

# Caring for Wildlife - The World Zoo and Aquarium Animal Welfare Strategy

## Chapter 8: Partnerships in Animal Welfare

*Our commitment is to work collaboratively and openly to highlight animal welfare and improve the lives of animals*

### Editors' Note

*WAZA's Animal welfare strategy is a much needed and timely milestone. It provides approach for assessing and managing animal welfare and thus responds to concerns over welfare of zoo and aquarium animals. It also provides approaches for conservation activities of zoos and aquariums. We have the permission from WAZA to serialise Caring for Wildlife: The World Zoo and Aquarium Animal Welfare Strategy. There should be something for everyone to do to make the zoos and the animals in their locality better. Happy reading! - Editor*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To realise our commitment to high animal welfare standards, the *World Zoo and Aquarium Animal Welfare Strategy* calls on member organisations to:

1. Become a recognised centre for animal welfare expertise and assist and advise other organisations on animal welfare.
2. Make sure that all relevant staff, including your animal management and veterinary staff members, closely collaborate and are up to date with professional standards of animal health and welfare.
3. Collaborate and partner with universities, research bodies and other zoological institutions to further understanding of animal welfare states and animal sentience.
4. Partner with animal welfare organisations and external animal welfare experts, through representation on animal ethics and welfare committees, or similar entities, in reviewing animal welfare in your organisation.
5. Partner or 'twin' with zoological institutions that require guidance to achieve positive welfare outcomes for the animals in their care. This can be through staff exchanges, training opportunities, exchange of procedures or funding grants.

## INTRODUCTION

As in any endeavour, partnerships mean that capacity is shared and increased. This is also the case for animal welfare work in zoos and aquariums. This Strategy as a whole reflects the complexity underlying the proper care of animals in zoos and aquariums and the many

matters that need to be considered to meet species-specific needs. A wide range of inputs is required, so that the establishment of partnerships that together provide all the skills is beneficial.

The formation of effective relationships with collaborating colleagues is important to encourage and achieve long-term advances in animal welfare. Key to the development of effective and successful partnerships is trust, understanding, and clear and effective communication.

Partnering is a core activity and requirement for modern zoo and aquariums. *The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy* (2005) devoted a chapter to the concept of partnerships, emphasising that as zoos and aquariums embrace a unique mix of technical and interpretive expertise, legal and environmental ethics and knowledge of biodiversity, they should cooperate among themselves to provide mutual support. Although the *World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy* focuses primarily on biodiversity conservation, the delivery of high standards of animal welfare also benefits from this. Modern zoos and aquariums therefore seek to ensure that the development of partnerships to support their conservation and animal welfare objectives is a core competency.

### **PARTNERING TO EXPAND CAPACITY AND KNOWLEDGE**

Partnerships in animal welfare can have a variety of objectives and functions. Research collaborations with universities can significantly contribute to our understanding and effectiveness in managing animal welfare. Also, zoo or aquarium veterinary clinics can partner with conservation bodies working in the field to focus on the health and welfare of free-ranging wildlife. Such partnerships should enable us to increase specific projects that enhance our knowledge; for example, pain perception, sentience and different behavioural expressions of positive affective states in the variety of species accommodated in zoos and aquariums, invertebrates as well as vertebrates.

Advancing understanding in such areas would further develop animal welfare principles and facilitate improvements in the husbandry provisions required to ensure good welfare of wildlife in human care. Of particular significance in the animal welfare context are the benefits provided by zoos and aquariums establishing and maintaining animal ethics and welfare committees, or similar entities, which include external (non-staff) membership. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of representatives of animal welfare groups,

if their members are prepared to participate constructively in the functions of such committees.

For partnerships to be successful, zoos and aquariums require a high level of transparency in their operations, particularly regarding animal welfare standards. Persistent high-level scrutiny exists, not only by the visiting public but also by governmental and non-governmental animal welfare bodies and by animal rights groups. These are audiences with strong interests in those zoo and aquarium activities that potentially affect animal welfare. Transparency helps allay the concerns they may have and, in addition, animal ethics and welfare committees and animal welfare charters provide good vehicles for demonstrating accountability.

### ANIMAL WELFARE ORGANISATIONS

Modern zoos and aquariums can benefit by being proactive in their dealings with local and international animal welfare organisations and by actively building positive relationships with them (see *case study 8.1*). While the notion of involving members of local animal welfare organisation in an animal ethics and welfare committee might seem to be risky



#### Case study 8.1:

*Partnering with an international animal welfare organisation*

At the request of the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA; renamed World Animal Protection in 2014), personnel from both WSPA and WAZA teamed up to visit three bear parks in Asia in 2004. The team found that in all three parks the conditions in which the bears were kept were well below even basic standards expected of responsible zoos holding these species. The team developed a comprehensive report that detailed specific recommendations to upgrade the conditions for the bears at these parks. Follow-up visits by team members took place in 2007 and, although some improvements were noted, it was clear that long-term external monitoring would be required to bring about significant change in the bears' circumstances. Consequently, Wild Welfare, through the support of zoological institutions and international animal welfare organisations, has re-visited the parks and is evaluating the next steps to take that will make improvements. This project represents an excellent example of a partnership with an international

animal welfare organisation where zoo and aquarium expertise was needed to identify and evaluate issues of poor animal welfare provision within the international zoo and aquarium community.

- Asian Bear Park, Brown bears

to some zoo and aquarium managers, international experience shows that most animal welfare organisations welcome such involvement and are usually an asset to such committees.

