

Conservation Breeding Guidelines - Call for a Working Group

Sally Walker

Although there is a recently updated IUCN Policy Statement on Conservation / Captive Breeding, it gives very little practical guidance to those who might possibly need it most, that is the zoo managers in high biodiversity countries.

Although there are various sets of regional guidelines, manuals, books, decision trees and articles giving advice and technical help in various aspects of captive/conservation breeding, there is no single overview or document which can be consulted by a zoo in parts of the world

1. where English is not the first language,
2. where directors, vets and curators of zoos are transferred every 6 months to 3 years,
3. where zoos are used by their governments as dumping grounds for confiscated or rescued animals,
4. where the demands of the government officials, senior administrators, etc. often takes precedence over science in collection planning,
5. where the systematic planning and conduct of a long range conservation breeding programme is simply alien to that culture, its thinking and its habits,
6. where there are no records, or where records are gravely inadequate
7. where training, articles, information has been given for the last 20 years with no impact on practice and on and on

The plethora of information available is confusing to zoo professionals from these zoos, and even more so because practice and philosophy and science often changes from year to year. For some of the science needed for conservation breeding, not only are the skills and equipment missing but also the means simply to keep them well-honed and up to date. The developing world's zoos are often governed by chaos and indiscipline — and it is nobody's fault. It is the way.

When I suggested this idea of creating guidelines for captive breeding to CBSG a few months ago, the response was mostly that people were confused, and probably felt that I was very confused. Some said the the policy statement said it all; and other said the manuals did. It was not until one of a major national zoo associations in Asia admitted that they really didn't know how to plan a systematic conservation breeding programme and asked CBSG for help, did the idea gain credence.

That is only one aspect of my desire to convene this working group and attempt to address this situation. Another is this: While listening last year to Dr. Fred Launay, Chair of the Reintroduction Specialist Group, describe RSG's activities and go over the RSG guidelines, it occurred to me that my own presentation about CBSG fell flat beside his. CBSG does many things to help highly placed institutions and individuals in higher places decide whether a species needs *ex situ* conservation or reintroduction, etc. (CAMPs, PHVAs for example), and other things such as conservation planning workshops to help institutions decide their mission and marketing statements,

which drive their institutions it is not that easy to demonstrate how that plays in the real (developing) zoo world.

I am not the first person to be confronted with this feeling nor was it for the first time. We have discussed this from time to time in CBSG and no less than when trying to decide what to call CBSG, after switching from Captive Breeding SG to Conservation Breeding SG. It doesn't quite work.

It occurred to me that if CBSG could create a set of evolving guidelines that addressed all the questions that a zoo director in Chittagong or Kabul or Brunei might have about systematic, scientific conservation breeding, and if this project could be ongoing and regularly updated and expanded, then it would help these lost zoo personnel in the parts of the world which don't work like the west and also help CBSG have a genuine, unquestioned "conservation breeding identity."

So what we want from a working group is

1. a group of people (from both zoo worlds) who understand the problem of the "other zoo world" as I have described it above and who, in principle, agree that systematic, scientific guidelines which take into consideration the diversity of problems and situations faced by the other zoo world as well as its biodiversity
2. an agreement on a framework or skeleton of such guidelines such that different subgroups could form and make a preliminary cut at fleshing those out before taking them home and working through them on email
3. a commitment to keep working on this until the people who need these guidelines so desperately are satisfied that it is what they need and will get them through the process of starting to plan their conservation breeding programme, from deciding what kind of zoo they are even to preparing an animal for strengthening a population in trouble, and even afterwards, as every year things change.
4. an awareness that this is being done as much for CBSG, albeit for different reasons, as for the zoo personnel of the other zoo world.

More on the need for Guidelines for Captive Breeding / Management for Conservation

The purpose of this paper is to make a hopefully convincing argument in favour of the need for guidelines for captive breeding under the auspices of the IUCN SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, in the same way that the IUCN SSC Reintroduction Specialist Group has guidelines. In the past year in which the writer has been pursuing this idea, the suggestion has met with confusion, contention and condescension from almost every single individual from the "organized" zoo community and with relief by every individual from the "other" zoo world.

This is not merely an "east/west" or "organized/other zoo", "northern/southern" issue, however; there are other reasons why Conservation Breeding Guidelines associated with the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group would serve a useful purpose. Hence, this communication.

