

Euthanasia statement

Approved by Council on 26 September 2011



Preamble:

1. EAZA members take seriously the responsibility for their animals' wellbeing while they are under their direct care, and every reasonable effort is made to ensure that when an animal moves to a different institution, this same level of responsibility is maintained by the receiving collection.
2. EAZA members strive to ensure that their animals are held in appropriate, species specific circumstances that enable the expression of as wide a range of natural behaviours as possible. It is therefore important that they should be able to exercise the full range of normal and regular breeding behaviours on a natural cycle.
3. EAZA members aim to maximise the physical and psychological wellbeing of the animals in their care. That is to say, we strive to provide standards of housing and husbandry that satisfy the animals' behavioural and physical needs, e.g. enabling animals to fully express reproductive and parental behaviours. As a consequence of this, maintaining the health and vitality of a group or population of animals may, in appropriate circumstances, take precedence over the duty of care to maintain the life of individual animals in EAZA collections.
4. EAZA members' responsibility for the survival of species may, under certain conditions, exceed that for individual animals, as is often the case for conservation bodies working in the wild

Having this in mind, euthanasia should be considered:

1. Where the animal poses a serious and unavoidable threat to human safety, e.g. escaped animals.
2. Where, in the opinion of the staff responsible for the individual animal's health and welfare, an animal is suffering from a disease, detrimental psychological state or severe pain and stress which cannot be adequately alleviated.
3. Where the only alternative is permanent transfer to substandard accommodation.
4. Where the continued presence of an individual animal is disruptive to the natural dynamic of a group within an individual collection and/or the demographic or genetic health and development of an EAZA approved *ex-situ* conservation programme. Consequently, young animals (e.g. at weaning or when normally leaving parental care) and animals that are past breeding age or are senile (groups that are prone to deleterious geriatric conditions) may be considered for euthanasia as part of a balanced population management strategy.

Euthanasia as a management tool

The application of a considered culling policy is appropriate on welfare grounds, at an individual and group level, and helps to mirror species specific population structures. While this may at first appear to be somewhat contradictory, we are ethically obliged to strike an informed balance between the life of an individual and maintaining the long term viability of a managed population. If a female's opportunity to breed and rear offspring regularly is limited, it can frequently result in the premature and permanent cessation of her reproductive cycle and/or abnormalities within her reproductive tract, all of which can negatively impact upon

that specific management programme. In addition, limiting the opportunity to breed, by definition, reduces an individual animal's opportunity to express one of the most important and complex set of behaviours and will thus lead to a decrease in welfare. Where local legislation allows, the culled animal can also provide enrichment for the institution's carnivores by being fed to them and increasing their welfare.

Inevitably there are a finite number of suitable enclosure spaces available for the animals within our programmes and outside of EAZA. This therefore limits the number of offspring we are able to suitably house. The problem of space is compounded by the presence of individuals that are no longer part of the breeding population or individuals that result from 'accidental' matings within structured breeding programmes, e.g. hybrids.

When all options have been thoroughly investigated and the decision is made to euthanise an animal, which must be made on a case by case basis, care will always be taken to ensure that it will be carried out humanely. Euthanasia may be influenced by local customs or subject to laws but should always be considered in preference to keeping animals under conditions which do not allow them to experience an appropriate quality of life.

A post-mortem examination should be performed and biological material preserved for research and gene conservation. The results of the post-mortem should also be passed to the relevant programme coordinator, and full records of any results and outcomes should be archived.

EAZA zoos will judiciously act according to the above principles. We are committed to providing a full explanation and justification of these principles to the public and the media and to support the actions of colleagues in other EAZA member collections within the limits of the applicable national legislation.