



In 2019, three EAZA zoos reintroduced five black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) to the Akagera National Park in Rwanda

---

# 3

---

## CONSERVATION

EAZA Members and accredited zoos and aquariums more widely form an important part of the international conservation community. There are many global conservation problems such as the climate emergency, habitat loss, and the unsustainable use of the planet's resources. Accredited zoos and aquariums use their expertise to work towards the protection and recovery of some of the species affected by these issues.

The diversity of life on earth (biodiversity) is one of the most important factors in maintaining a healthy world, with each native species of animal or plant playing a role in shaping and protecting the environment; and because each species is important, it is vital that we protect and conserve as many as we can. EAZA zoos and aquariums work to protect and conserve animal species both in the places where they evolved, and in zoos and aquariums.

From predators to pollinators, many animal species are at an increasing risk of extinction due to the activities of human societies. Some may be hunted for their meat or skin, some may have value in the live animal trade, and some may just be in the way of agricultural, urban, or infrastructure development. Species conservation aims to turn around the fortunes of these species through targeted interventions that address the cause of the threat as well as the symptoms.

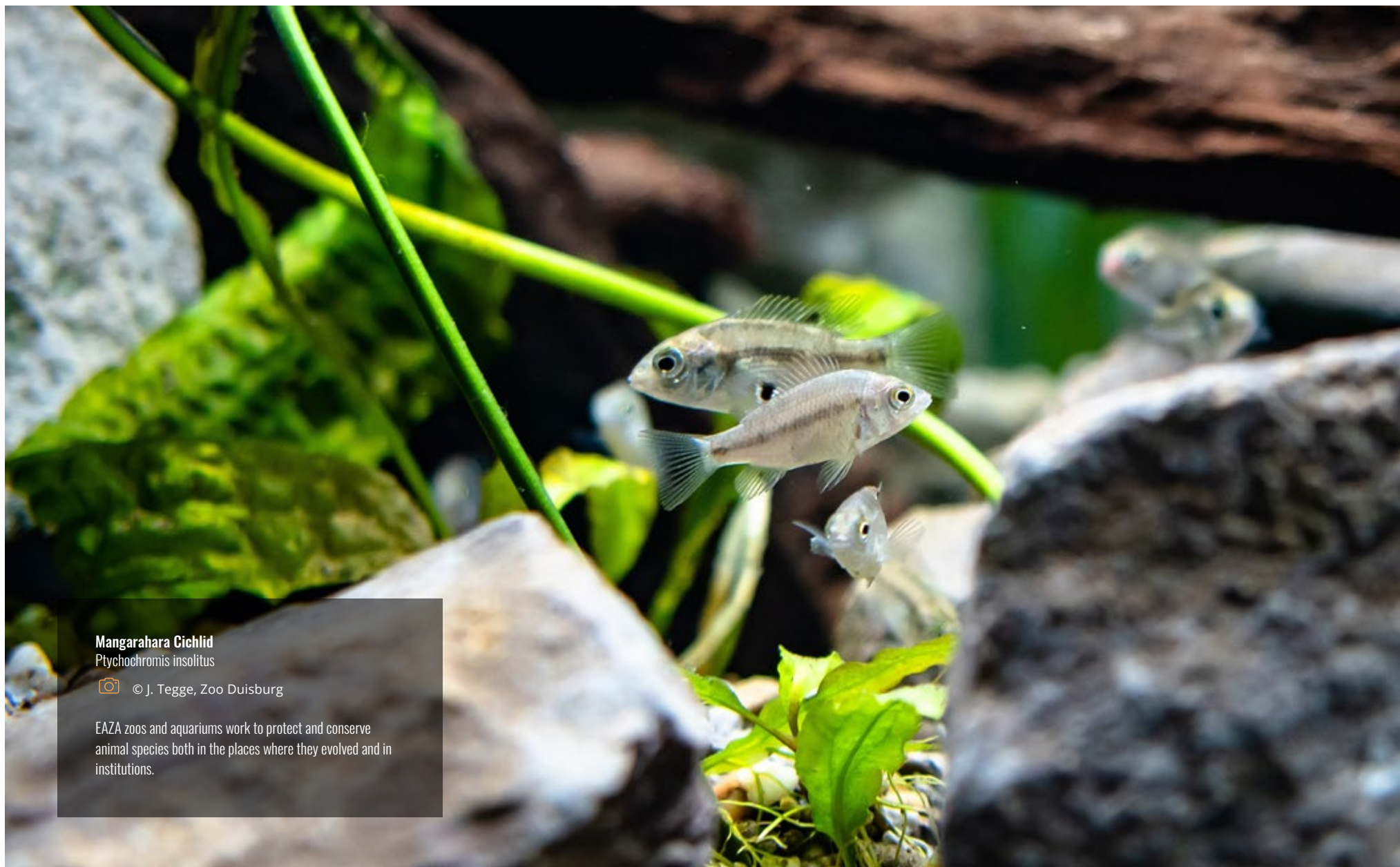
People are usually not trying to eradicate a species on purpose. In many cases, a combination of measures carried out *in situ* (i.e. in the original habitat) can help slow or stop the decline in numbers of an animal species. Conservationists will work with local communities to find ways for them to live with animals sustainably and without confrontation, while removing threats such as traps and wrongly introduced alien invasive species. This work needs money and knowledgeable people to do it, and zoos and aquariums can help with both.

