great way to expend energy which was more beneficial for the parents' enjoyment.

It is important that the conservation 'theme' is presented at all parts of the zoo, including ancillary facilities such as cafes, and gift shops (Fennell, 2013). Hutchins and Smith (2003) expand on this concept by arguing the importance of each zoo organisation adopting its own high standard of environmentally friendly operations, such as responsible energy consumption, waste disposal, and recycling. In this way, they are

leading by example and 'practising what they preach', which is more likely to result in positive changes in attitudes and future behaviours of visitors.

Although the souvenir/gift shops, cafes, and organised events for groups may be regarded as more commercial entities than representing nature, it can be argued that ultimately any monetary gains from these ancillary commodities make possible part of the Zoo's wider contribution to national and international conservation programs they are affiliated with. Such organisations are clearly outlined on Auckland Zoo's website, information pamphlets, and maps (Auckland Zoo, n.d.). As modern zoos become more sophisticated and superior organisations, they must have an excellent level of business and corporate acumen. Forming close partnerships with other local businesses and community members is essential to gain financial and societal support, ultimately resulting in monetary gains which can be used to maximise their contribution to in-situ and ex-situ conservation projects (Khalil & Ardoin, 2011).

5.2 Family Connections

5.2.1 Generativity

Generativity is an important concept in family group tourism. It involves the imparting of a nurturing and educational role from the older adult generations within a family, to ultimately benefit the sustainability of future generations (Pratt et al., 2013). One of the emerging popular attractions and family bonding experiences during the zoo visit was the purchasing of a treat for each of the family members from one of the cafes. In most cases this was an ice-cream, milkshake, or slushie and a tradition for most families when visiting the zoo. Although ice-cream may be a common food commodity in some families, the novel experience of trying new flavours, colours, and brands provides vivid and lasting memories (O'Donohoe et al., 2021). In all three family groups that included grandparents, admission costs and lunch was paid for by the grandparents, who used the opportunity and time with family to provide the entire visit as a special 'treat'. In these cases, all family visits were infrequent, so the monetary generosity contributed to a unique experience not often done together. The bond shared between grandparents and grandchildren engaging in leisure tourism activities can lead to a sense of well-being for individuals and provide fun and lasting memories (Gram et al., 2019). Grandparents often use treats as a means of rewarding positive behaviour traits and a special

differentiated association for their grandchildren from their normal daily family food routine. Mostly, the treats are calorific sweet or savoury processed food which in small amounts and frequencies, is not sufficient to raise any significant long-term dietary or weight concerns (O'Donohoe et al., 2021).

5.2.2 Sharing knowledge

One of the noticeable observations from some of the family interviews, was the active encouragement from the adults for the children to share their thoughts and experiences. Part of the reason for this was a genuine interest that the parents and caregivers had, in exploring how the children felt about various issues raised during the interview process. For example, Tuatara (N) had trouble with cognitively processing that the neck bone numbers of a giraffe were the same for all mammals and this created an opportunity for the adults to interact and share their knowledge. Tuatara (D1) then explained one thing she wanted to find more information on was - "*how the rhinos grow their spikes*" (horns).

Interactions and discussions with adults while being immersed in nature, encouraged them to seek out answers and engage in critical thinking skills. This adds to their positive experience and helps establish long-lasting memories, particularly if parents ask open ended questions to elicit thoughts and ideas from their observations. Connection of their current thinking to previous experiences is an effective means of making their experience more relevant and meaningful. Often parents or caregivers will recall their own similar childhood experiences as a way of engaging with children and their own enjoyment from recalling positive memories (Callanan et al., 2017).

5.2.3 Social connectedness

Several respondents in the interviews referenced their earlier experiences as children themselves, as a primary motivation in bringing their children or grandchildren to the zoo. An example of this was the Tui (M) who had fond memories of riding the train within the zoo grounds when she was a child. Her mother also mentioned this as a fond memory and although not a supporting facility anymore, it evoked fun and enduring memories. The main reason for their current visit was to continue their childhood memories throughout the generations. Kererū (F) acknowledged that the children's enjoyment was his priority and superfluous to their enjoyment (as parents). In a study

on zoo visitor motives, Klenosky and Saunders (2007) argued that family groups visit the zoo primarily for a fun and enjoyable day out, which encourages family bonding by the creation and sharing of memories. The authors concluded from their study that children who were part of a family or other social group, greatly increased the probability of that group visiting a zoo.

Furthermore, as explained by Parrish (2010), cultural institutions, including zoos, can evoke a strong emotional response in adults and children as well as bringing about a change in their social attitudes and behaviours. The author suggests that some of the strongest motivations pushing adults to visit a zoo, are related to their personal identity and self-perception. Adults who visit as part of a family group are often motivated by the opportunity of a fun and entertaining day out with friends and family (Parrish, 2010; Roe et al., 2014). Therefore, it can be assumed that visitors to a zoo are expecting not only an educational and productive experience but are ultimately seeking a fun and enjoyable experience.

Several families were visiting the zoo as part of visiting friends and family (VFR). The zoo offered a suitable meeting place for all members of the family groups to spend some fun quality time together. Two families were using the zoo essentially as a 'function area' to celebrate a special occasion such as a birthday or anniversary. Auckland Zoo have dedicated staff who cater to the needs of family celebrations and special occasions, offering the provision of catering, private function areas, and entertainment. This is an important aspect of strategic management of any modern zoo and staff particularly focus on the prioritisation of the family having a fun, memorable leisurely experience (Roe & McConney, 2015; Roe et al., 2014).

2. What are the similarities and differences between families' zoo experiences compared with their pre-visit expectations?

5.3 Fun Day Out

Hallman and Benbow (2007) suggest that from their research on American zoos, on average 80 per cent of visitors were part of a family group which included children up to the age of 12. Most adults within the family groups questioned provided positive affirmation that they felt the zoo was a safe, fun environment suitable for all members

of their family. Many identified one of their main motivations for taking their family to visit the zoo was to provide the children with an educational, fun, and recreational experience and an introduction to environmental connectedness, responsibilities towards animal welfare and conservation, and environmental sustainability (Fountain et al., 2015; Roe et al., 2014; Therkelsen & Lottrup, 2015). Many felt that by learning how to interact with animals and nature, their children would learn and develop their own values from a tangible experience. Many adults also commented on how much they had enjoyed and personally gained from their own visitor experiences, at a similar age to their children. They wanted to share their experience with the next generation.

5.3.1 Exploration

The unique characteristics of the flamingo were commonly mentioned by children within most family groups. They seemed to have pre-existing knowledge of aesthetically pleasing characteristics from a combination of books, cartoons, and documentaries displaying this unique characteristic. For example, the children in the Kea family mentioned how they used to have competitions to see who could stand on one leg for the longest time, followed by (S1) commenting that *“they are funny because they do this”* (stands on one leg). The perceived difficulty in being able to do this for long periods made this feature a perplexing but fascinating concept. Kea (D1) was in awe that they commonly used this stance when sleeping. It provided a good example of the importance of animal characteristics alongside aesthetic appeal.

The range and variety of favourite animals did not appear to follow any logical patterns. But the larger species were more popular with the adult participants, particularly the newer additions as previously mentioned. Children participants seemed more attracted to the smaller, cuter species of animals with the most mentioned in descending order, being the flamingos, otters, kiwis, meerkats, penguins, red pandas, ring-tailed lemurs, and spider monkeys. The most popular larger animals were the orangutans, tiger, rhinos, and giraffes. Orangutans overall were the most popular for all participants. This was for two main reasons: 1) Observing the new-born baby bonding with the mother, and 2) Their new well designed immersive enclosure. In previous studies, adult animals with babies tend to attract more visitors due to the pleasure gained from observing the baby bonding with the mother and father, as well as the ‘cuteness’ factor of the baby’s aesthetics and characteristics (Carr, 2016c). In general, the visual aesthetics of an animal

tend to influence visitors' satisfaction and the species with more aesthetically pleasing and unique features, are deemed more popular (Carr, 2016a; Powell & Bullock, 2014).

5.3.2 Leisure/relaxation

Hallman and Benbow (2007) highlighted that despite the intention of a family zoo visit being a leisurely, fun activity, it can also involve a considerable amount of work, mostly by the mother to plan the trip -such as organising transport, tickets, food and beverages, all-weather gear.

Both mothers from the Fantail family group were the sole care givers for the visit so when asked how their day had been, their initial response was to explain the day had been tiring. This was due to them having all responsibilities to ensure their children were safe and enjoying the day. They attributed their tiredness to a combination of exercise and child-minding fatigue. Their visits did not offer them a break from their normal routine of motherhood and allowed few opportunities for relaxation. Their main priority was to ensure the children had a fun day out. They did enjoy the break they had when being interviewed, as an opportunity to rest and have a 'sit down'.

