

Should robots replace live animals at zoos and aquariums?

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Ever wonder what it would be like to hang out with a robotic animal? You may one day get the chance.

Engineers across North America have created robo-animals that could one day replace live ones at zoos and theme parks.

Advocates for these man-made creations say they could act as an ethical alternative to marine captivity.

Robo-dolphin swims and comes up for air on its own

One of the prototypes making waves in the science community is a robo-dolphin. Technicians who work for the company Edge Innovations, located in San Francisco, Calif., say the robot closely resembles a real dolphin — both inside and out.

“Inside that robot is a skeleton where the major elements look very much like a real dolphin,” said designer Roger Holzberg.

Holzberg said you can actually tell the robot what to do and it will look at you and respond to you.

Even when you move beside it or bump up against it, he said it feels like a real-life dolphin would.

The dolphin look-alike is partially remote-controlled, but can also move automatically by itself. Left to hang out in the water on its own, the robot will swim, dive and come up for air.

Robot an ethical alternative

The first version of the prototype was showcased more than 20 years ago, and has been improved since then to be what it is today.

In that time, people have raised more concerns about animal captivity in aquariums and amusement parks, as well as in film and television.

“I've always thought that the way that we preserve our world oceans is to get people to fall in love with them,” Holzberg said.

“And my hope and my dream is that children who interact with these dolphins will fall in love with the ocean and the creatures that live with them and will grow up to preserve them.”

Other robo-animals

Dolphins aren't the only robot animals that exist.

For 10 years, Jurassic Forest, a theme park near Edmonton, has been offering a glimpse of what hanging out with a dinosaur might be like.

The exhibit features dozens of life-size robot dinosaurs in a 40-acre preserve that is meant to imitate their natural habitat.

Check out videos of the robo dolphin here!

<https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/poll-should-robots-replace-live-animals-at-zoos-and-aquariums>