

Marketing the conservation role of zoos and aquariums

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Abstract

The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy calls on institutions to pursue a strategy of integrated conservation, i.e. to integrate all aspects of their work with conservation activities. But, while more and more zoos and aquariums see themselves primarily as conservation institutions, the perception of the public at large is still very different. For the average visitor the main or only purpose of zoos and aquariums still is leisure and entertainment.

The continued existence of zoos and aquariums depends, however, upon recognition that they are based on respect for the dignity of the animals in their care, and that they serve the higher goal of nature conservation. Consequently the conservation role of zoos and aquariums must be actively marketed at all levels.

WAZA, when representing the zoo world in international fora, such as CITES, positions itself as an expert organisation that is philosophically close to IUCN. The WAZA Magazines that are distributed to Governments world wide, deal exclusively, and the WAZA web site predominantly, with in situ and ex situ conservation activities of the WAZA Constituency. Regional and national associations (should) carry out campaigns addressing people in their own language, and institutions must make conservation a top issue for communication and formal and informal education.

In marketing their conservation role, associations and institutions must ensure that they are credible. Institutions, in particular, must purchase, keep, breed, and dispose of animals in compliance with ethical principles and in a way that is deemed acceptable by the general public.

The Problem

The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy Zoos calls on institutions to pursue a strategy of integrated conservation, i.e. to integrate all aspects of their work with conservation activities (WAZA, 2005). However, while more and more zoos and aquariums see themselves primarily as conservation institutions, the perception of the public at large is still very different: For the vast majority of the more than 600 million people visiting WAZA Network institutions every year, the main or only purpose of zoos and aquariums still is leisure and entertainment. The family's expectations are for a fun day out for the family. Young urban people want to have some stimulation and excitement. Organized groups want an interesting back drop to hold social functions, and tourists want something they can't see back home (Harrison, 2006). Most visitors do not know that zoos and aquariums are organized at the national, regional and global level, and they usually are unaware of the fact that member institutions of the WAZA Network are committed to conservation and perceive themselves as conservation centres.

Regional associations and individual institutions are assumed to translate the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy into action. But this is not enough.

They have also to properly market their conservation involvement. Otherwise neither WAZA will be perceived as a conservation organisation nor the zoos and aquariums as conservation centres (Dollinger, 2006).

The Reasons

The role of the zoo world in global conservation is not perceived by the broad public because it is not properly and actively marketed. Shortcomings include the following:

- zoos and aquariums may not have a clear vision and mission or, if they have a mission statement, may fail to measure their activities against it (Child, 2006). As a result they do not appear to be credible and competent – but credibility and competence are the basis for every marketing strategy (Niekisch, 2006);
- zoos and aquariums are not particularly effective in informing the public of their work in the conservation of species and habitats (Alabaster, 2003). An example: If you search in GOOGLE for "WAZA + zoo + conservation", you will get 23'900 hits. But if you search for "SEAZA + zoo + conservation", you will get only 437 hits;
- zoos and aquariums tend to use their institution's logos for branding their conservation activities and the first thing zoo consortia and interest groups do is to create their own logo;
- in partnerships with other conservation organisations zoos and aquariums are mostly the junior partners;
- (certain) zoo associations compete with each other;
- both associations' and institutions' logos are not single-product brands but stand for many things.

The plethora of logos used by the zoo world to brand their conservation involvement has to compete with a few – very strong – global brands, such as WWF, IUCN, Birdlife, and Greenpeace.

The Solution

Zoos and aquariums are on lost ground unless they market their conservation activities proactively, and unless they use, and actively promote, one single global brand to label their conservation involvement - the WAZA Brand. This may seem difficult to achieve, but Birdlife was in a similar situation. Their more than 100 national members used to have all their own logo. Some, including the national associations of Austria, Belgium, Finland, Indonesia, Malta, Netherlands, South Africa, and Switzerland have recognized however, that they should go for umbrella branding. Umbrella branding, i.e. the use of different but similar, interconnected brands (Lukken, 2003), would be possible also in the WAZA context, but so far only two national zoo associations – the Austrian and the Swiss - took the opportunity.

Steps in the right direction

In order to disseminate information on the zoos' and aquariums' conservation activities at the global level, and to assist regional associations in producing more specific information tailored to the needs of their region, WAZA has

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produced a promotional brochure on the WZACS (WAZA 2006). While several associations and institutions have just ordered certain quantities of the global edition, three associations have taken up the ball and produced their own marketing tools: the German, the Swiss, and SAZARC. SAZARC has not only made an extra print-run of the original Strategy, and printed posters and stickers, but produced also a very nice brochure with examples exclusively from the South Asian region (WALKER, 2006).

WAZA tries to do to improve the situation also by ensuring :

- all publications issued by the WAZA Executive Office are readily recognizable as WAZA products;
- all language versions of the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (WZACS, 2005) - WAZA's most important publication in recent years - look the same;
- WZACS Promotional Brochures, which have to take into account national or regional peculiarities, are all very similar in appearance

Marketing of the zoo world as a conservation community must happen at all levels, i.e. by the WAZA Executive Office, the Regional and National Associations, and the individual WAZA takes also the opportunity of informing the interested broad public, as far as this is possible with reasonable effort. To this end a *website* is maintained, which is permanently updated and improved. This website sees a steady increase of visitors, visits, pages opened, hits, bytes transferred, and receives visitors from all parts of the world, e.g., in August 2006, there were 14'001 visits by 10'285 different visitors from 98 different countries.

