

Committing to Conservation - The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy

Committing to Conservation

The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) represents a global community of zoological facilities united for the care and conservation of living fauna and flora. This status is shared locally and globally with botanic gardens, museums, protected areas and concerned communities. Successful conservation means all species, including humanity, thriving in healthy and sustainable ecosystems; that is, securing populations of species in natural habitats for the long term.

Editors' Note

Zoos and Aquarium have tremendous potential to engage the general public in wildlife conservation. These facilities also contribute for conservation research which is fundamental for conservation of threatened species. Since the extinction rate has been accelerated many folds due to anthropogenic activities, modern zoos are contributing for species conservation in the wild as well. This document by WAZA - Committing to Conservation: The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy, outlines the key role zoos and aquariums can play in supporting conservation in the wild. We have permission from WAZA to serialize this publication. This is much needed and timely milestone. Happy reading! - Editor

Ensuring the well-being of other species is essential if humans are to ensure their own. The quality of the land, air and water not only affects wild populations of animals and plants but will eventually determine humanity's fate as well. Quick and effective action must be taken to deal with the profound anthropogenic issues that confront natural ecosystems, such as growing human populations, continued pollution and over-exploitation of natural resources, and climate change. Human actions and lifestyle choices are threatening the planet and the life forms that inhabit it. To preserve the diversity of the world's wildlife, humans must change how they live, and how they apply knowledge and skills.

However, it has proven extremely difficult to mobilise and sustain the social and political will necessary to change behaviour for the benefit of wildlife and wild places. While many believe that species and habitat conservation are innately valuable, others need to be convinced of the material importance of conserving living fauna and flora. The key strategy for achieving the required revolution in attitudes and behaviours will be reconnecting the public with nature. People must be inspired to understand that life on earth is fragile; that the species that make up life on the planet depend upon each another to survive; and that human survival is reliant on the species populations in natural ecosystems. It must also be made clear that species conservation has economic value: the richer the diversity of life the greater the opportunity for medical discoveries, economic development and adaptive responses to the ominous impacts of global climate change.

THE ROLE OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS

Zoos and aquariums (accredited or otherwise designated members of the

professionally recognised zoological community) are uniquely poised to contribute to successful conservation of species and ecosystems. Extensive and diverse populations of species are cared for by zoological institutions, which attract high numbers of visitors who are delighted and inspired by such close encounters with nature.

The collective social, political and financial power of zoos and aquariums as a community, as well as the potential impact of such vast audiences, can be potent. Zoos and aquariums enjoy wide-ranging levels of public credibility and trust, and provide fun and intellectually stimulating destinations for visitors of all ages. Every year, an estimated 700 million visits are made to zoos and aquariums that are members of national or regional associations around the world.

Instilling in all visitors a strong sense of excitement about and a desire to care for life on earth will create a solid platform for fulfilling the promise to care for and conserve wildlife. Zoological facilities are uniquely positioned to use a social-science, evidence-based approach to influence pro-environmental behaviour. This Strategy provides guidance, inspiration and access to a set of techniques designed to help zoos and aquariums respond to the challenges of mobilizing social and political will on behalf of wildlife, and embrace the

WAZA ACHIEVEMENTS



Over 700
Million Visits
TO ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS
AROUND THE WORLD EVERY YEAR



Over 300
WAZA Members
AROUND THE WORLD



Over 350 Million
US Dollars
SPENT ON WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION
EVERY YEAR

Zoos and aquariums readily accept the responsibility that comes with maintaining and caring for animals.

WE HAVE A DUTY TO

- Provide the highest-quality care and management of wildlife within and across institutions
- Develop and adapt intensive wildlife-management techniques for use in protecting and preserving species in nature
- Support conservation-directed social and biological research
- Lead, support and collaborate with education programmes that target changes in community behavior towards better outcomes for conservation
- Use zoological facilities to provide for populations of species most in need of genetic and demographic support for their continued existence in the wild
- Promote and exemplify sustainable practices in the management of animal populations, our facilities and the environment
- Provide a public arena to discuss and debate the challenges facing society as extinction accelerates and ecosystem services are degraded
- Act as rescue-and-release centres for threatened animals in need of immediate help, with the best knowledge and facilities to care for them until they are fit to go back to the wild
- Be major contributors of intellectual and financial resources to field conservation
- Provide ethical and moral leadership

opportunities available to facilitate a greater realisation of our potential.