In some situations involving family group leisure experiences, potential conflict may arise due to the parents (in particular mothers) seeking a relaxing experience, versus the children seeking a fun and recreational time (Gram et al., 2019). Mothers often use a family leisure experience to 'escape' from their mundane and traditional family role of doing chores and childminding. This is particularly evident when other adult family members are part of the same visiting group (Fountain et al., 2015; Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015).

The reference to their visit providing a reprieve for children from modern technology and screen devices, was mentioned by a couple of adult participants. Most agreed that getting the children away from such rather 'anti-social' activities and outside was a great family socialisation activity. As argued by Lérida-Ayala et al. (2022), children's use of the internet has dramatically increased in recent years, particularly with the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Parental control of time spent on their digital devices is becoming more difficult as children spend more time at home. Other families, similarly, noted the visit as an opportunity to escape from their normal daily activity. Family tourism and leisure activities are an important time for social cohesion within the family unit. A zoo visit

provides a family with a leisure experience to spend together away from otherwise usual activities/distractions individuals may choose to spend their free time doing (Ingakidijaya, 2018).

5.3.3 Edutainment

Focusing on the concept of edutainment, several comments from the parents explain their view that they believe there is something for everyone and different visits focus on different things. Sometimes exercise is the focus, whereas on other days, exploring new additions and exhibits is the primary motivation – *“It’s like a walk with entertainment”* - Kererū (M). Kererū (GM) felt the zoo was a trusted safe place to celebrate and enjoy her grandson’s birthday. The adults did not have to go to too much effort to provide entertainment as there was plenty to keep them entertained.

A study conducted at Wellington Zoo, concluded that most visitors considered education as the most important role of a contemporary zoo (Mason, 2007). A strong correlation was observed between time spent at the zoo by visitors with the degree of success in providing a comprehensive educational conservation message. This is substantiated by Roe et al. (2014) who concluded that the highest recorded activity from visitor feedback was the observation and learning about animals, specifically animals endemic to other countries.

The level of animal activity observed, as previously mentioned, is a key positive feature of the visitor experience, particularly for children. As an example, most pictures or documentaries of kiwi are filmed in daylight, when the kiwis are normally less active. One of the children commented how much bigger they were in ‘real life’ and how much faster they moved than he had expected. This emphasises the importance of the three-dimensional experience and realistic perspectives gained from seeing the animals in their natural settings. Children also like an element of surprise and most often made comments about enjoying seeing animals being active, e.g., monkeys swinging and cheeky behaviours from territorial aggression seen with some duck species (Tofield et al., 2003).

As highlighted by Falk et al. (2007), almost half the visitors surveyed in their study, specifically mentioned an animal species as the highlight of their visit, with one fifth of visitors acknowledging the importance of the general layout and aesthetics. Fennell

(2013) concluded that specific animals of interest tended to be the 'babies and beggar' or as he described, the cute and entertaining. Most of the perceived dislike of these animals was due to a sense of fear they evoked most likely learned from previous exposure to audio-visual media. One of the interesting findings from asking participants about their favourite animal and what they would like to see added to their experience, was the tendency of the males, particularly boys, to prefer the less attractive or 'ugly' species. Jamieson (1985) findings similarly found that most zoo visitors were attracted to the animals who showed cute behaviours and had unique sounds. Fantail (S) wanted to see snakes but only ones that did not bite or hurt people. He was stipulating the ideal type of snake out of a possible fear associated with the species, thus co-creating an ideal animal to display on his terms.

In discussing the stages of child development, White and Stoecklin (2008) acknowledge the fact that children begin developing their values from an early age. As a result, education of any form needs to focus on matching a child's learning abilities and needs. The most effective way to address the aforementioned factors of children's learning development, is to provide them with interactive sensory experiences that require a degree of their own participation and creativity (White & Stoecklin, 2008). In this way, children learn critical thinking and enquiry surrounding the welfare and ethics of animals in both the captive and non-captive wildlife environments (Nabavi, 2012; Stainton, 2022). Moreover, children benefit from being introduced to an 'emotional experience' with wildlife and nature by preventing the often one-eyed assumptions gained by factual learning in school and home environments (Andersen, 2003).

5.4 Affordability

5.4.1 Value for money

Most family group adults felt that their zoo visit provided a fun and entertaining family day out, which provided value for money. All family members gained a 'priceless' family group bonding experience which offset the monetary contributions made towards admission fees, food, and souvenirs. All these products and services provided by the zoo, contribute to a well perceived value for money. As explained by Gram (2005), a desirable tourism attraction and destination for children is "one which has lots of things to do, in a friendly, accommodating and rich environment.....a children friendly

atmosphere, fun, nature and new experiences, good food, attractive facilities, freedom and independence” (p.4). The sharing of fun, new, and exciting adventures together as a family unit, combined with food treats such as ice-cream, contribute to a successful and transformational experience (Gram et al., 2019).

Kererū (M) did suggest that although the food was expensive, *“it was worth it due to the examples set and extra costs involved to provide recyclable materials and waste services”*. She acknowledged the scope of the ongoing national and international conservation work the zoo as an organisation needs to do and the numerous costs involved. In this way the zoo branding and marketing instils a sense of trust and loyalty. As a family, Kereru trusts the zoo practices and the ability it provides them with knowledge, which questions their own conservation attitudes and behaviours.

I think it's quite important socially...and I think it's important to keep the price reasonable.....so it can be a place that really represents Auckland - Kererū – (F).

This comment could be referring to the wide variety of visitor demographics observed at the zoo, being representative of all sectors of society. The debate amongst the family group as to the pros and cons of the zoo and other attractions was clearly something not previously discussed as a family. This effectively was a clear example of the co-creational aspect of my research whereby data was constructed during the interview process, which allowed family members to learn differing opinions amongst themselves (M. J. Crotty, 1998).

5.4.2 Contributions to conservation

Most participants were aware of the threat and endangerment of the animal species on display, but few were able to acknowledge a broader awareness of habitat exploitation and decimation. Kererū (F) specifically mentioned the importance of breeding programmes for the rhinos and giraffes. Rhinos were mentioned by several families for their perceived importance in the zoo’s role of breeding animals threatened by extinction. Kererū (F) felt that an important part of the breeding program was sending some animals on to other zoos and was prioritising the animal’s welfare before his own disappointment, of not being able to observe certain species of animals who had been moved.

Some families attributed the lack of habitat awareness to current signage; however, it is most likely the information was available but not seen. Some conservation and habitat information used signs with varying degrees of detail. Videos were playing at several enclosures and given the dynamic nature of attending as a group, may not have been watched. As discussed in the previous chapter, most adult participants felt they did not gain much further insight into conservation or environmental issues. This was mainly due to previous knowledge acquired from prior visits and life experiences. Often adults visiting cultural institutions as part of a family group are primarily motivated by a fun and entertaining day out with family. They do not have expectations to gain any new learning outcomes (Packer & Ballantyne, 2010; Parrish, 2010). Adult participants within the family groups spent most of their visit focusing on the children's safety and enjoyment. Tui (GM) did acknowledge that although she understood the main role of the zoo was animal conservation, she was primarily there to have a 'fun' day out with her family.

Education was deemed to be a lower priority than conservation, although they both share a symbiotic relationship and cannot co-exist successfully without the other (Ahmad et al., 2015). This study investigated the public perception of Lahore Zoo, Pakistan, and concluded that although most visitors agreed the primary role to be one of conservation, concerns were highlighted about the public's perception of the effectiveness of the zoo's interpretation methods for education. The authors argued that despite the acceptance of their role in wildlife conservation awareness and management, many visitors were still motivated to visit for recreation and leisure purposes. The evolution of the modern day zoos, from providing a source of entertainment to an organisation focused on providing visitors an emotional connection to the animals, has become one of the main goals for zoo managements (Skibins & Powell, 2013). Most animals are used and promoted as 'ambassadors' for their global species, to highlight current environmental and conservation issues (Clifford-Clarke et al., 2021).

As aforementioned, most participants had some degree of knowledge about the zoo's role in conservation. However, it was mostly limited to preservation of rare species, awareness of global habitat destructions, and provision of a safe enclosure void of their natural predators including poachers, as pointed out by two children. Only one child

mentioned donating money to a charity involved with animal conservation. The effects of palm oil production on many of the animals' habitats, was the most mentioned environmental concern, which had caused a change in participants' behaviour. Two families discussed the decision by Auckland Zoo to discontinue supplying Cadbury products several years ago when palm oil was an ingredient in their chocolate. They switched brands '6-8 years ago' because of Auckland Zoo leading by example and making their decision and reasoning transparent. Cadbury received public backlash in 2009 over its decision to substitute cocoa butter with palm oil and following a strong public backlash, they immediately stopped its inclusion as an ingredient. The director of Auckland Zoo at that time publicly applauded Cadbury for their decision and re-instated the company as a product supplier (Fox, 2009).

