

All Zoos contributing to Conservation

The purpose of the current series of reprinted material (see next four pages) in ZOOS' PRINT issues starting last month is to argue for captive breeding guidelines more along the lines of IUCN SSC Reintroduction Specialist Group guidelines, but (more importantly) which **begin at the beginning**, instead of in the middle, as current guidelines do. That is why with all the guidelines already printed, we need yet another one. Other reasons:

1. There are distinct advantages for zoos in countries which have not been sufficiently exposed to the full scenario of captive care needed for conservation breeding. Not all zoos are equal - many do not have the benefit of having learned systematic management of wild animal breeding for conservation.
2. There are multiple advantages for zoos. For example, in countries which are under an administrative system that transfers Directors and/or Veterinary Officers and/or Curators/Asst. Curators every few years (or months, even!), official IUCN based, conservation breeding guidelines will be invaluable, as most of the officers transferred in know nothing at all about zoo management.
3. There are advantages for other specialist groups, such as the Reintroduction Specialist Group whose Chair, Dr. Fred Launay feels that his job and that of RSG would be easier if there were very specific guidelines for different objectives and levels of breeding wild animals in captivity. Guidelines for *ex situ* breeding could cover exactly how animals intended for reintroduction must be housed, fed, and reared in order to make the fit physically, genetically and psychologically for release.
4. There are advantages for CBSG (Conservation Breeding Specialist Group), as Guidelines can be routinely updated often at CBSG meetings. It will enable CBSG to "level the playing field" of zoos in different parts of the world and it will expand and clarify the role of CBSG as the scientific "conscience" of zoos and as an objective facilitator and planner of zoo interactions with other zoos, wildlife agencies, animal welfare organisations, government organizations, etc. in the arena of conservation action.

The IUCN Technical Guidelines on Management of *ex situ* Populations for Conservation, reprinted in this issue along with an article "interpreting" them, were approved at the 14th Meeting of the Pgm Comm. of IUCN Council, 2002. It is an update of the IUCN Policy Guidelines of Management of *Ex Situ* populations for Conservation approved and published in 1987. Such documents have been written more for policy makers and some western zoos which were already on track. More than 90% of the zoos in the world could not make heads or tail of these documents in terms of applying them to

real life in zoos. Neither of the IUCN statements, 1987 nor 2002 are a substitute for guidelines as referred here.

In the world today there may be 10,000 zoos, or even more. About 10% zoos come under the WAZA banner being either full members themselves or members of a regional or national zoo association. Most of the full members are on the right track but not all, and many regional or national association members, particularly in the developing regions, are not all able to contribute to conservation by captive breeding. Some countries, such as the United States mimics the percentage I mentioned globally. There are about 250 zoos that have been accredited by AZA "The Zoo Association" (in USA) and more than 2000 "other zoos" in USA alone.

While not all zoos are well-intentioned or oriented towards the goals and aspirations of the organised zoo community, many zoos and their owners and employees ARE well-intentioned, but still do not know where to begin in systematizing their breeding how to begin on the right foot if starting a new zoo. There is no single document which explains the "big picture" of zoo conservation sufficiently for the purpose of instruction. There is a need for such a document which must be simple, comprehensible, and easily translated into different languages. It should include the political and administrative, aspects of breeding as well as physiological aspects, such as even the decision of individual zoos at a particular time to breed for exhibition, education, research, and/or conservation. There is no reason why every zoo has to satisfy its conservation duty by breeding, except when it prevents the need to take animals from the wild for exhibition) –there are other conservation activities which will contribute to conservation other than breeding endangered species. The guidelines I have in mind would encourage, permit and empower zoos and zoo associations to scale down their objectives to what is realistic and possible for their budget and technical level instead of thinking it is imperative to breed threatened species.

Most of us in the zoo community can relate many instances of animals caught for captive breeding ostensibly for conservation by zoos which were not equipped to do the job. Those zoos have contributed to extinction and are even now.

Although it may seem I am being very hard on zoos, it is only because I see some huge gaps where gaps do not have to be. I have huge faith in zoos as instruments of conservation ... IF they know their own abilities and limits and stay within them, substituting some other conservation activity they can do well for breeding until they develop the expertise and infrastructure required. **Submitted by Sally Walker, Editor Emeritus & Convenor, CBSG South Asia.**