

EAZA

Education standards



The word “zoo” is used here for any institution that is a member of EAZA or is applying to become a member of EAZA.

The main aims of modern zoos include conservation and education. If conservation is to succeed, people need to be inspired to care about and understand animals and the threats they face in the wild. Everyone should have the opportunity to experience and learn about wildlife at first hand. One of EAZA's aims is to promote knowledge and understanding of the natural world through the medium of zoos. Zoos are a valuable educational and cultural resource, together with museums and botanical gardens. Every year 125 million people visit the zoos in Europe. The World Zoo Conservation Strategy (published by IUDZG, now WAZA, in 1993) concludes that, given a professional approach, a knowledge of the zoo public and a clear-cut education plan, zoo education programmes can be successful in increasing the public's awareness of the irreplaceable value of nature. Education is therefore an essential conservation task of zoos.

- A. The education role of the zoo is to be clearly stated in its written mission statement.
- B. The zoo must have a written education policy, identifying educational components and setting out the methods by which these components are directed towards the different sections of the zoo's visitor audience. The concept of zoo education is broader than a programme for schools and should be targeted at the entire zoo visitation. This should be consistent with the World Zoo Conservation Strategy.

Explanation

Educational components might include such topics as: animal behaviour, zoo animal management, variety of life, a variety of animal-based topics, global or local conservation in situ and ex situ issues, threats to species, the role of zoos in conservation, sustainability and a respect for and appreciation of wildlife.

Each zoo should have some idea of how the visitor audience is constituted in order to target its education programme. Examples might include: general visitors, locals, tourists, families, mixed age groups, friends, school groups, same age groups, teenagers, elderly, handicapped, literate and illiterate people.

Methods for delivering educational programmes might include (a combination of): the exhibits themselves, identification labels, graphic displays, audio/visual presentations, interactive displays, information technology, zoo guide books, education staff, animal staff, zoo volunteers, permanent or temporary exhibitions, zoo publications and other media.

- C. The zoo must demonstrate that it is carrying out its education policy, by reference to specific projects, figures of attendance, evaluation procedures and research.
- D. At least one member of staff within the institution should be responsible for a professional implementation of the education policy.

Explanation

Medium-sized zoos should employ at least one member of staff with overall responsibility for education. Larger zoos should also have additional education staff. Staff must have some training in education, preferably with a university degree and/or teacher training qualification. In smaller zoos, the education role might be combined with other functions and be carried out by personnel such as: the director, curator, senior keeper and researcher. Staff involved must be familiar with education practice and ideally have some formal or informal training in education (through education conferences and regional workshops).

- E. Animals must be clearly and correctly identified at their enclosures. Threatened species and species in regional, national and international coordinated breeding programmes should be highlighted.
- F. When animal demonstrations form part of the programme, these demonstration must contain an education or conservation message.

Explanation

Displays should demonstrate or extend the animal's natural ability and show behaviours that are of intrinsic value to the species. They should not be compromised by being made to perform unnatural acts or to become humanised. Care should be taken to avoid the impression that the animals make wonderful, exotic pets. It should be possible to focus on endangered species and to give reasons why they are in the zoo. Conservation issues such as loss of habitat and animal products' trade can be included. Successful breeding programmes in the zoo and any reintroduction to the wild should be mentioned.

- G. It should be emphasised that for education programmes to be successful, zoo animals must be exhibited in the best conditions in enclosures that enable them to live as natural as possible and to participate in natural behaviours as far as possible.

Explanation

Animals that appear to suffer from physical and/or psychological restraint are counter-productive to education and will spoil the conservation message.

- H. Interpretation/education should be an integral part of zoo exhibits and the educator should be incorporated in the exhibit planning and collection planning process.
- I. A reference library appropriate to the size and complexity of the zoo should be maintained and made available to all staff members, and possibly to the public where practical.

Explanation

Books, current journals and other media enable staff to improve their knowledge and to keep abreast of recent trends in zoo biology and conservation. In turn, this enables them to provide accurate information to zoo visitors.

- J. Resource material/education information should be made available to the general public and zoo audience. This might include: leaflets, guide books, teachers' notes, resource packs, work sheets and should be displayed and available for purchase or for free.

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