Retelling and recalling experiences and memories from a zoo visit may contribute to further family bonding and strengthen family communications (Therkelsen & Lottrup, 2015). The information provided post visit should also be presented in a way that all age groups can understand and promote continuing family conversations about animals and nature long after the visit. It is not just the responsibility of parents to promote and follow efforts to increase sustainability. According to Shani and Pizam (2010), sustainability needs to consider "ecological, social, cultural, and economic aspects of human development" (p.282). In fact, children often become the drivers of change in environmental behaviours and attitudes within the family group setting. Some examples include recycling, composting, use of biodegradable products and plastics, saving power, and family 'picking up litter' excursions.

All participants who commented on specific animals they had concerns for regarding their risks in their natural habitats, had a strong affinity and empathy towards the species they mentioned. Children knew most about the larger more popular species such as elephants, tigers, rhinos, giraffes, and primates. Some of the other conservation behaviours visitors may choose to adopt following their visit to a zoo, include such things as "volunteering their time, becoming politically active, adopting environmentally responsible lifestyles and contributing funds" (Hutchins & Smith, 2003, p. 137). Furthermore, Wagner et al. (2009) concluded in their study on conservation outcomes, that the two most important determining factors for a positive conservation visitor outcome, were the quality of the exhibits/enclosures and the quality of the staff. They

need encouragement and guidance about how to undertake practical changes within their own normal everyday environment.

When asked about the zoo's role in conservation, several adult participants included in their comments a statement regarding the 'ethics' of keeping animals in an enclosed environment, but they did think the standard of the enclosures had vastly improved the animal's welfare:

It doesn't matter how much space you give them here, it's the loneliness. I think I'm keener on the smaller animals. I don't particularly want to see a rhinoceros or an elephant ...unless it's absolutely...like a white rhino...where it's the last of...it's the only way to save it – Takahē (GF).

Furthermore, Swanagan (2000) noted in their study on visitor perceptions, that those who had a positive experience with an enclosure and the animals, were more likely to support ongoing animal conservation. Often their choice of animal was largely dependent on activity of the animal observed and the degree of interactive interpretation at the specific enclosure. To improve interpretation, the authors suggested more information regarding actual wildlife habitats and location, threats of the animal to extinction or survival, and what products to avoid purchasing and using, which are known to exploit an animal's habitat or survival from poachers.

3. How do the visitors' experiences align with those of the animal welfare goals and strategic vision of Auckland Zoo?

5.5 Nature Connectedness

The Kererū family gained several benefits from their zoo experience. It provided them with knowledge, empathy, and emotional connection towards the animals. It raised their awareness of animal welfare and protection allowing both the children and adults insight into the real world. They felt a major role of the zoo was protecting the larger species from poachers and hunters. Zoos allow children to observe and have close encounters with wildlife and other animal species they have either never heard of or

only seen via books, digital or audio-visual media. Zoos play a unique role for children living in urban areas with limited exposure to animals in their natural habitats/wild places. It allows them the opportunity to be exposed to nature and wildlife in an urban region. Children more so than adults, gain invaluable experiences from tactile interactions with animals such as holding a rabbit, lizard, snake, or petting larger more domesticated animals such as goats or sheep (Myers Jr & Saunders, 2002).

Through their interactions with nature, children learn and develop basic attitudes and behaviours about the effects of environmental degradation and sustainability (Kahn Jr et al., 2009). Klenosky and Saunders (2007) note that some of the impacts that learning at zoos have on children. These include observations that children “learn and appreciate nature, fostered the development of stewardship ethic, provided ideas for school projects, and laid the groundwork for helping their children learn about basic human functions such as reproduction and childbirth” (p.325).

A common observation was the greater awareness of animal welfare and conservation issues with the increasing age of the participants. One example was Kererū (F) who had a solid and broad understanding of the zoo’s conservation role “*I think like...breeding, to see if they are able to breed things like the rhinos...good to see the giraffes breeding. And then good to see some of the other animals been sent to other zoos*”. This was due to a greater life experience and knowledge but also recollections of how the zoo used to be with the use of smaller cage like enclosures and animals such as elephants and chimpanzees being used for rides and entertainment. The grandparents recalled seeing the chimpanzees dressed up and with props to simulate a tea party. At the time they were unaware of the animal welfare issues surrounding these previous activities but now thought they were a form of animal abuse and sadness. Public perceptions and expectations of animal welfare standards have grown significantly in the past 30 years (Sherwen & Hemsworth, 2019). A positive animal welfare perception is much more likely to result in positive conservation and environment behaviour changes (Carr, 2016a). The increase in visitors’ awareness to animal welfare has also increased due to cultural changes, scientific research, and the way in which animals are perceived. The advent of focusing the role of zoos on conservation has contributed to the shift in more positive visitor attitudes towards the ethics and main functions of a modern-day zoo (Normando et al., 2018).

5.5.1 Environmental responsibility

The zoo environment is an ideal place to address environmental issues such as climate change, better waste reduction methods, recycling, and acid rain, ozone layer depletion, air pollution and deforestation to name a few (Packer & Ballantyne, 2013). The authors highlight the importance of using the zoo location to teach visitors essentially social science, considering most environmental and wildlife threats are directly or indirectly related to human activities, or lack thereof.

Auckland Zoo's website contains local links to conservation departments and organisations, as well as providing numerous informative links about current global issues such as palm oil production and deforestation. It promotes visitors to avoid buying or using products made from either palm oil or rain forest materials (Auckland Zoo, n.d.). Other educational opportunities could include promoting visitors to plant native flora and fauna in their private properties as a means of conserving habitats and therefore attracting and preserving native animals (Roe et al., 2014).

In the last 20 years, nature and its relationship with human beings has taken on a significant pivot, with much more recognition of the many positive effects it provides (Clayton et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2012). This recognition has been heightened by the recent decline and degradation of the global environment and in particular the current focus on climate change. As argued by Berger and McLeod (2006), researchers and philosophers have found that the breakdown and connectiveness of humans with nature, has resulted in a decline in personal well-being and physiological ill health of many people, due to emotional imbalances. Their argument expands on the well-documented physical degradation of the global environment and suggests that human/nature connectedness is also imperative for psychological well-being and happiness. They explain the 'touching of nature' as:

a direct encounter with natural elements can trigger strong emotions and sensations that were not previously touched or shared.... through direct physical, emotional, and spiritual encounter with nature one can touch upon deep parts of one's personality, receive profound insights, and sense a strong connection to the universe (p.14).

The hedonic experience gained by observing the animals and being surrounded by nature, was reiterated by most adult and child participants at some stage of each

interview. It allowed a sense of well-being and contributed towards a fun, relaxing family day out. Tui (GM) repeatedly smiled and surveyed the surroundings, as she talked about her experience which she felt provided a 'spiritual' encounter with nature.

5.5.2 Human-animal bond

The instinctive human-animal bond which provides reciprocal psychological comfort to both humans and animals has been described by some researchers as fitting into the 'biophilia hypothesis'. This is a term describing a love of life or living things (Lee, 2015). Luebke and Matiasek (2013) expand the explanation of this term by defining it as a spiritual belief of nature with respect to order and harmony amongst all living species and nature. A visitor's ability to gain a 'spiritual experience' from nature often was related to them respecting the power of nature, enabling a sense of calm and tranquillity. In discovering and exploring the power of nature, these types of visitors can momentarily escape their everyday lives.

Several children participants commented on their 'love' of animals and nature. This was expressed in either the wish to get closer to the animals and in some cases 'hug' them. It was also evident in the genuine concern and empathy they had for the animals. This was particularly noted for larger animals, whereby comments and suggestions such as providing bigger enclosures or 'runways', would help predator species exhibit natural behaviours. Tipper (2011) conducted a research study into children's relationships with animals. The study argued that most children felt that animals played an important role in their everyday lives and their relationship with animals mattered to them. Their study showed that children learn companionship, responsibility, and basic facts of life surrounding such issues as caring for something important to them and dealing with emotions surrounding death. Animals have been shown to help develop children's emotional development in learning such skills as empathy, caring, and ethical and moralistic values important in relationships with animals and other humans within their family or social circles.

Both the mothers in the Tuatara family group felt strongly about the need to protect the animals and form a relationship with them, due to their many similar characteristics, biology, and behaviours to the human species. They felt animals were 'vulnerable and required love, attention, and care just as humans give and receive'. Their empathetic

approach showed there is no age barrier when it comes to forming and gaining mutual benefits from the human-animal bond. The oldest son (S1) had mixed feelings and emotions with how he felt towards the animals in their captive enclosures, highlighting one of the main conundrums facing zoo management – *“I don’t know, it’s just really depressing that they are held in captivity, yet at the same time it is helping them”* - Tuatara (S1).

