

World Association of Zoos and Aquariums promulgates Guidelines on the Acceptance of Confiscated animals



The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) was founded in 1946 in Rotterdam as International Union of Directors of Zoological Gardens. It promotes effective stewardship of the natural world by encouraging its members to bring people close to living animals, applying and advancing in situ and ex situ conservation, science and education, and setting standards of excellence in animal welfare and environmental responsibilities. WAZA unifies more than 200 major zoos and aquariums (institutional members) and 18 regional or national federations representing another 1000 zoos and aquariums. The headquarters of the organisation are located at Berne, Switzerland.

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At the most recent Annual Conference of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) participants adopted guidelines on the acceptance of seized and confiscated animals. These Guidelines have now been promulgated to the entire constituency of the association.

Authorities seizing wild animals must ensure that the animals are temporarily placed at a facility where they are housed, fed and cared for according to animal welfare requirements. After final confiscation they must decide on how to dispose of the animals in a responsible, timely and efficient manner, taking into account practical, legal, animal welfare and conservation aspects and following guidelines issued by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and by IUCN – The World Conservation Union. CITES and IUCN refer to zoos and aquariums as suitable recipients of confiscated animals. They recognise, however, that zoos and aquariums generally cannot accommodate large numbers of animals that become available through confiscations and that, in particular for species with lower conservation value, the authorities may also have to explore other options, such as rescue centres, life-time care facilities, specialist societies, humane societies, commercial captive breeders, or research institutions.

The new Guidelines promulgated by WAZA deal with the issue from the receiving institution's perspective. They encourage zoos and aquariums to continue to support the efforts of their authorities by accepting to temporarily house, feed and care for seized animals. Confiscated animals may be accepted under a permanent loan agreement or as donations but only if the receiving institution has the necessary expertise and can ensure appropriate care and accommodation of the animals in the long term. A permanent loan agreement should also define the ownership of the offspring.

Zoos and aquariums accepting animals will do so only if the transaction will not result in any benefits to the person or institution from which the animals were confiscated. If the animals belong to a species for which a coordinated regional conservation breeding programme exists, they should be integrated, if appropriate, into that programme.

If zoos or aquariums are requested by the confiscating authority to accept animals for returning them to the wild, they will accept only if the requirements of the IUCN Guidelines for Re-introductions are met. They will make sure that, during the whole process, these guidelines will be fully respected. Zoos and aquariums having confiscated animals on display should take the opportunity to inform the public about the reason which led to the confiscation. In particular, they should make the public aware of the threats unsustainable and illegal trade poses to wild species and of the role CITES plays in combating such trade.

Efforts should be made to raise funds for supporting *in situ* projects for the species concerned, especially in the case of high profile species, such as primates, large carnivores, elephants, rhinos, parrots, or marine turtles.

WAZA Guidelines on the acceptance of seized or confiscated animals

A. Introduction

1. Live wild animals are seized and confiscated by local, regional and national authorities for a variety of reasons. After seizure, the authorities must ensure that the animals are temporarily placed at a facility where they are housed, fed and cared for according to animal welfare requirements. By the subsequent act of confiscation, the authorities become the owners of the animals and have to dispose of them in a responsible, timely and efficient manner, taking into account practical, legal, animal welfare and conservation aspects.

2. The authorities are assumed to take into account the following guidelines when disposing of confiscated animals:

a. the CITES Guidelines for the Disposal of Confiscated Live Specimens of Species included in the Appendices (Resolution Conf. 10. 7, adopted at the 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Harare (Zimbabwe), 9 to 20 June 1997);

b. the IUCN Guidelines for the Placement of Confiscated Animals (approved by the 51st Meeting of the IUCN Council, Gland, Switzerland, February 2000).

Both Guidelines refer to zoos and aquariums as suitable recipients of confiscated animals. They recognise, however, that zoos and aquariums generally cannot accommodate large numbers of animals that become available through confiscations and that, in particular for species with lower conservation value, the authorities may also have to explore other options, such as rescue centres, life-time care facilities, specialist societies, humane societies, commercial captive breeders, or research institutions.

Further guidance is provided to the authorities by

c. the IUCN Guidelines for Re-introductions (approved by the 41st Meeting of the IUCN Council, Gland, Switzerland, May 1995); and

d. the IUCN Guidelines for the Prevention of Biodiversity Loss Caused by Alien Invasive Species (approved by the 51st Meeting of the IUCN Council, Gland, Switzerland, February 2000).

B. Acceptance of seized animals

3. Whenever possible, zoos and aquariums should support the efforts of their authorities by accepting to temporarily house, feed and care for seized animals. Institutions accepting such animals may request that their expenses will be reimbursed. It is strongly recommended that arrangements are made under which the costs will be charged to the confiscating authority rather than directly to the importer or owner of the animals.

C. Advice to authorities regarding placement of animals

4. When confiscating animals, the authorities will have to take the basic decision whether the animals should

a. be returned to the wild;

b. be maintained in human care for the remainder of their natural lives;

c. be euthanised.

5. To facilitate this basic decision, both the CITES and IUCN Guidelines contain decision trees. WAZA and its association members will not interfere with this stage of the decision making process. Individual zoos and aquariums will also refrain from influencing the authorities, unless they are (part of) the CITES Scientific Authority or belong to another government established consultative body and are approached by the authorities in that capacity.

D. Acceptance of confiscated animals for permanent keeping

6. Zoos and aquariums will accept confiscated animals only if they have the necessary expertise and can ensure appropriate care and accommodation of the animals in the long term.
7. The animals may be accepted under a permanent loan agreement or as donations. A permanent loan agreement should also define the ownership of the offspring.
8. While the receiving institutions may pay for transportation costs, they should refrain from buying the animals.
9. Zoos and aquariums accepting animals will do so only if the transaction will not result in any benefits to the person or institution from which the animals were confiscated.
10. If the animals belong to a species for which a coordinated regional conservation breeding programme exists, they should be integrated into that programme, if appropriate.

E. Acceptance of confiscated animals for returning them to the wild

11. If zoos or aquariums are requested by the confiscating authority to accept animals for returning them to the wild, they will accept only if the requirements of the IUCN Guidelines for Re-introductions are met. They will make sure that, during the whole process, these guidelines will be fully respected.

F. Creating awareness and fundraising for conservation

12. Zoos and aquariums having confiscated animals on display should take the opportunity to inform the public about the reason, which led to the confiscation. In particular, they should make the public aware of the threats unsustainable and illegal trade poses to wild species and of the role CITES plays in combating such trade.
13. Efforts should be made to raise funds for supporting *in situ* projects for the species concerned, especially in the case of high profile species, such as primates, large carnivores, elephants, rhinos, parrots, or marine turtles etc.

Adopted at the WAZA Plenary Session of 20 November 2003 – 58th Annual Meeting, held at San José, Costa Rica, 2003

