Mid-year meeting at WAZA Office

At the time of the WAZA Council meeting, other business is attended such as discussion and drafting of guidelines for topics of interest and concern to zoos and to WAZA members. This April, the topics to be discussed were Substandard Zoos, Conservation Breeding Guidelines (CBG), an Evaluation System for ex situ Conservation Breeding Operations (ESCBO), Guidelines for the Access and Benefit Sharing clauses of the Convention on Biodiversity Guidelines on how to address as zoological gardens.

1. Conservation Breeding Guidelines

After much discussion it was agreed that the term "conservation breeding" was multidimensional and perhaps open to misunderstanding. The title of the discussion was changed to 2006 Animal Management Guidelines which will undoubtedly undergo several regular revisions. The question of why did this discussion take place at all was raised by several participants from developed countries. The reason is that although the World Zoo Aquarium Conservation Strategy recommends that all breeding programmes for threatened species in zoos and aquariums be managed as global or regional cooperative programmes with participant institutions sharing specific programme objectives, these objectives presuppose a familiarity with a collection of scientific and ethical principles and actions which are not, in fact, familiar to all, and even may be contrary to the policy and mind-set of a community, country, or culture. Therefore it was deemed useful to review the differences in understanding of "managed programmes" and of knowledge and acceptance of the big picture surrounding acquisition, holding, breeding, exchanging and de-acquisition of wild anials throughout the world. The final document is intended to provide a definitive explanation of the term “conservation breeding” or to suggest whatever term which best describes the kind of scientific, systematic propagation of species, subspecies and populations that zoos do for the purpose of conservation.

In the past, perhaps many individual institutions and countries were guided by self-interest in running their zoos as well as other, more politically prestigious institutions. It is possible, then, that some countries exploited or were exploited by other and their memory of this is yet to fade. Perhaps, even, self-interest survives the last two or three decades of zoo evolution which has put much emphasis on communication, cooperation, and collaboration in order to confront the problems of shrinking habitat and declining species. Individuals and institutions are as diverse as nature itself although not as transparent. In carrying out such an important mandate as attempting to conserve species, populations, genetic resources, all must learn to trust one another and be worthy of trust. Conservation breeding / management is so dependent on cooperation between participants that, without trust, it cannot be carried out effectively. These guidelines describe the means of best practice – the ideal – predicated on best behaviour of all parties within the framework of the WAZA Code of Ethics. It is up to each association, institution and individual to act in a way that generates trust and from that, cooperation, and from that, conservation.

In order to level the playing field and help all zoos understand the overall responsibilities of keeping wild animals for conservation the following topics will be explained in the final document.

- Collection plan – aspirational document (*Ex situ* management: Principles and pitfalls).
- Demographic management of *ex situ* populations
- Importance of records
- Acquisition and Disposition policy
- Ownership
- Animal Welfare concerns
- Role of Population Management/Studbook manager
- Role of Studbook
- Species prioritisation - regional collection planning
- How to set up a managed programme

2. Evaluation system for *ex situ* conservation breeding programmes.

The group discussed an evaluation system for *ex situ* conservation breeding programmes. After very much discussion it was decided that our terms of reference are an evaluation of breeding programmes in zoos. There are wider issues pertaining to the conservation relevance which need to be resolved and are outside the remit of this discussion, such as to evaluate what a successful programme is. It was decided to turn this topic over to CIRCC with the following notes :
A successful breeding programme should have the following characteristics (result in the following):

- A sustainable *ex situ* population
- A genetically variable and demographically stable *ex situ* population

In order to evaluate this, the following questions need to tbe asked:

- Does the programme have a studbook ?
- Are the studbook data analysed ?
- Does this process produce recommendations ?
- Are they adhered to ?
- Is the *ex situ* population stable or increasing (and thus achieving the pre-determined demographic aim) ?
- Does the *ex situ* population retain as much genetic diversity as possible over time (and thus achieve the pre-determined genetic aim) ?
- Does the *ex situ* population reach/retain a stable sex ratio as in the predetermined aim ?
- Does the programme achieve other predetermined aims ?
- This is about management to any predetermined aim that may or may not be for a conservation purpose.

3. Substandard Zoos issue :

Draft discussion on this issue was finally entitled WAZA Discussion on Lowest Acceptable Practices for Zoos.

The framework of discussion included a Policy statement that WAZA will assist those national associations or

institutions that request assistance, and a call for a definition of a substandard zoo and what WAZA should do about it.