In contrast, the youngest child participant from the Kea family group had his first visit to a zoo and seeing the animals in real life, sparked a creative interest in his toy animal collection at home. The animal-human bond he experienced during his visit gave his toys a sense of meaning and emotional connection. His willingness to set up a zoo for his toys suggested he had an overall positive experience observing the zoo animals in their enclosures. Kereru (M1) was adamant that children only ever gain a true bond and appreciation for animals by seeing them in ‘real life’ – *“I think it’s hugely important for children to see and observe the animals in real life instead of on devices or TV”*.

The similarity larger animal breeds share with humans, is believed to be one of the main reasons in general visitors feeling more of an empathy towards and connection with such species (Carr, 2016b; Walpole & Leader-Williams, 2002). They are important ambassadors for raising public awareness around local/national/ and international conservation needs and efforts. If they successfully raise conservation awareness for a wide range of species, the authors counter-argue that they serve an invaluable purpose in global conservation. They advocate for all modern-day zoos to consider a greater degree of biodiversity, especially for the small animals/invertebrates often overlooked by zoos, despite their major risk of extinction. Skibins and Powell (2013) likewise support the argument that the bigger (mega) vertebrates are highly popular in the zoo setting, attributing their popularity to characteristics perceived by visitors as majestic, graceful, powerful, and beautiful.

5.5.3 Animal welfare

Animal enclosures was one of the most important aspects of animal welfare commented on by both the adult and child participants. The continual improvement and development of the third generational interactive enclosures was widely supported and acknowledged. Fantail (GM) recounted her last visit to the zoo (20 years ago) was a sad

experience and from today's visit, her attitude towards the role of the zoo and animal welfare had taken a 180-degree turnaround. Seeing such drastic changes would have contributed to the positive hedonic and spiritual experience she described throughout the interview. As a result, her intended loyalty to return more frequently was expressed.

Visitor satisfaction was increased when the enclosure was close to the natural environment and habitat of the species and therefore their behaviour closely reflected that which would be seen in the wild (Lee, 2015). The overflow effect of an improvement in animal psychological and physiological well-being was observed to result in most visitors having a more enjoyable experience (Tofield et al., 2003). The visitor benefits by gaining an 'intimate' area to view the animal and is a more discrete vantage point to minimise stress and interruptions to the animal's normal daily activities and behaviours. An example of such an enclosure is the Rain Forest exhibit at Copenhagen Zoo. This enclosure is designed to 'mimic' the rainforest environment whereby visitors walk on a boardwalk that is central to surrounding flora and fauna, and free-flying birds and insects (Andersen, 2003; Braverman, 2011).

Similarly, animals benefit from viewing areas designed to minimise their stress of visitor observation. An example of this is the new Southeast Asia exhibit at Auckland Zoo where numerous climbing apparatus and places of rest are available for the orangutangs, above the level of the human observers. This has been proven by studies to reduce the apes' stress levels and improve their overall psychological welfare (Catibog-Sinha, 2008). In most cases, the participants, including children had a solid and empathetic understanding of prioritising animal welfare over their own pleasure and enjoyment. Their personal emotions of sadness did not affect their empathy and caring attitude towards the animals. Children participants had some unique and creative ideas for improving enclosures and overall animal welfare. Although not necessarily practical solutions, it was a cognitive learning process on realising the effect of restrictions with captive animals and how to overcome some perceived animal welfare issues.

Like I mean, a runway strip or something for the cheetahs would be great (Laugh)...Because they can't actually reach their top speed – they can't run - Tuatara (S1).

This comment then led onto information Tuatara (S1) wanted to find out and research post visit. He seemed fascinated with speed and knew in miles per hour how fast cheetahs could run but was going to look up the speed in kilometres per hour.

As argued by Braverman (2011), animal welfare has become a major focus for the modern zoo. It should be the goal of any zoo management over any visitor appeasement efforts. Animals are not coerced to 'perform' or undertake tasks against their perceived will. Animal welfare strongly interrelates with animal ethics, which according to Fennell (2012) is an increasingly important consideration within the tourism industry, which uses animals for commodification and personal benefits. The author concludes that more research into ethics and morals with respect to the use of animals within the tourism industry, is needed. He uses the term 'utilitarianism' to describe what the tourism industry needs to strive towards with respect to animal ethics. Human interest and benefits gained from the use of animals should be balanced and not be outweighed by non-human animal suffering. This research highlights the importance public visitors place on animal welfare, within the zoo environment.

Some of the welfare benefits animals gain from zoos, include provision of basic needs: shelter, food, water, protection from predators and adverse environmental conditions/hazards, and freedom to express some natural behaviours (Fennell, 2012). Other benefits include the provision of expert veterinary care, specifically tailored nutrition, and suitable enclosure design that closely mimics the animal's natural environment (Carr & Young, 2018; Hutchins & Smith, 2003).

Negative impacts to animals within zoo enclosures is an important aspect of animals' husbandry and monitoring. Such negative effects may include avoidance behaviour due to stress such as hiding, aggression, and escaping from perceived stresses. Habituation may lead to intentional ignoring of humans, and attraction to aversion for seeking food or shelter. All may often be accompanied by a degree of aggressive behaviour towards humans or other animals within their enclosure (Choo et al., 2011). Similarly, the suitable grouping of animals with the same species or other animals normally within their habitat that do not pose a predatory threat or adverse psychological stress (Tofield et al., 2003).

Takahē (GF) acknowledged the importance of considering the social behaviours of animals and whether they are solitary or herd-based animals - *“I won't be sorry for example, when the last elephant is gone. It doesn't matter how much space you give them here, it's the loneliness. I think I'm keener on the smaller animal”*. He was genuinely concerned for the psychological well-being of the animals. He was allowing his stance on ethics to override any enjoyment potentially gained from observing the elephant(s) up close, in an enclosed environment. Braverman (2011) argues that although there is a degree of irony that animals are kept in captivity to highlight their species plight and endangerment, it serves an important purpose whereby the animals become ambassadors to save the rest of their species from extinction. The animals are a role model for their species and an important and vital tool in the education of world conservation and sustainability.

A further important advancement in animal welfare is allowing animals within enclosures, choice of where they want to spend their time. This includes contact with the public for feeding or tactile interactions, whereby the animals are not forced by their keepers to be at a specific area for specific 'entertainment' roles. This has proven beneficial in reducing unnecessary physiological stress and promoting more natural social behaviour patterns (Hartley et al., 2019; Normando et al., 2018). Hosey (2005) supports this argument and highlights the considerable advances in internal zoo research, which has developed a deeper understanding and awareness of animal welfare issues and goals. This is important for both solitary and herd-based animals whereby they have the choice of social cohesion or social confinement within their enclosure. This is the primary reason for the elephant's relocation from Auckland Zoo, as elephants are herd animals and need to be part of a larger group to maintain a positive form of physiological wellbeing.

5.6 Personal Discovery

5.6.1 Hedonic experiences/memories

Customer satisfaction ultimately is determined by the visitors' psychological feelings, emotions, and attitudes evoked by their visit, but also pre and post-experience stages (Del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). The authors divide the level of satisfaction into the hedonic or short term benefits and the eudemonic or longer term benefits. Ideally, a

tourism experience should incorporate elements of both these states. Providing a tourism experience in addition to the product and service, allows organisations to provide important competitive variables such as memories, emotions, stimulation of senses, cognitive arousal, and an overall quality experience (Oh et al., 2007).

Most participants were able to find and observe their favourite animal and when asked to discuss reasons why they liked certain species, they came up with descriptive and emotional responses as seen with the children who favoured the flamingo. Visual memories of colour, characteristic traits, size, and recollections of seeing animals on digital media, television, and books contributed to their overall impression of their favourite animal(s). Several children were surprised how different in size the animals were up close than their recollections from digital sources. Kea (D3) was excited about observing the kiwi being active but also was pleasantly surprised at the size as she 'expected them to be much smaller'. Seeing animals active was a well mentioned bonus of several child participants' visit especially if they were able to see the animals 'close up'. Otters were a popular species mentioned by several of the children due to their 'cuteness' and ease of visibility when feeding.

The ability for all visitors to experience an up-close encounter with a wild animal provides a level of excitement not experienced by other educational tools such as television, movies, or photos of the animals (Mason, 2007). This is what makes the zoo experience fun and entertaining for many in the absence of animal shows which are being phased out due to animal welfare concerns, associated with exploiting the animals' natural behaviours as a source of human entertainment. The development of more accessible, aesthetic enclosures has helped counteract the entertainment value that was gained from animal displays/rides/demonstrations.

