

Humanists call for tourism boycott of Noah's Ark Zoo

A secular group is demanding that tourism groups stop promoting a "Creationist" zoo which questions the traditional view of evolution.

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The Noah's Ark Zoo, in Wraxall, near Bristol, is accused by the British Humanist Association (BHA) of misleading tens of thousands of annual visitors and "threatening public understanding".

The BHA has written to the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA), North Somerset Council, Visit Britain and South West England, asking them to remove Noah's Ark from their material.

The BHA says the zoo farm, run by husband and wife Anthony and Christina Bush, promotes Creationism - the belief that all life was created by God.

The charity says the zoo seeks to discredit scientific facts such as radio carbon dating, the fossil record and the speed of light.

The owners make no secret of their religious beliefs but say they are "slightly different" from pure creationists because the zoo explains life as being created by "both God and evolution".

In a long section entitled "creation research", the zoo's website says Darwinism is "flawed" and wants to encourage a "creation/evolution debate".

Signs at the zoo also describe how the "three great people groups" could be descended from the three sons of Bible ark builder Noah.

BHA director of education and public affairs Andrew Copson said: "We believe Noah's Ark Farm Zoo misleads the public by not being open about its Creationist agenda in its promotional activities and by advancing misunderstandings of the natural world.

"We have therefore asked the South West England and Visit Britain tourist boards to stop promoting the zoo.

"As they are public bodies, we believe it is inappropriate that they should support establishments that seek to urge religious or ideological beliefs upon people in these ways.

"As Noah's Ark Farm Zoo threatens the public understanding of the natural world we have asked the local authority, who issues the zoo with its licence, to ensure that the zoo's education practices are in line with relevant Government and other guidelines."

Jon Woodward, Noah's Ark research assistant, said: "To say that we are not upfront with our beliefs is unfounded. The name Noah's Ark is the first indicator.

"We also have much material on our website, which is not disguised or hidden, as well as being on our leaflet. Our Education policy is purely based around the National Curriculum. At no point is religion taught in the classroom, unless requested, as that would go against the National Curriculum.

"We are offering our visitors the chance to look at the Evolution/Creation debate. As it is a free country, that is within our right. Contrary to a small minority of people's claims, we do not teach false science. This is clearly shown within the zoo with one exhibition talking about Darwin and another offering another point of view.

"We are slightly different from popular creationism. We hold a view that the natural world around us is the product of both God and Evolution. Although technically creationists, we do not hold the stereotypical creationist views that the world was created in 6,000 years and there is no evolution.

"Out of 120,000, of which a vast amount are made up of parents and school trips, we get approximately 10 complaints a year regarding this topic which is very low. Clearly the public do not share the British Humanist view point."

Steve Makin, a spokesman for North Somerset Council, said: "The licensing of zoos does consider education in so far as a zoo must promote an understanding of, and concern and respect for, biodiversity, animals and the natural world. The zoo licensing system therefore does not comment on or is involved in personal beliefs."

A spokesman for VisitEngland said it did not comment on the content of attractions.

Miranda Stevenson, the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums director, said they did not promote Noah's Ark Zoo Farm although it is a member of BIAZA.