One of the most popular features on the WAZA website is the *Virtual Zoo*, which was opened on June 1, 2006. The Zoo is taxonomically organized. It comprises in its initial phase 53 sections with 265 different species. It contains information on the biology and conservation status of species, provides information on studbooks and coordinated breeding programmes, how the animals should be kept, and gives the reasons why zoos and aquariums keep the various species. It is illustrated with about 1200 photos and 264 distribution maps, and the individual data sheets are linked to information on *in situ* conservation projects, exemplary exhibits presented in detail on the ZOOlex web site, and the "Zoos and Aquariums of the World" section of the WAZA website. An extension of the Virtual Zoo, which will bring the total of species to more than 400, is under preparation.

Another important means for promoting the conservation role of zoos and aquariums is WAZA's programme for the *Branding of Conservation Projects*. This programme was designed with a view of creating a win-win situation: The project organisations allow WAZA to use their project for telling the world what zoos do for conservation. On the other hand, they receive substantial publicity and some other benefits. It started with a pilot phase in 2003, and was taken up in earnest in summer 2004. Since then, the number of branded projects has increased continuously:

- 2003: 2
- 2004: 17
- 2005: 42
- 2006 (August): 23

The geographical location of the projects currently branded is as follows:

- Africa: 25 + 5 Madagascar
- Eurasia: 20
- SE Asia: 20
- Central and South America and Caribbean: 12
- Oceania: 6
- North America: 5

What YOU can do

The continued existence of zoos and aquariums depends upon recognition that they are based on respect for the dignity of the animals in their care, and that they serve the higher goal of nature conservation (WAZA, 2003). This requires that the conservation role of zoos and aquariums must be actively marketed at ALL levels. The opportunities WAZA has at the global level have been described above. Regional Associations, such as SEAZA, should play their part by involving institutions not directly affiliated with WAZA, and by carrying out campaigns addressing people in their own language (Bos, 2006). Institutions must make conservation a top issue for formal and informal education.

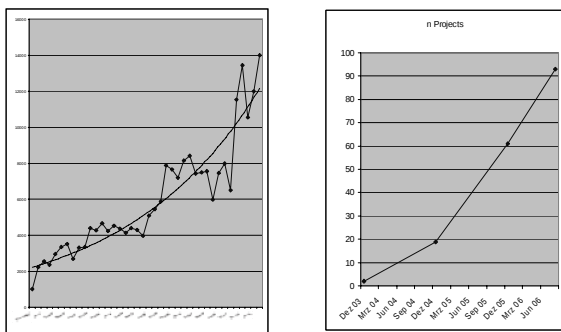
In order to promote a more efficient interpretation of the conservation message, institutions should ensure that their educational programmes are attractive (Lalumiere, 2006). They should also give more emphasis to word-of-mouth marketing and adult education. In addition zoos should be aware of their own role model function and openly declare their support of conservation through their activities. Animal collections should be comprised with the view to a better communication of important conservation issues (Graf, 2006).

In marketing their conservation role, associations and institutions must ensure that they are credible. Institutions, in particular, must purchase, keep, breed, and dispose of animals in compliance with ethical principles and in a way that is deemed acceptable by the general public, and they need to advertise to the general public the fact that they operate to the highest ethical and sustainable standards and with excellent animal welfare (Stevenson, 2006).

Zoos must not appeal primarily to the intellect, but rather to the heart of their visitors. Anyone who analyses the success criteria of zoological gardens of recent years will soon realise that those zoos have had the greatest success with visitors, which have been able to present their animals in such a way that they initiate what might be called a „Wow-Effect“, i.e. a highly emotionalised reaction from the visitors (Scherrieb, 2006). This may require *a complete change of the face of an institution by creating a themed layout that will transform the zoo or aquarium into an adventure experience, immersing visitors into adventurous, wild places* (Loubser, 2006; Machens, 2006). *Another option may be to create behind-the-scenes close encounters experiences, which may achieve both conservation and commercial outcomes* (Mecoy, 2006; Ng, 2006).

Furthermore, zoos and aquariums should

- Link their websites to www.waza.org;
- Undertake or support *in-situ* projects, and have these projects WAZA-branded.



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Asalam wali-kum:

I must congratulate Sally first for organizing this trip to participate in the 15th SEAZA Annual Conference at Saigon, Vietnam. It was really worthy for the zoo personnel as an eye-opener to modern zoo management in Asia and concerned activities. I personally really benefited and experienced much through participating in all the sessions and presentations.

SEAZA organized presentations of research papers and the experience of the zoo personnel on animal management, nutrition, zoo planning and zoo education in South East Asia. I was very much excited at attending the session of zoo marketing, which is a new concept for me and being promoted by WAZA. I could learn even more from the presentations about the concept of Ocean Park, which is also very new to me. The achievement and success of the zoos in Indonesia and the Night Safari Park in Singapore also amazed us greatly. I must thank SEAZA Executive Board and Director, Saigon Zoo, for inviting us to participate in such a good event to participate, and the officials at Saigon for attending us with great honor and hospitality.

Conclusively, I can say that the SEAZA Conference was an educative one we have learnt a lot from the whole gamut of activities at the conference.

After I came back I have shared my experience of SEAZA Conference with the Ministry's officials and DG, DLS. Besides, I talked with the zoo officials also. This will greatly help to plan and develop the zoos in Bangladesh.

Last but not the least, I must thank Sally along with our donors and partner organizations for arranging such an important visit. We'll be looking forward to enriching SAZARC partners to have future experiences. Our expectation is WAZA being our apex organization will think over the matter and will extend similar cooperation.

Md Abdur Razzaque, Retd. Director General, DLS and Country representative, Zoo Outreach Organisation and SAZARC, Bangladesh.