Key elements identified as pull motivation factors for an enjoyable zoo visit, include a variable mixture of exploration, mental arousal, adventure, social interactions with family/friends, developing a deeper knowledge and connection with the animals (Luebke & Matiasek, 2013). Their study concluded that the main contributors to a visitor's cognitive experiences during a zoo visit were the enclosure design, animal visibility/activity, and distance of the observing platform, from the animal being observed. Emotional effects from the visitor experience were observed to be an overall

increase in empathy and connectedness with the animals and a social identity and responsibility gained with respect to the sustainability of the environment and species survival in their wild habitats.

Several adult and child participants felt that the enclosures were well designed and how they imagined certain animal species would live in the wild. The South-East Asia exhibit appealed to children in the tuatara and takahē families due to its 'baron-like' design mimicking how they imagined a desert to look like. In a study looking at zoo visitor perceptions of the experience, Ballantyne and Packer (2016) concluded that the four most significant factors participants attributed to a positive experience included the opportunity to see live animals they have not seen before, good perceived animal welfare, enclosure design that mimicked the species natural habitat, and being able to observe animals being active.

Some visitors found the zoo experience evoked positive and happy memories from their family or group life from previous activities together. Tui (GM) and (M) mentioned they found memories of earlier visits to Auckland Zoo when Tui (M) was a child – their happiest memory was the same – riding the train that used to be located within the zoo grounds. As a result, they felt that their visit provided a unique bonding experience with others in their family/ social group. Tui (GM) also had long-standing negative memories of what she said were 'sad conditions' when she last visited over 10 years ago, making specific reference to the infamous polar bear that used to be at Auckland Zoo. She felt sorry for it in such a 'stark concrete' enclosure where she remembers seeing it constantly 'pace back and forth'.

5.6.2 Active participation

As an expansion to the 'experience economy' concept, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) argue that the majority of tourists seek out an 'authentic experience'. They explain the two types of authentic experiences as either 'original' or 'staged'. As explained by Beverland and Farrelly (2010):

consumers actively seek authenticity to find meaning in their lives, and in line with associated personal goals.....there is a widespread agreement that authenticity is a socially constructed interpretation of the essence of what is observed rather than properties inherent in an object (p.839).

The authors argue that consumers create their own authentic experiences through active participation and construction of their perceived thoughts and feelings.

The tunnels at the meerkat exhibition provide two important opportunities for children young and old, by creating a sense of immersion within the enclosure and combining observation with play and a sense of adventure. Similarly, the seal enclosure was mentioned as a popular exhibit due to the glass viewing area, allowing visitors to see the animals active underwater at eye level. This provided an immersive experience whereby children especially felt they were 'swimming' with the seal.

The extent to which the tourist benefits from value-added variables, is dependent and proportional to the level of active participation taken by the consumer (Oh et al., 2007). Furthermore, an optimal visitor experience involves active participation from the staff within an organisation providing a product and service. This concept is described by Parrish (2010) as 'co-creation' whereby both visitor and staff play important roles in the construction and collaboration of an 'authentic experience'. This form of active participation allows them a sense of reality and a feeling of connectedness and belonging. What one individual may consider as an 'authentic experience' another may see it as a 'fake' representation highlighting the subjectivity in nature of the 'authentic experience'.

5.6.3 Interpretation

Several comments were made on the benefit of a face-to-face interaction with the volunteers. One of the points made, was the fact that much of the information provided by the volunteers was bizarre and unusual facts that most visitors would not come across in their day-to-day animal education. It seemed the more bizarre the facts imparted by the volunteers, the more likely the younger participants would show an interest and pass on their knowledge. The specific roles of zoo volunteers are for them to be prevalent around exhibits to approach visitors to share their knowledge and experiences with animals, conservation, and sustainability practices. Volunteers make an invaluable additional resource to other forms of interpretation and knowledge gained by simply just 'observing' the animals (Tofield et al., 2003).

No families mentioned any other zoo staff interactions, other than keeper talks, whereby they received help or advice. This highlights the important role the volunteers

have in providing a valuable resource to ensure visitors are looked after. The face-to-face encounter with volunteers and other staff provided a memorable and emotional experience for participants, both adults and children. Volunteers are an integral member of any zoo organisation, providing an informal educational experience. Their role is to engage with visitors and expand on the interpretation provided by signage and digital media. Through their extensive ongoing training and socialisation with staff and visitors, they become wildlife ambassadors to their friends and families (Bixler et al., 2014). The participants easily recognised staff and volunteers by their uniforms which symbolised to many a person who loved animals and in whom they could trust.

Lück (2003) concluded that from the numerous methods of interpretation tools available, such as digital media, signs, interactive displays, zookeeper talks, the most effective means of conveying an important long-lasting message, is by well trained staff. Furthermore, the level of energy and enthusiasm shown by the staff directly influenced the enjoyment and satisfaction of visitors. In most instances, a knowledgeable and enthusiastic tour guide or staff member, resulted in a more positive and enjoyable visitor experience.

Digital platforms which provide updated information on conservation and environmental projects, with numerous links and other options, will be of a huge benefit for ongoing longer-term benefits from the original onsite interpretation provided. These need to appeal to the original sense of empathy and connectedness the visitor gained from their initial experience. In doing so, they effectively provide a means to extend the original experience and for visitors to relive positive memories (Wagner et al., 2009).

As argued by Perdue et al. (2012), the addition of a video or digital presentation at an exhibit or enclosure, accounted for an overall longer observation time in comparison to enclosures with only signage as an interpretation resource. The authors also observed that visitors gained more educational benefit when knowledge was imparted to them through video and live presentations. Video presentations are a good means of passing on knowledge person-to-person, where it is not possible to have staff available at all enclosures at any given time. Furthermore, the length of time spent at enclosures and displays was found to correlate with knowledge gained and the ability to retain information longer. Live presentations were the most effective means of knowledge

retention, largely due to the emotions evoked by the staff member presenting the information.

Some of the information mentioned as missing, was available from my own initial observations of the zoo and interpretation, such as about forest sustainability and the effect of palm oil production on habitats. Tuatara (M1) had not seen any signage about what products to avoid. She suggested keeper and volunteer talks could be invaluable for highlighting habitat destruction. Effective educational interpretation at a zoo should aim to promote questions and discussions amongst social and family groups, about what they are observing and learning from their visit (Luebke & Matiasek, 2013). Furthermore, Hacker and Miller (2016) suggested that despite strong and positive behavioural intentions instilled as a result of a zoo visit, the likelihood of any long-term behaviour changes was limited. They suggested that interactions with zoo staff and volunteers during their visit, contributed to initial strong intents to change behaviour being actively pursued post visit and long term.

A common theme that emerged from the interviews was the little amount of time parents and caregivers reported the children spent reading signs or interactive displays. This was to a degree dependent on age. Most children were too busy enjoying the large play area the zoo offers and observing or trying to find the animals. Interpretation by adults was limited also due to the constant distractions of their children's excitement and energy levels.

The most effective signs, are those that have an initial bold 'attraction' which increases the chances of all visitors learning from their interpretation messages. Such signs should entice children and adults, and often provide a point of social cohesion whereby adults read or explain the information to children, particularly young children and therefore initiate questions and discussions during the visit (Andersen, 2003). Most zoo signs should include a combination of species biological name/classification, ecology, unique behaviours, habitat, and conservation issues locally and globally (Moss & Pavitt, 2019).

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has grouped the interpretation and supporting literature under headings incorporating the research questions, themes, and subthemes outlined in the

methodology chapter. The overall family experience was one of a fun filled, recreational, and entertaining day. Although some adults mentioned the zoo's main role as being one of conservation and animal welfare, the overwhelming consensus from all participants was that the purpose of their visit was to observe animals and have fun together with their family. All family groups felt the visit provided value for money in meeting their expectations. The favourite animal for most of the children was the flamingo, with a much broader range of species given by adults. Many participants felt that the Auckland Zoo adequately met their animal welfare expectations. Similar concerns were shared by adults and children regarding the ethics of keeping wild animals in an enclosed environment. However, most adults commented on the significant improvement in animal welfare evident in the facilities, over the last couple of decades. Although many participants commented on various aspects of the interpretation provided, few mentioned gaining an educational experience from their zoo visit. The social connectedness and generativity aspect of the findings comprised a significant part of the family interviews and stood out as the most enjoyable part of the overall visit.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore the family group tourism experiences at Auckland Zoo, primarily focusing on the contribution and inclusion of children between the ages of 6-17. As the main stakeholders of a zoo experience, children have a right to be heard. The experiences of visitors were compared with any preconceived expectations and whether the family groups' visit, was aligned with the zoo's strategic objectives and animal welfare goals. This chapter begins with a synthesis of the key findings and how these addressed each of the three research questions. Following this, limitations of the thesis results are discussed, specifically addressing the small sample size used as part of the qualitative methodology. Recommendations are provided for Auckland Zoo management and other modern-day zoos and future research opportunities to add more robust and useful data to this thesis, are argued. Finally, a personal reflection of the entire research process is discussed.