The impact of substandard zoos was discussed and listed as
1.Conservation Impact (poor survival rate; loss of potential genetic material; frequent perceived need for re-stocking)
2. Impact on wild populations (indiscriminate capture depletes wild populations; indiscriminate release of over-bred of surplus animals damages wild populations; disturbance of wild population behaviour leading to stress; panic and fatal accidents; effect on social behaviour; disturbance of wild population dynamics)
3. Impact on wild habitats (indiscriminate and poorly researched release of surplus animals can impact habitat; irresponsible releases can wreck a niche or fragile ecosystem)
4. Public education (difficult to convey an effective conservation in a substandard zoo; a bad zoo conveys unfortunate subliminal messages such as wildlife is cheap; authorities don't seem to care therefore wildlife is plentiful; wild animals are pathetic and not valued)
5. Industry image (zoo is the same word applied to a broad range of institutions of varying quality; animal rights/anti-zoo/ radical animal welfare groups do not differentiate between zoos; the organized zoo community is lumped with the "other" zoo world by most of the public; our best zoos share the same "bed -public and the press - with the worst zoos.
6. Animal welfare issue (unsuitable living environments for animals, lack of husbandry and veterinary expertise such as sanitation, nutrition, preventative medicine, etc.; visit misbehaviour such as feeding, teasing, violence, stress, etc.)
7. Safety for the animals, public and staff (inadequate barriers and enclosures; inadequate sanitation which could cause the spread of diseases; public liability)

A policy statement had been suggested which was noted as " We as a community of organized zoos have a moral, ethical and professional responsibility to engage with needy institutions in order to help them improve their standards, achieve conservation goals, and benefit the animals they hold. This assumes that the body of WAZA members are interested in helping substandard zoos."

There was discussion of what is or could be called as a substandard zoo and the following were listed: Zoos that a) don't know how; b) don't care; c) are deliberately substandard (such as to save money or attract a certain type of clientele; and d) cannot afford to change.

A tentative definition of a 21st century zoo (best practices) would include
-- Permanent sited legal establishments
-- Primarily open to and administered for the visiting public which, in accordance with animal welfare and scientific management principles, living organisms are maintained in ethical conditions and under predominantly *ex situ* circumstances for the foremost and demonstrable purpose of conservation through exhibition, education and research and where the principal business rationale is not the commercial trade in living organisms or their products.

This definition is meant to exclude nature reserves, game farms, botanical gardens, plant nurseries, research laboratories, circuses, pet shops, animal dealerships/ brokers and commercial breeding operations that are not open to the public, animal rehabilitation facilities and sanctuaries.

The principles of best practices in zoos were discussed. There was considerable discussion about the term "acceptable". The group discussed those standards that are "barely good enough", "adequate", "minimum" and "acceptable" and recommend use of the term "lowest acceptable practices" which are the starred three of the 7 practices below:
· Permanent site (implies continuity)
· Supportive environment for the animals, personnel and public (duty of care)
· Active involvement in the maintenance of biodiversity
· Management for the wider benefit of the community (greater good)
· Healing the relationship between man and animal (promotion of an emotive value system)
· Provision of education opportunities for learning about animals and their environments
· Meet applicable legal requirements

It was felt that education can only be done if the three lowest acceptable practices are met, e.g. meet applicable legal requirements, are permanently sited (implies continuity) and providing a supportive (safe, comfortable, etc.) environment for the animals, personnel and public.

Ways in which WAZA or WAZA zoos can help substandard zoos were suggested as :
. by providing assessment tools (for inspection, etc.)
· Organising brother/sister zoo relationship (works only if the substandard zoo wants help, if the help is appropriate and if they will maximize it)
· by offering mentoring/consultation
· by working with the local authorities
· by providing basic information such as WZACS and the Code of Professional Ethics
· by threat of loss of membership in WAZA (for regions)
· by making possible help from outside the region if appropriate.

The point in Chapter 7 was reiterated that when zoos send people overseas for field conservation work, they should visit the local zoo and assist with general advice.

It was also felt that when there is no zoo legislation or no strong zoo/aquarium legislation, then WAZA can help "fill the gaps". WAZA, particularly members from countries which have used zoo personnel to draft legislation, can be helpful providing its consultative expertise on local legislation as an aid to the country.