Not all zoos are equal

The draft World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy which is likely to be approved in the 2004 meeting of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums to be held in Taipei, Taiwan in November 2004 states unequivocally in Chapter Seven :” *Not all zoos are equal. Not all animal collections calling themselves zoos meet the standards necessary for effective conservation work in today's world; . . . yet some of them may have good intentions and may even be close to being accreditable.*”

In fact, many of these zoos have excellent intentions, but for reasons associated with their administration, social structure, economy or educational inclination, they have not managed to keep up with the current established world zoo conservation breeding standard. For example, many zoos in countries which were under colonial administration still operate with the same administrative framework – frequent transfer of officials, politically-based appointments, vertical hierarchy, etc. so that individual higher officials do not acquire a “big picture” or overview of the zoo conservation potential or requirement. This results in management decisions which are inconsistent with both the science and the philosophy of modern zoo conservation. The transfer system may also include veterinarians and even curatorial level as well as directors so that, in essence, the institution's progress goes back to square one every few years or, in some cases, every few months.

Another problem is that many of the zoo staff which might carry on quite well and safeguard the philosophy and technology which would provide the continuity to carry on with scientific breeding programmes (such as zookeepers and other non-senior staff) are not well educated, or in many cases, not educated at all. They may not even understand the concept of conservation or animal welfare. Additionally, many of the “unequal” zoos are in countries for which English (or any western language) is not the first language, and this deprives those zoo personnel who are educated and motivated from access to most of the published scientific and technical material in the world today. There are other reasons as well which can be learned from several published papers and discussion.

Advantages for the IUCN SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG)

CBSG staff and steering committee members have often commented on the fact that the “Captive” or later the “Conservation” Breeding Specialist Group does not actually reflect the wide range of activities that it conducts, and that it is often difficult to explain even how CBSG relates to zoos. This is despite the enormous support received from zoos both technically and financially as well as the immense support in conservation direction, linking of all aspects of conservation, and innovative conservation science contributed to zoos all over the world by CBSG in the last quarter century. CBSG has literally changed the face and image of zoos, if not currently for all zoos, then potentially. The tools of CBSG, e.g. the P.H.V.A. and C.A.M.P. workshops are popular and effective, and they usually involve or refer to conservation breeding. However, the impact on zoos is very long range. These workshops definitely link zoos to genuine conservation action in most cases, but due to the time it takes to establish and conduct a systematic and

scientific conservation breeding programme or put conservation action recommendations on the ground, the CBSG message and contribution sometimes gets left behind. Also another excellent tool, the Conservation Planning Workshop, which can give excellent direction even to established zoos is insufficiently used by zoos in low currency countries, would be enhanced – particularly in low currency countries – by such guidelines as suggested here.

Advantages for the IUCN SSC Reintroduction Specialist Group (RSG)

Again quoting from the WAZA draft of the new World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy, “The WZACS emphasizes that zoos and aquariums must not work independently in reintroduction or translocation programmes but must work with other institutions, and always with the appropriate Government authorities, the relevant IUCN/SSC Specialist Groups, and other governmental and non-governmental conservation agencies, particularly those in the host country.” Reintroduction as a conservation tool has turned out to be even more difficult, time-and-resource-consuming and complex than anticipated a couple of decades ago, and the lack of animals which have bred and reared appropriately from the beginning is often one of the many stumbling blocks.

The current Chair of RSG, Dr. Fred Launay, confirmed at a joint meeting of CBSG/RSG held in Sri Lanka last year in December 2003, that the job of the Reintroduction Specialist Group would be made much easier if there were also specific guidelines for the different levels and objectives of breeding wild animal in captivity.

Why CBSG ?

As opposed to WAZA, or individual zoo associations, or RSG itself, etc. CBSG is the nodal specialist group for zoos and for breeding animals for conservation. Originally named the Captive Breeding Specialist Group, it was created to provide an objective, scientific framework for breeding animals for conservation. Sir Peter Scott, when Chair of SSC, appointed Dr. U. S. Seal as Chair with a mandate to develop a methodology for prioritizing threatened species for zoo conservation, among other ways to link zoos with conservation action. Thus, CBSG's CAMP workshop was a response to this request : originally the CAMP workshop was solely a method to prioritise species for captive breeding – in essence, a component of zoo conservation planning.