6.1 Synthesis of the Key Findings

What are the main experiences of family tourism groups (including children above the age of six) visiting the Auckland Zoo?

Despite most families acknowledging conservation and education as the main roles of the zoo, the majority adamantly described their zoo visit as a fun day out with the family. The resounding findings indicate that despite conservation being one of the main strategic goals of zoo management, family groups ultimately visit the zoo for escapism from their routine daily activities and for the social family cohesion the zoo experience provides. Most of the children commented on the enjoyment gained from observing their favourite animal in 'real life'. The flamingo was the standout favourite animal with children due to its aesthetics and 'quirky' characteristics. This was followed in popularity by the primates, kiwis, rhinos, giraffes, elephants, meerkats, and otters. Adults showed similar results, as mentioned in previous studies, with the larger species being the most popular (Carr, 2016a). Not one single adult stated the flamingo as their favourite animal. This highlights the importance of including children in this thesis and the significance of the findings.

Family connections were an important aspect of the zoo visit experience. Three of the family groups had members spanning three generations, with the grandparents all admitting the highlight of their visit, was spending time with the grandchildren. It provided them with an opportunity to 'treat' their children and grandchildren with monetary contributions towards admission costs as well as the popular food treats associated with a zoo visit, such as hot chips, ice-creams, and slushies. The zoo provides a safe environment for families to share a range of experiences with no specific time limits. Adults enjoyed observing younger family members exploring nature and sharing knowledge with each other. Some families used the zoo as a 'meeting point' while others used it as a location to celebrate a special event.

Most comments about the infrastructure of Auckland Zoo were from the adult participants, with an overall positive response about the major ongoing renovations, accessibility, and support facilities. Although the renovations and parking did provide issues for some families, this did not overshadow their experience in a negative way. The newer, bigger enclosures were seen as a favourable change for the betterment of animal welfare and observation ease and enjoyment. This is supported by previous studies (Carr & Young, 2018). One of the children's favourite activities while at the zoo, was the playground area. Often it was their first choice to visit upon entry. It also was a popular choice for adults as it provided them some time to relax and allow the children to enjoy time together while expending some energy.

What are the similarities and differences with families' zoo experiences compared with their pre-visit expectations?

All families were satisfied that their experience matched their expectations and would visit again. Two families who lived in different cities within the North Island, admitted they would purchase annual passes if they lived closer. Although most participants felt the zoo visit provided them with a fun leisure experience, some mothers did mention they didn't feel they had much time to relax, as they were busy keeping an eye on their children. The mothers in family groups who had grandparents or other adult members, tended to relax more as they were able to pass the child-minding duties onto others. Many adults commented that the zoo experience provided the children with a 'reprieve' from their digital devices and anti-social behaviour associated with their use at home.

They felt the zoo provided their children a balanced edutainment experience, whereby education, enjoyment, and exercise were important benefits gained from their visit.

All families felt the zoo visit provided value for money, due to the overall fun family day out. Any monetary costs were far outweighed by the 'priceless' value of the family connectedness. Several families commented on the 'expensive' cost of food at the various outlets within the zoo, however felt it was justified, to cover zoo running costs and as part of their contribution towards the zoo's conservation work. The use of sustainable products in the café was commended by some families as setting a good example and helping visitors to think about their current and future behaviours to improve the environment and conservation of wildlife.

How do the visitors' experiences align with those of the animal welfare goals and strategic vision of Auckland Zoo?

Participants had varying degrees of understanding about the conservation and educational roles of the zoo. They acknowledged the importance of contributing towards conservation in both monetary methods and behavioural attitudes. Many however, felt they had not learned any significant new environmental sustainability behaviours from their current visit. The most common issues mentioned facing the wildlife and wild places was the habitat destruction caused by palm oil extraction for the use in consumable products. Two families had modified their product selection as a result. Children participants had knowledge about the role of the zoo in protecting species from extinction and predators. Adult participants tended to know about less popular species, which they had formed affinities for, over a longer period and from exposures to other attractions and information sources, such as television and digital documentaries. This provides visitors with a broader knowledge and scope of the conservation and environmental issues.

The ability to connect with nature was commented on by both children and adults. It involved both the animals and surroundings contributing to an emotional and spiritual connection felt by individuals. Being close to the animals helped for an empathy and human-animal bond that other sources such as audio-visual and digital platforms failed to achieve. The three-dimensional close encounter with wildlife and their enclosures was a uniquely inspiring experience for many, that their routine daily lives in urban areas

does not allow. Children gave considerable thought as to ways to improve animal welfare and well-being within the zoo setting. Most had a reasonable comprehension about finding the balance between animal well-being and their enjoyment at having the unique opportunity to observe and explore their learning about them in the zoo environment. This is the conundrum facing modern day zoos, as they seek to attract visitors while focusing on their main roles of conservation and education (Carr, 2016b). Several children did express their interest in being able to have a closer interaction with the animals, such as hugging or feeding them.

The experiences children gain with animals and nature allows them to learn about how they exist in an infinite universe/system. They can potentially develop nurturing attitudes and knowledge about different ecosystems and how they are all somehow related in the 'circle of life'. This has an important influence on their emotional and cognitive development in a unique manner, that many do not initially gain from adult parents or caregivers. It gives children a means to exhibit strong emotions around caring for 'lesser beings' and the care they show to animals can often be reciprocated in their behaviour towards family and friends (Myers Jr & Saunders, 2002). A major benefit children gain from providing care to animals is a sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, calm and reassurance (Myers Jr & Saunders, 2002). Children become aware through their care (or neglect) of animals, the consequences of their decisions with respect to their behaviour and actions. Children can learn from a fairly young age how to test their morals with respect to animal welfare and in some cases extend this to question the complex theories of existence (Myers Jr & Saunders, 2002).

The zoo experience for most participants evoked positive memories and in some cases reminders of memories from previous visits. Many comments praised the zoo for the significant improvement in enclosure design and enrichment available to the animals. The grouping of animals mainly due to their global geographical locations, in habitats resembling those in their wild places, was commended. The clear way the different areas were shown on the map with colour coding, pictures and suggested routes to follow, was popular with all participants, particularly the children who were the 'GPS' for their family's daily activities. Several interviewees commented on the enjoyment of observing the animals actively seeking out their food. An example was the otters, where food enrichment is provided by encapsulating the food in ice blocks, which provides welfare

benefits for the animal as they are encouraged to actively seek out their food. Visitors also benefit by watching the animals exhibit natural predatory and hunting behaviours during their feeding times.

The signage and interpretation were not a priority for most families. However, several families mentioned the usefulness of the volunteers and some of the more 'interesting' facts they learned from them. Interactive displays were popular with the younger children, although a few comments did suggest more interactive digital/audio-visual displays would be ideal. Two participants suggested that videos of what the animals do in their wild habitats might be beneficial, particularly for popular species such as the tiger, which often were not visible at their time of visiting.

6.2 Limitations

Due to the small sample size and random participant selection, it was not possible to have a more general spread of family groups who held annual passes. These visitors inevitably have a greater motivation and accessibility to visit the zoo and therefore may have provided more insight into their contribution to conservation and shared knowledge gained from their zoo visit. Previous studies have found that there tends to be a bias towards engaging with conservation issues for people who visit zoos regularly (Powell & Bullock, 2014; Smith et al., 2008). Only one family out of the seven interviewed, held a current annual pass, although a family with children in their teens had previously purchased frequent annual passes when 1) their children were younger and 2) when they lived closer. This would be a useful comparison to use for further research.

The small sample size also meant that there was not a true representation of the multidimensional family group structure. Results therefore may not encapsulate the wide range of cultures and demographics of visitors to Auckland Zoo. As a qualitative thesis with the main aim of the 'whole family' methodology, it does however provide invaluable insight into the contribution children and 'the family group' and the rigour and potential it has for further studies.