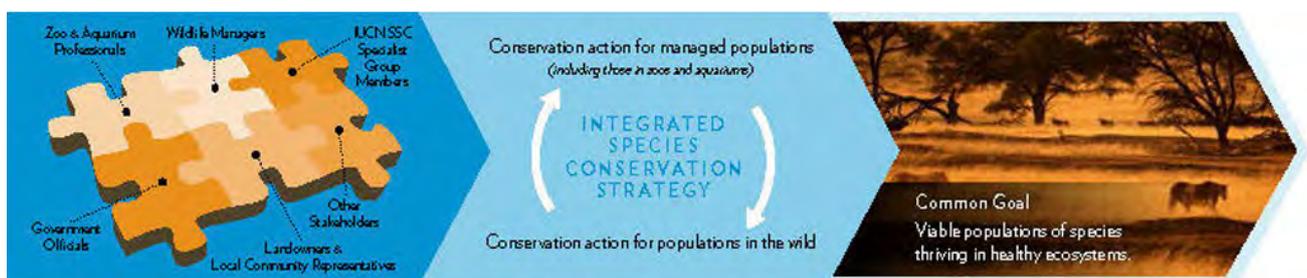
To accomplish this, and to increase the effectiveness of global conservation efforts, zoos and aquariums are increasingly adopting a One Plan Approach. This conservation planning framework brings together experts from the global zoo and aquarium fraternity, local community representatives, governmental agencies, wildlife managers, conservation organisations, scientists and others in developing conservation strategies to achieve the common goal of viable populations of the species thriving in healthy ecosystems. Through the One Plan Approach, all available resources are engaged in producing one comprehensive conservation plan for each target species (*see Population Management*). This integrated approach will result in more comprehensive actions, promote innovation in species conservation, cultivate greater collaboration between zoological facilities and with other conservation organisations, and allow for greater adaptability in the face of climate change.

Zoos and aquariums can and must become models of integrated conservation (*see Creating a Culture of Conservation*). As animal-care specialists, conservationists, educators, communicators, wildlife advocates and scientists, zoo and aquarium professionals must also become powerful agents of change and encourage widespread application of the One Plan Approach. Their institutions must embrace the role of professional conservation organisations that operate sustainably (*see Modern Conservation Organisations and Animal Welfare*). Fulfilling this responsibility has never been more essential.

The One Plan Approach also mandates that animals maintained in zoological facilities play a conservation role that benefits wild counterparts (*see Saving Species in the Wild*). The One Plan Approach links researchers in zoos and aquariums with scientists and conservationists working directly with wild populations (*see Science and Research*). Likewise, education and capacity-building efforts must start with zoos and aquariums and expand to influence behaviour change for conservation in society (*see Engagement—*

ONE PLAN APPROACH

Definition: Integrated species conservation planning that considers all populations of the species (inside and outside the natural range), under all conditions of management, and engages all responsible parties and resources from the start of the conservation planning initiative.



Influencing Behaviour Change for Conservation). Zoological facilities must work together, and be effective at partnering and collaborating with other conservation organisations to evaluate impacts and advocate for conserving biodiversity.

The partnership between the Amphibian Ark (AArk), the Amphibian Specialist Group (ASG) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission (SSC) and the Amphibian Survival Alliance (ASA) is an example of a One Plan Approach. The collective vision of these organisations is ‘amphibians safe in nature’. Their missions—protecting amphibians and their habitats through dynamic partnerships worldwide (ASA); providing the scientific foundation to inform effective amphibian conservation action around the world (ASG); ensuring the survival and diversity of amphibian species focusing on those that cannot currently be safe-guarded in their natural environments (AArk)— work synergistically to achieve the collective vision. ASG members around the world contribute their knowledge to AArk’s Conservation Needs Assessment (CNA) on a country-by-country basis as well as to the IUCN Red List for amphibians. The CNA identifies high-priority species for assurance populations, and AArk works with zoological institutions and other in-country entities to facilitate the establishment of these populations. ASA focuses on protecting habitats so that assurance populations can eventually be returned to the wild. By working together links are established between the excellent conservation work that goes on in zoos and aquariums and the conservation of species in their native habitats.

A CALL TO ACTION

The need for urgent action is clear. The United Nations Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020—by far the strongest commitment ever made by the world’s governments to combat the escalating extinction crisis—includes 20 targets, collectively known as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Together these provide a framework for halting the loss of biodiversity. Major non-governmental conservation organisations and international conventions are aligning their activities with these targets.

WAZA membership at the 2011 Annual Conference endorsed the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity. WAZA and all its member zoos and aquariums, and other zoological facilities that want to conserve species and habitats, have a potentially powerful role to play in the achievement of many of these targets. As a community committed to educating people about the changing natural world zoos and aquariums must act responsibly, and inspire and mobilise society to respond. Otherwise, the tide of extinction, for both other species and humans, will not be reversed.

The vision for WAZA and the global community of zoological facilities is also clear. WAZA calls on all zoos and aquariums to adopt an integrated One Plan Approach to conservation. Animal welfare and conservation must be the primary purpose, and zoological institutions should be guided by this in everything they do (*see Appeal to Zoo*

AICHI BIODIVERSITY TARGETS



and Aquarium Directors). With vast living populations of animals, devoted and talented staff, and extraordinarily large, diverse and engaged audiences zoos and aquariums have the power to facilitate the vital work of caring for and conserving living wild animals and ecosystems.

The future is promising. This Strategy is intended to help make that promise become a reality. If successful, zoos and aquariums will rank among the most important forces for conservation on the planet; a conduit through which visitors and society can help to save species. Even more important, meaningful progress will be made towards the vision of all species thriving in healthy ecosystems.



African penguin

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