The situation may arise that an institution doesn't want help and all that WAZA or members could do may be to involve legal authorities. It was noted that it is easy to say that a zoo should be closed, but disposition of the animals is not easy.

The types of help a zoo might need were suggested as :
- engagement, information and training and mentoring
- intervention to engage their local or national authority or

government
- emergency help or monetary support
- desire, interest or willingness to be helped

Also the short-term assistance for zoos not meeting the lowest acceptable practices could include "one-off" capacity building, facility improvement, veterinary assistance, personnel provision, material supply, engagement with authority, ·some temporary housing of animals, emergency relief (such as for a crisis), and general skills Transfer

Long-term assistance for zoos not meeting lowest acceptable practices may be capacity building, skills transfer, "Twinning" as a form of mentoring, long-term mentoring, engage licensing authority

Other documentation was done such as a flow chart and continuum for action. It was recognised that much more work was required for a system and that this is not a simple issue. Now, the WAZA Council and WAZA Regional Associations persons will review the Draft to date and comment.

4. Discussion on Access and Benefit Sharing - WAZA Guidelines

The CBD defines biological diversity as "*the variability among living organisms from all sources, ... including diversity within species, between species and of eco-systems*". It covers all ecosystems, species, and genetic resources. It affects all aspects of the work of zoos and aquariums. In particular it governs the way genetic resources are exchanged and used, and introduces obligations to obtain prior informed consent and share benefits arising from their use.

"Genetic resources" means genetic material of actual or potential value. "Genetic material" means any material of plant, animal, microbial or other origin containing functional units of heredity.

The Convention has three main goals:
1. The conservation of biodiversity,
2. Sustainable use of the components of biodiversity, and
3. Sharing the benefits arising from the commercial and other utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way (Access and Benefit Sharing - ABS)

How will CBD/ABS affect zoos and aquariums?
The provisions of the CBD have, to date, had little real impact on zoos and aquariums. However, this is likely to change, as the Parties to the Convention are now developing or reviewing their national legislation. WAZA members should, therefore, become prepared as each signatory country is expected and obliged to prepare national strategies to plan future biodiversity conservation.

The CBD will certainly offer WAZA members new opportunities to play a significant role in biodiversity conservation activities in line with then World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy, such as research, *in situ* conservation, training, monitoring, advocacy, communication, education and public awareness, and cooperation.

The Convention affirms the sovereign rights of states over their genetic resources, a right that has not previously been recognized legally or subject to such international legislation. ABS results in new requirements for zoos and aquariums. ABS requirements will apply to the collection from the wild and removal from range states of genetic resources and all derivations thereof. It should be noted that ABS requirements apply also to *in situ* research and the knowledge gained there from.

Article 15 of the CBD lays down the principle that access to genetic resources remains with national governments and therefore is subject to national legislation. The Convention leaves it thus up to individual national governments to decide how it is to be implemented. Based on national interpretation ABS requirements may also apply to circumstances such as genetic resources collected prior to the entry into force of CBD and to the latter transfer of such animals between institutions. It should also be noted that the term "access" has not yet been officially defined. Thus its meaning depends on national interpretation and may involve activities such as: entering a location where genetic resources are found; simple surveying activities, acquisition of genetic resources for scientific, educational, conservation breeding or other purposes.

Some of the processes to be introduced by national governments may initially seem unfamiliar and involve additional costs. However, in many cases the elements required by the ABS system will be integrated into existing formalities that must be fulfilled when exporting live animals, gametes or other genetic resources, or when carrying out research in foreign countries.

Core Commitments
Access to genetic resources by zoos and aquariums is subject to certain core commitments as enumerated in the following section. Members are ethically bound to observe the commitments.
1. Prior informed consent (PIC)
2. Mutually agreed terms (MAT)
3. Benefit sharing
4. Conservation and sustainable use
5. Traditional knowledge
6. Community participation
7. Information and transparency

WAZA Guidelines on Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit Sharing were discussed and a draft created. Now the WAZA Council and regions will discuss and suggest modifications, put up queries and agree to parts of the document.

By the next Annual Conference which is to be held in Leipzig, Germany in August, it may be possible to take a vote of the General Membership on these four important issues.

Discussion group consisted of Dave Morgan PAZAAB, Sally Walker Z.O.O/SAZARC, Rosamira Guillen ALPZA/ ACOPAZOA, Olivia Walter BIAZA, Kristin Vehrs AZA and Thomas Althus, WAZA