As explained in the detailed methodology of this thesis, field notes were taken for the researcher's initial familiarisation of the zoo's layout and visitor demographics and

behaviours. The thesis did not use these objective records as part of the findings which could be a useful adjunct in future longitudinal research studies, to ascertain if visitor behaviour and their subjective opinions are closely related.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Education and interpretation

Interactive displays and interpretation were popular with the child participants and therefore should be increased and constantly updated. A balance of diverse and interesting tools needs to be presented for all age groups (Lee, 2015). The zoo map was a very popular and integral part of the family group visit, particularly with children under the age of 13. The sense of exploration and adventure by overseeing their family's movements and plans for the day, gave some of the children a sense of responsibility and challenge. The map design is an example of how maybe other signs around the zoo can appeal to all age groups, by using a balance of colour coding, pictures, and brief written explanations. Consideration for providing interactive displays that allow full family participation would be ideal to provide an educational, but fun, memorable, and cohesive family experience. A possible additional product/service offered could be volunteers or employees who can be used as private tour guides for a family group. They would offer the parents and caregivers a means of edutainment for their children that they could themselves enjoy.

To maximise the educational conservation role, zoos need to provide parents and learning centres with adequate tools via books and digital media. All interpretation in situ and ex-situ must incorporate a combination of explaining the importance of conservation and environmental sustainability. They need to emphasise clear and practical steps that individuals, family groups, and the zoo organisation themselves can engage in, to support wildlife and wild habitat conservation (Falk et al., 2007).

An improvement in education and interpretation would be beneficial to ensure a positive outcome in changing visitors' attitudes and behaviour towards conservation and environmental sustainability. Careful planning by education managers within the zoo organisations to present positive messages on their animal welfare and conservation goals is a key strategic consideration. The balance required to deliver an

overall positive message requires a mixture of fun active participation, underpinned with some serious facts and self-searching questions (Mann-Lang et al., 2016). The expectations of most family groups are to enjoy a leisure experience together, so therefore it is imperative that zoo management bridge the gap between their mission of education and conservation with an entertaining fun day out. If zoo visitors are overwhelmed by too much information (or in some cases not enough), then this has the capacity to dampen their enjoyment and any potential educational gains from their visit. The information provided needs to be concise on one hand but informative about the suggestion of everyday solutions to tackle current conservation and environmental issues (Packer & Ballantyne, 2013).

Two adults commented on the 'apparent' bareness of the Africa Safari Track and considered it to be unappealing for the animals. Tofield et al. (2003) highlighted an interesting finding about comments made by visitors about their disappointment in the enclosure design for a camel and other animal such as giraffes and zebras. Visitors felt that the enclosure was 'bare' and lacked the presence of plants and sheltered areas. However, as the authors argued, it is closely mimicking their natural, desert-like habitat they are found to thrive in when in their natural environment. Therefore, better interpretation about their preferred natural environment would help abate any misunderstandings from visitors. This research highlights the importance public visitors place on animal welfare within the zoo environment. Woods (2002) balanced the positive experiences with negative ones experienced by zoo visitors. The most common negative experience shared by participants, was the perception of insufficient animal welfare standards when comparing their enclosures to their natural wild habitats. This was followed by visitor perception of animals behaving in a socially unacceptable manner towards other animals and showing aggression in response to the visitor's presence. Interpretation plays an important role in helping visitor's ascertain what behaviour is normal. This will help to prevent any unnecessary distress to visitors as well as preventing misconceptions and misunderstandings of the care and safety provided to the animals by zoo staff.

6.3.2 Brand image and marketing

Brand image and marketing are invaluable tools required by zoo management to educate and make the wider community aware of the organisation in-situ and ex-situ

environmental and conservation commitments. Furthermore, Leask (2016) concluded from a literature review of visitor attraction management, that community and visitor engagement is paramount to the ongoing development and sustainability of tourist attractions. Marketing needs to encapsulate a broad range of visitor demographics, particularly the child and senior markets. The composition of families is changing as the average age of the population increases, due to lower morbidity and mortality rates occurring, as medical care options become more advanced. More grandparents are healthier for longer to be able to join a family group visit or accompany their grandchildren as a 'special treat' (Schänzel, 2022; Turley, 2001).

Adopting more sustainable practices which slow down habitat and environmental destruction, is a goal all modern zoos should actively promote in the marketing and interpretation. In order for individual zoos to convey a meaningful conservation message, collaboration between other zoos and institutions and governing bodies is paramount, to maximise their contribution to species recovery and environmental conservation (Hutchins & Smith, 2003). Targeting the conservation message to influential community and organisation leaders is an important consideration for ensuring that local and national governing bodies make responsible and informed decisions to protect and sustain wildlife and their habitats.

6.3.3 Off-site interpretation and post visit follow up

The off-site follow-up of interpretation offered by zoos is essential if the visitors are expected to adopt new conservation and environmental behaviours post visit (Hughes, 2011). Onsite interpretation may not be sufficient to foster significant behavioural changes (Smith & Broad, 2008). Digital platforms and social media need to appeal to the original sense of empathy and connectedness the visitor had gained from their initial experience. In doing so, they effectively provide a means to extend the original experience and for visitors to relive positive memories (Wagner et al., 2009). The information provided post visit, should also be presented in a way that all age groups can understand and promote continuing family conversations about animals and nature long after the visit (Therkelsen & Lottrup, 2015). This allows a continuum of a 'whole family' approach to ongoing education and further research opportunities about the family visitor experiences. This concept is outside the scope of this thesis as post visit

interviews are not included in the methodology. However, it is an area where further research would be beneficial in exploring the longer lasting visitor experiences.

6.4 Further Research

Throughout this thesis, areas for further research have been mentioned. In summary, this thesis has shown the value of using a 'whole family' methodology. Family groups and therefore children compromise a large portion of zoo visitors and their contribution to future research is paramount. While conducting this research, Auckland Zoo were conducting their own internal research to specifically ask children for their ideas for a 'nature playground', as part of the ongoing renovations. Children were asked to express their ideas by drawing the objects they would like to see, as part of various playgrounds to be built around the zoo. The enthusiasm of them to participate was encouraging as was seen in this thesis. Using prompts such as play doh and drawing are excellent ways for children to communicate their thoughts. Internal research is an important part of any organisation, and it is encouraging to see Auckland Zoo including children in such interactive ways, as part of their ongoing improvements. The children in future research could use a video story or photos to express their opinions about their zoo experiences. School groups could be given projects to make mini documentaries to express what they have learned and enjoyed from their visit.

Larger qualitative and quantitative studies will allow the capturing of a more diverse range of demographics which will provide ongoing benefits to zoo managers on how to maximise visitor experiences, while also providing excellent standards of animal welfare. Combining observational behaviour of the visitors at enclosures and exhibits would enhance the findings of this thesis in future research. Comparing findings from the three North Island Zoos - Auckland, Hamilton, and Wellington - may also add rigour and collaboration to this thesis as a future research option. Due to time constraints of the data collection for this thesis, further longitudinal similar research may determine the effects of seasonality and international tourism on the family group experience. Although the data collection was post COVID-19, international tourism was only just re-starting and mask restrictions were in still in place. Therefore, further research will be invaluable to include international tourists and domestic visitors, who have had sufficient time to re-adjust to the post COVID-19 removal of restrictions.

6.5 Personal Reflection

The opportunity to research family group tourism at Auckland Zoo has provided me with a challenging but rewarding introduction to qualitative research. As mentioned in the introduction, I chose a topic that I was genuinely interested in and which combined my skills and interests. I was also fortunate to have a primary supervisor for whom family tourism is one of her speciality fields of research. I feel my research has adequately answered the initial three research questions. I was planning to interview zoo staff to gather more insight into how they thought their role contributed to a positive family group experience, however due to time limitations and the decision to focus more on the children's contributions to this thesis, no staff interviews were used in the data collection and findings.

Unfortunately, this thesis has taken longer than expected, due to unforeseen medical circumstances which required me to have two surgeries. The first surgery occurred 2 months before the original submission date. The ensuing recovery periods from both surgeries required rest and rehabilitation which effectively gave me 6 months' total break from the write up process. Although this was unexpected and not ideal, I feel I gained benefits from having an extended break and returning with fresh eyes and new motivations to complete the final chapters. I re-started by methodically reading each family interview transcript followed by completed initial drafts of the first four chapters. By familiarising myself with the original data collected and the drafts, I think my thesis benefited with editing I may not have done without having had such a long break.

One of the highlights of my research journey was the invitation by my supervisor to join her and other AUT students at the 3rd Critical Tourism Studies Asia Pacific Conference in Hanoi, Vietnam – 13-17 February 2023. I presented my research in a workshop moderated by my supervisor under the title of 'Children Agency in Tourism'. Although my write up was incomplete I had enough information to discuss the social and conservation outcomes for children. This was an amazing (albeit nerve wracking) experience which was well received and added a personal level of confidence to the contribution my research thesis will make to other academics. One of the highlights for the attendees of my presentation was providing them with small, coloured pots of play doh to demonstrate how I gained the children's trust and interest for the interviews.