CBSG may be viewed as a “scientific conscience” of zoos, and certainly as an objective facilitator of zoo interactions with other zoos, with wildlife agencies, with animal welfare organisation, with government organizations, etc. in the area of captive and non-captive wild animal activities. Therefore, Captive Breeding guidelines, if done by CBSG with help and consensus from WAZA and other zoo, wildlife and welfare experts, would most likely be perceived as objective and scientific. Having said that, there is no reason why some of the tool kits which will be created by WAZA could not be used, perhaps with modifications, as a starting point for some of these Guidelines. It is hoped that the zoo community will understand the need for objectivity in this matter in view of the lack of awareness of many individuals and institutions, even in the conservation

community, of the good intentions and commitment to conservation of the organized zoo community. In point of fact, Captive Breeding Guidelines under the auspices of an IUCN specialist group may be more successful in bringing the amazing range of techniques and depth of care and welfare that zoos now bring to animal breeding as these facts are not known to the conservation community at large.

CBSG meets every year in a different place around the world in connection so is in a position to provide a very convenient venue not only for developing the Guidelines, but also for getting them reviewed at the WAZA meeting which takes place immediately after CBSG, and also for updating the Guidelines as zoo and wildlife policy changes. Also, as RSG has now found the need to develop policies and guidelines for different orders and taxon groups, CBSG also may find Guidelines so useful that it would seem a good idea to go on refining and expanding them.

What happened to the IUCN Technical Guidelines on the Management of *Ex situ* populations for conservation

Admittedly, no systematic, scientific survey of zoo managers and staff (or even policy makers) in developing countries zoos has been carried out to ascertain how much of the IUCN Technical Guidelines of Management of *ex situ* populations for Conservation is comprehensible and useful, but the writer would be extremely surprised if this number were more than 1-2%. The IUCN Policy Statement

is not a substitute for Guidelines for Conservation Breeding of the type referred here. No doubt, the current IUCN Technical Guidelines will be helpful in formulating some parts of the intended Guidelines and even could be "translated" into normals peak which would be more helpful for countries whose English is more simple, either for reading or for translating into the local language.

Many zoos do not know where to begin in systematizing their breeding programme or how to start 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 in more than 50% of the of the zoos and zoo associations in the world. The Guidelines, whatever form they take should be simple, universally comprehensible, and easily translated into local languages. The Guidelines 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, conservation. There is no reason why every zoo has to breed for conservation – we should create Guidelines which would 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 just trying to keep up with the big kid zoos in high currency countries. **Submitted by Sally Walker, Convenor, CBSG, South Asia**

Ex-Situ Conservation Management Guidelines -- CBSG Working Group Report, Taipei

Group members: Kathy Traylor-Holzer (Facilitator), Kristin Leus (Recorder), Mark Pilgrim (Reporter), Jansen Manansang, Sally Walker, Chein-Jen Yang, Abdul Qadeer Mehal, Mark Stanley Price, Jai-Chyi kartis Pei, Alex Hon-Tsenyu, Franck Maelewyn, Mei Hsiu Hwang, Kartin Schwarty, Chen-Yang Lin.

1. What are "conservation breeding guidelines"?

- Zoos that are just starting the process of thinking about systematic breeding and conservation programs should have some guidelines regarding how to start and how to decide what level of management to target. E.g., Some zoos think that in order to contribute to conservation, they have to take on the highest possible task (i.e., breeding animals for reintroduction). This sometimes works against effective conservation as it may mean they acquire animals without knowing how to maintain and breed them.
- If we only talk about breeding it may lead us down the wrong path. The issue is captive management and deciding at what level to manage populations of particular species – the entire spectrum of rationale for keeping animals in captivity.
- The term "conservation breeding guidelines" is a bit confusing; are we talking about only captive programs? If so, we should specify that these are "captive" or "*ex situ*" guidelines.
- Confusion arises from the fact that "Conservation Breeding Specialist Group" is not entirely descriptive of what CBSG does. Here we are looking for guidelines for *ex*

situ management, not the entire spectrum of what CBSG does.

- Important elements of these guidelines: *ex situ*, linked to conservation (or to responsible management of animals that is not in conflict with conservation), population management, decision structure of different levels/ purposes of management (like collection planning)
- Possible names: *ex situ* conservation management guidelines (current working title), population management guidelines
- Indonesian zoos are specifically requesting guidelines for conservation – this is more than just "conservation breeding" guidelines
- Often zoos do not have the resources for full blown breeding programs. A first strategy may be to maintain animals, keep them well, and do a basic level of management and perhaps exchange animals with other zoos in the region.

The guidelines being produced, whatever their name ends up being, need to be guidelines on how facilities (zoos, rescue centers, etc.) can determine how they should manage animals and small populations for conservation – taking into account the specific situation of the facility (available resources, etc.) — and include information on how to achieve specific levels of management. They must include general guidelines for animals in captive settings, as well as specific guidelines on how to determine management types and goals.