The remit and focus of animal welfare organisations varies widely and while some may consistently challenge the keeping of wildlife species in human care, many others are practically and scientifically minded organisations that welcome collaboration. The openness of cooperative arrangements, in ensuring that the participants are well informed, helps to forestall confrontational misunderstandings that may otherwise occur. However, as the ethos of such organisations in some localities may preclude constructive partnering, this should be given careful consideration.

Similarly, soliciting the involvement of animal welfare organisations in the development of animal welfare charters is a useful mechanism to build trust between representatives of both communities. This, in terms of improving animal welfare, is advantageous.

Although differences of opinion about what constitutes good animal welfare may persist between such partners, they are often mitigated by recognition of a common purpose. Even when an organisation might seem to be opposed to zoos and aquariums and be publicly vocal about that, these groups regularly seek local help from their accredited zoo or aquarium to deal with an individual wildlife problem or a substandard zoo or aquarium. Such interactions help to cement valuable working relationships for going forward.

An advantage of such partnerships—quite apart from combining networks, effort, skills and resources—is that their existence and operational transparency tend to be reassuring to the wider public who are thereby less influenced by the opposition of groups that will remain implacably opposed to zoos and aquariums.

### **ANIMAL RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS**

Unfortunately, many proponents of ‘animal rights’ work around the doctrine of freedom and ‘liberation’, which in its application opposes the concepts under which zoos and aquariums operate. The consequence is that there is rarely a middle ground that enables constructive dialogue. As in the instance of any clash of fundamental philosophies, non-participation in the debate to begin with is sometimes the only effective strategy.

However, as with animal welfare organisations, there is a spectrum of operational values within animal rights communities and, depending on the circumstances and the individuals concerned, accords may be reached. Much can be achieved going forward with a sensible dialogue that recognises differences and accepts them.

### WORKING WITH COLLEAGUE ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS

As a professional ethical practice, the pursuit and application of good animal welfare cannot end at our own zoo or aquarium gates. It should be projected outwards to other organisations that need help.

Recent surveys have shown that as many as eight out of ten institutions keeping wildlife species (or ‘zoos’ and ‘aquariums’) open to the public worldwide operate with no animal welfare accreditation standards. Many of these organisations have facilities in very poor condition and animal welfare is a serious concern. Such situations adversely impact public perception of all zoos and aquariums—good and bad. Modern zoos and aquariums are strongly encouraged to assist in efforts to improve conditions in these zoological institutions, because ‘zoo’ or ‘aquarium’ people, wherever they are, will tend to listen more seriously to other zoo or aquarium people and then take the necessary action to improve.

When dealing with such situations, it is critical to determine who makes the decisions that

#### **Case study 8.2:**

*An example of partnership in action*

Following the long civil war and finally the capture of Kabul in 2001, Kabul Zoo was largely in ruins. North Carolina Zoo raised US\$ 500,000 from 6,000 largely private subscribers to support and help rebuild it. The emergency first phase, the provision of food, water and heating to the animals during the first few weeks, was undertaken by staff members from the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA; renamed World Animal Protection in 2014), which had a team ready to act quickly for such emergencies. The second, stabilisation phase was undertaken by zoo- and aquarium-based personnel from all over the world, recruited by North Carolina Zoo. The final stage of training and capacity building was then accomplished largely through the Indian zoo community. Other zoo and aquarium personnel notably from the Wildlife Conservation Society, with added funding from the European Union and others, have since provided further assistance.

- Kabul Zoo, Afghanistan, Animal habitat



will address poor animal welfare. Who is really in charge? Frequently, it is not in the zoo or aquarium itself and many factors may be at play. Local politics often enter into the picture and occasionally poor management or animal welfare may be the result of other factors.

Ways to assist include 'twinning' partnerships between a modern zoo or aquarium (or consortia of zoos and aquariums) and the facility in need of assistance. Similarly, partnerships with animal welfare organisations provide sound prospects for cooperation, as they bring a variety of skills, resources and networks of their own (see *case study 8.2*).

From a practical, financial and marketing perspective, it is relatively easy to be immediately and visibly effective in assisting a zoo or aquarium in need through the simple expedient of staff exchanges and training. There are great benefits in a staff exchange. As many zoos and aquariums in need may be involved in trading animals from the wild, assisting such zoological institutions and helping to stop such trade may have an additional



Houston Zoo, Tx. USA and Hangzhou Zoo, Hangzhou, China - Houston Zoo staff training Hangzhou Zoo staff how to utilise PVC for environmental enrichment

conservation value. For further guidance in this area, refer to the *WAZA Code of Ethics and Animal Welfare*.

## CONCLUSION

To achieve the necessary high standards of animal welfare globally, it is imperative that zoos and aquariums embrace animal welfare responsibly by promoting effective communication with colleagues and by establishing, nurturing and maintaining proactive partner relationships, while at the same time being open about efforts to improve the lives of wildlife species in human care.

Importantly, zoos and aquariums that are in need of assistance can benefit from the establishment of successful partnerships that facilitate the sharing and effective use of collective knowledge and expertise. Such help may ultimately aid improvements in animal welfare and operational standards, and encourage longterm organisational change in attitudes towards animal welfare.

Moreover, not only can partnerships offer support to colleagues and benefit the lives of individual animals by improving their welfare, but by working together and striving to find practical solutions to animal welfare challenges through knowledge sharing and the pooling of resources, these partnerships can highlight the importance of, and dedication to, animal welfare within the zoo and aquarium community and positively influence public perception.

**Citation:** Mellor, D. J., Hunt, S. & Gusset, M. (eds) (2015) *Caring for Wildlife: The World Zoo and Aquarium Animal Welfare Strategy*. Gland: WAZA Executive Office, 87 pp.

© 2015 World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission. (See: <http://www.waza.org/en/site/conservation/animal-welfare-1439197763>).