

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue marks the beginning of Volume 5 for *Visitor Behavior*. Over the last four years we have received considerable encouragement and support from the visitor studies community. For this we thank you all.

On pages 4-7, you will find a tentative program schedule for the 1990 Visitor Studies Conference which will be held in Washington, D. C., and hosted by the Smithsonian Institution. The program is jammed with papers, discussions, and other activities that could result in difficult choices for those who attend. However, we had a large number of excellent proposals positively reviewed by a program committee and we assume that you would rather have a choice of papers based on your interests rather than a limited slate.

Interest and activities in visitor studies still seem to be on the increase and we anticipate an even brighter future. We receive phone calls and letters daily from students and professionals who only recently discovered our activities or who are involved in visitor studies. Perhaps a more objective measure of this interest and activity in visitor-related topics is the theses and dissertations being conducted at colleges and universities worldwide. Theses and dissertations typically represent serious research in an area and reflect the health of a discipline. Therefore, we dedicate part of this issue to these products of graduate schools – theses and dissertations in visitor studies. Our bibliography (pages 8-12) omits many citations that we were unable to obtain before press time. However, we would like to update the list of theses and dissertations regularly. Consequently, we encourage readers to keep us informed of relevant material for these future updates.

[Steve Bitgood, Editor]

## The Effects of Length, Type Size, and Proximity of Interpretive Signs on Reading in a Zoo

Donald Thompson  
Master's Thesis  
Jacksonville State University

In this study, over 5600 visitor groups at the Birmingham Zoo were observed as they passed through the entrance area of the Predator House, an exhibit area containing a variety of predator species including large cats. Introductory labels dealing with the topic of predation were placed on an easel in a prominent location at the building's entrance. Label length (30, 60, 120, and 240 words), size of letters (18-, 36- and 48-point), and placement of labels (directly on the visitor's path vs. 10-feet from the visitor traffic flow) were the variables studied. For each label condition, the percentage of visitors passing by and the number who stopped to read (remained visually oriented to the label for more than 3 seconds) was recorded and percentages of readers were computed.

### Results showed:

1. There was a systematic decrease in visitor attention to labels as the number of words increased. In addition, for those who did read, reading time per word decreased as the number of words increased.
2. There was a small but increasing difference in the percentage of visitors who read labels as a function of type size. In addition, larger type size was more effective than smaller type size in attracting visitor attention when the label was placed off the traffic flow path.
3. Visitors were more likely to stop and read labels placed along the traffic flow path than labels placed 10 feet off the path.

## *Visitor Studies: Theory, Research and Practice, Volume 2.* Proceedings of the 1989 Visitor Studies Conference

This 259-page volume contains 30 papers by leading professionals in visitor studies from all over the world. The book is based on papers delivered at the Visitor Studies Conference hosted by the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in May, 1989.

Cost: \$15 + postage and handling  
(\$3, U.S.; \$4, Canadian; \$7 overseas)

Make check payable to: Center for Social Design  
P. O. Box 1111  
Jacksonville, AL 36265