

Guidelines of Central Zoo Authority for Reintroduction of Captive Bred Animals into Wild Policy
Regarding release of zoo born chital, sambar, black buck and blue bull in wild
(Adopted by CZA in its meeting held on 27th March, 1995)

Chital, Sambar, Black Buck and Blue Bull are all prolifically breeding species. Their number in most of the zoos and deer parks have gone beyond the spatial carrying capacity. Besides this the cost of feeding for such a large number of animals has become a serious financial burden on the state exchequer. With these facts in view, many state governments and central government departments have started thinking in terms of releasing of the zoo bred stock of these species in the wild. But before any programme for such release is taken up by the authorities in the Wildlife Department, it will have to be considered that unplanned release of animals in wild may be one of the largest causes for extinction of species of wild fauna. Any programme of release of zoo bred captive animals in the wild has to be carried out with due caution and care. The zoo animals do not have the natural instinct of searching the food and defending themselves from the predators. Living in close proximity with human being eradicates their natural fear of human beings by zoo animals. This increases the chances of these animals straying in villages and indulging in crop raiding. Chances of their falling prey to stray dogs are also quite high. Another factor which has to be kept in mind that there could be some sort of aggression on the part of the native population towards the animals that are going to be released. The release of the animals has to be so timed that aggression between the released animals and the native population is kept at a minimum level. The zoo animals normally carry pathogens of many infectious diseases. The animals will have to be subjected to strict veterinary scrutiny before their release in the wild. The IUCN in their guidelines have suggested certain criteria for re-introduction of species. The gist of criteria that are relevant for release of zoo animals in the wild is as follows:

1. Any release of a captive population in any habitat is not warranted unless there is a need to increase the number of individual species or unless a genetic manipulation is needed to increase genetic diversity of the population. It is usually preferable to release the captive animals into a habitat, which either has very sparse population or preferably no population of the species, which is to be released.

2. The release should in no way threaten the existing wild population through disease, genetic swamping or social disruption. The stock being released should be absolutely free from contagious and genetic defects, which could be transmitted to the native animals.

3. The release should not have any negative impact on the local human population. In this case increased crop raiding could lead to wide spread dissatisfaction in the local population.

In view of these guidelines no release of zoo born animals should be made into the natural habitat having sizeable population of the species. For release of zoo animals in other areas following procedure will have to be followed: -

1. The habitat should be evaluated with respect to climate, food availability, vegetation, water, disease and parasites. Climatic factors such as temperatures, rainfall, humidity and predators should be considered.
2. Viable habitat with sparse ungulate population will have to be selected for the release.
3. Suitable enclosure will have to be constructed near the release site at least one season advance of the proposed release.
4. The stock to be released should be brought and put in the constructed enclosure immediately after antlers are shed (before new antlers come up). The animals should be subjected to strict veterinary screening. Vaccination against communicable diseases will also have to be done.
5. Any animals that are suspected to be suffering from any disease or genetic defect will have to be moved back to the zoo or treated separately in a rescue center to make them disease-free before release in wild.
6. Some identification like ear tags etc. will have to be put in all the animals released. This will facilitate the post release monitoring of the population.
7. The animals should be released in the wild well before the rutting season. This will help the released animals to get acclimatized and develop social relationship with a native population before the next rutting season.
8. Health protocol -- Epidemiological survey of the disease and parasites present in the release area should be done. The animals to be released should be examined for the presence of diseases, especially parasitic infestation and tuberculosis. All animals to be introduced should be certified by a veterinarian with regard to its health. Animals should be dewormed with a broad-spectrum anthelmintic. As far as possible animals should be protected by vaccinating them against diseases which are endemic to the area. Herd history of the animals to be released should be examined for the incidence of diseases.

The released animals should be monitored for their health for atleast 2 seasons.

Any effort to straightway release the zoo animals in the wild without going through the procedure mentioned above may prove disastrous to the animals released as well as the native animals of the area.