

## Introduction to Bengt Holst by Hilde Vervaecke

Welcome to all of you present today, Bengt Holst, our students, former students, the people of the zoo world, people of the Animal Welfare Service, colleague members of the Zoo commission, friends, my dear colleagues researchers and lectors of Odisee.

Odisee is a University College with a close link to several zoos. Our students are trained to become Animal caretakers with a Bachelor Degree in Agro- and Biotechnology and a lot of them do their internships in zoos or get a job in the zoo-world. Within Odisee we have the research group, Salto, focusing on durability and welfare, with 16 researchers working on a diversity of topics, ranging from ethics, animal welfare & behaviour, human-animal interactions, zoo nutrition, durable agriculture and animal keeping, durable use of open space, aquaculture etc... If you type Odisee & Salto in google, you will find our website & some projects.

A school and a zoo show many similarities. They share more than just the primates that walk around in it. They share their mission of education, scientific research, the zoo adds conservation, the school adds service to the society (maatschappelijke dienstverlening). They are also companies in the same difficult economic reality. Some opt to lead their business through the storm with top-down principles in some sort of despotic system, other opt to experiment with co-creation, participation and bottom-up processes. We know from scientific research that the latter improves the well-being of the human employees and I dare to hypothesize that it will also enhance animal welfare.

Talking about welfare means talking about the welfare concept, sharing scientific knowledge and information, talking about the facts. Because the same facts can be interpreted differently, you have to take a stance in relation to the facts, explaining your ethical point of view. This exercise is like a dance, you have to dare to show yourself, you have to dare to do this and this only works when you feel safe and free. That requires a culture of openness & that is something that must be practiced in many companies.

It is important to add that we need to share information on welfare & to practice to clarify our standpoints not to convince others. We need it to learn to simply get better in ethical judgments & in dealing with different opinions & in ameliorating animal welfare one way or the other through this complexity of opinions.

Bengt Hols is a zoologist and amongst others – please do read his brief biography - it is interesting- Director of Research and Conservation at Copenhagen Zoo, and Chairman of the Danish Animals Ethics Council and he has a weakness for muskox. Bengt Holst stood in the eye of an international storm several years ago and I admired the way he shared the information on the facts and the way he clarified his ethical standpoints: open and frank. Without forcing his view on others and with respect. That is a lesson he taught many people over the world. I thought he must have Viking blood in his veins because of the way he did that. It actually takes guts to do that (sorry no pun intended). I think he is a very good teacher – our ethical dance teacher – who can teach us how to deal with the complexity of ethical welfare issues.

Please let us give a warm welcome to Bengt Holst.