The preparation for thesis presentation, is an important academic skill associated with most research but not a requirement for the master's degree. I feel very privileged to have had this added experience as well as the opportunity to meet, learn, socialise, and establish life-long friendships with other tourism academics from all parts of the world.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

The 'whole family' approach to this thesis was one of the main objectives in gaining new insights to family experiences at Auckland Zoo allowing children to have a 'voice'. It has provided considerable new insight into family experiences at Auckland Zoo. As argued by Tipper (2011), children need to be respected for their unique knowledge and the perspective that they can bring as part of tourism research, rather than being spoken for by their adult parents or caregivers. Children need to be considered as an integral part of adult culture and valued for their contributions (Therkelsen & Lottrup, 2015). Marketers need to appeal to both adults' and children's needs with respect to attracting visitors to their destination/attraction. As explained by Schänzel et al. (2005), children have marked variations in their cognitive abilities, motivational interests, concentration periods, and energy levels when compared with adults. This creates some complex considerations for marketing and managing strategic vision and goals within an organisation.

The children's input and contribution has proved invaluable in providing a fresh and new perspective and has supported the inclusion of children in this thesis. This is validated by the fact children are the main stakeholders within a zoo tourism attraction. Tourism research will benefit in the future by more inclusion of children and must be a consideration in future academic research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Family Group Interview Questions

N.B. Questions specifically designated for adults in normal type and those for children in *italics*. Questions for all family members in bold.

How was your day? What did you do as a family during your visit today? What was the best part about visiting the zoo today with your family? Were there any disagreements/conflicts?

What was the favourite thing about your visit? What was your favourite animal you saw today and why?

Is there any animal you didn't see at the zoo today you were hoping to? Why?

What was the main reason you and your family decided to come to visit Auckland Zoo today?

Did you have any difficulties accessing information throughout your visit? Was the signage /interpretation provided adequate?

How easy was it to find your way around?

How did the zoo staff help you with your experience?

Aside from the animals, were the other facilities around the zoo adequate? Why? Why not?

Do you believe your experience as a family today offered value for money? Why yes/not?

What do you believe is the main role of Auckland Zoo? Specifically, how do you see their role for family groups?

What is something you learned today that you didn't know before your visit?

Has today given you any questions to ask your parents/caregivers/teachers?

Has your visit today made you want to find out more about anything because of what you have seen, heard, or done? Has it changed your attitudes towards animals or the environment? How?

What could have helped improve your family experience? Any recommendations? *What else would make your visit more fun at the zoo?*

Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: A1 Sign

**YOUR FAMILY
EXPERIENCE
MATTERS.**

**WHY NOT SHARE
YOUR THOUGHTS
WITH ME?**

Appendix C: A5 Pamphlet with Contact Information

Would you like to share your thoughts and experiences about your visit today?

(Family Groups including children between the ages of 6-17)

My name is Sarah Way and I am Post Graduate student at AUT University.

I am researching family group experiences at Auckland Zoo, focusing specifically on the social and conservation outcomes.

I would love to chat to you and other members of your family about your experiences from your visit today.

This research will involve you agreeing to meet with me during or near the end of your visit in the Kid's Zone area as indicated on the attached map. The interview will be around 35 minutes in duration.

Light refreshments and colouring activities for the children will be provided as an appreciation for your time.

(Note: Your identity will remain confidential and you will not be required to share anything you do not wish to)

I will be available between 10am-3pm so please come and introduce yourself or contact me, Sarah Way via text/phone on 027 333 3464.

FAMILY MATTERS



You and your family group experience at Auckland Zoo today matter – so why not take part in a 35-minute research interview to share your thoughts with a post graduate AUT student?

Please take a handout if you are interested and willing to participate.

Appendix E: Ethics Approval Letter

24 May 2022

Heike Schanzel
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Heike

Re Ethics Application: **22/86 Family group tourism experiences at Auckland Zoo: Exploring social and conservation outcomes.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 24 May 2025.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: sarah.way@icloud.com; dodonnel@aut.ac.nz

Appendix F: Information Sheet

ADULT INFORMATION SHEET

Date Information Sheet Produced:

23 February 2022

Project Title

Family group tourism experiences at Auckland Zoo: Exploring social and conservation outcomes.

An Invitation

My name is Sarah Way, a current student at Auckland University of Technology. The research has developed from my interest in both family tourism experiences and wildlife conservation organisations like Auckland Zoo. I invite you (and your family) to participate in interviews for this research which is fully voluntary. Should at any stage today or within one month following our interview you wish to withdraw from your involvement in this research, please inform myself in person or by the contact email at the end of this information sheet.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research project is to explore family group experiences at Auckland Zoo. Specifically, the aim of my research is to compare family visitors' experiences with the Auckland Zoo management's vision and animal welfare goals. Children are important decision makers within a family group and their contribution is therefore important. Auckland Zoo staff will also be interviewed to provide their own perspective on how they feel they contribute to animal welfare goals.

This research is to meet the final requirements of my degree – a Master of International Tourism Management (MITM). The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been selected to participate because you are attending the Auckland Zoo today as a family group (one or more parent/guardian with a child(ren) between the ages of 6-17). Ideally, the invitation is extended to all family members present to participate to help me gain a broad understanding of your experiences gained from your visit.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To be eligible to participate, you will need to fill in a Consent Form and if required sign on behalf of any children unable to do so themselves. Any younger children for whom you sign consent will be asked for verbal consent by myself to ensure they are comfortable to be asked questions. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you.

What will happen in this research? costs

You and your family members will be asked questions about your experiences (both positive and negative) during your visit today. It will involve arranging to meet you at a time that suits you during your visit at the main café entrance. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes and refreshments will be provided. The interview will be recorded on an application on my cell phone which allows for instant transcription of the answers you will provide.

What are the discomforts and risks?

It is not anticipated the interview process will cause any risk or discomfort to you and your family. If you or any family member feels uncomfortable, you are well within your rights to cease the interview process and we can mutually depart from the meeting area with no explanation required.

What are the benefits?

As described above, the primary purpose of the research is to meet the thesis requirements to complete my Master of International Tourism Management Degree at Auckland University of Technology. However, as a family group sharing your experiences, you should also benefit from your participation and reflection from your individual and group experiences today. The research will also benefit other academics and organisations who have an interest in my project topic. Auckland Zoo management will benefit from the insight you provide by sharing your experiences.

How will my privacy be protected?

I am the only researcher who will have access to the information you give me today. My two supervisors for my thesis project who are senior lecturers at AUT will have access to the data during the duration of my thesis project. At all stages of the research (including the final write up) your personal names and details will not be used. All recorded data (written and digital) will be held securely in a locked cabinet within the Hospitality and Tourism building at AUT and destroyed after six years through a confidential disposal service.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no monetary costs affecting your participation in this research. As previously mentioned, participation will require about 30 minutes of your time.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

The invitation is open for your entire visit duration today and you can withdraw your offer to participate should circumstances change throughout your visit.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, once the research has finished, you will receive a summary of the findings and discussion. This will be sent to you via the email address provided on your consent form if you have indicated you would like to receive any follow up.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified to the Project Supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Heike Schänzel, heike.schanzel@aut.ac.nz +64 9 921 9999 x 6923.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Sarah Way, yjp3221@aut.ac.nz +64 27 3333 464

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Assoc. Prof. Heike Schänzel, heike.schanzel@aut.ac.nz +64 9 921 9999 x 6923.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24th May, 2022. AUTEK Reference: 22/86.

Appendix G: Adult Consent Form

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Project title: **Family group tourism experiences at Auckland Zoo: Exploring social and conservation outcomes.**

Project Supervisor: **Associate Professor Heike Schänzel; Dr Donna O'Donnell**

Researcher: **Sarah Way**

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 13th April 2022.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes No

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date on which the final approval was granted* AUTECA Reference number *type the AUTECA reference number*

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix H: Parent/Guardian Consent Form



Parent/Guardian Consent Form

For use in conjunction with either:

- an appropriate Assent Form when people under 16 years of age are participants in the research or
- a Consent Form when involving participants aged 16-20 years where their age makes them vulnerable as concerns informed or voluntary consent.

Project title: *Family group tourism experiences at Auckland Zoo: Education, entertainment, and conservation outcomes.*

Project Supervisor: *Associate Professor Heike Schänzel; Dr Donna O'Donnell*

Researcher: *Sarah Way*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated dd mmmm yyyy.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw my child/children and/or myself from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw my child/children and/or myself from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to my child/children and/or myself removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of our data may not be possible.
- I agree to my child/children taking part in this research.
- I understand that my child is able to refuse to give assent to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes No

Child/children's name/s :

.....

Parent/Guardian's signature:

Parent/Guardian's name:

Parent/Guardian's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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.....

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date on which the final approval was granted* AUTEK Reference number *type the AUTEK reference number*

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