EAZA zoos and aquariums can raise money for *in situ* conservation through the sales of tickets and through donations from citizens and other benefactors. The worldwide zoo community is usually understood to be the third largest contributor to conservation, and funds provided by EAZA Members alone reach tens of millions

of Euros every year. While these funds are not enough on their own to fund every worthy project, good strategic planning and campaigning can help make a difference to some of the most threatened species and have an effect on other species living within the same environment. A professional, high-performing zoo or aquarium is the basis for effective fundraising for conservation, making the links between the animals we see and the animals they represent.

The expertise of zoo and aquarium staff is also very valuable to *in situ* conservation projects. They can help manage small wild populations of animals, carry out scientifically endorsed reintroduction projects, help educate communities about the species and train local people in conservation, and provide a whole range of other services that can make a huge difference to the survival of a species. EAZA Members provide tens of thousands of hours of staff time every year to allow their experts to work on the ground in range states and provide support wherever it is needed, either close to home or on the other side of the world.

Conservation in the original habitat of animals is only part of the story, however. For some species, more protection and intervention is needed, and in many cases this is provided through *ex situ* conservation carried out away from their original habitat and often in zoos and aquariums. There are four main areas where *ex situ* conservation can make a material difference to the survival of a species.



**Mangarahara Cichlid**  
*Ptychochromis insolitus*

© J. Tegge, Zoo Duisburg

EAZA zoos and aquariums work to protect and conserve animal species both in the places where they evolved and in institutions.

Firstly, *ex situ* conservation can help address the primary cause of a threat such as disease by providing a safe haven where the species can be studied, and designing measures for its protection. For example, the global collapse in amphibian species due to the spread of the Chytrid fungus in recent years has led zoos to build biosecure facilities for the breeding of endangered frogs and to research the characteristics that allow some animals to survive infection.

Secondly, *ex situ* conservation can help offset the effects of some threats by, for example, intentionally breeding animals to promote genetic traits that may be being lost in the small and isolated wild populations *in situ*. For example, zoo populations of Mauritian pink pigeon have been able to restore genes to a wild population that had become dangerously isolated and lacking in diversity.



The small size of a wild population may also cause other problems that need to be overcome: the same population of pink pigeons was increased through removing eggs for fostering by other species, which allowed the pigeons to breed again earlier than would otherwise be possible.

Thirdly, for some species, the situation in their usual habitat is so terrible that there is little hope over the short term of their survival. *Ex situ* conservation by zoos and aquariums can help buy time for the species and allow the processes that will allow them to survive in the wild (such as habitat restoration) to take place. Tens of species listed as Extinct in the Wild such as European bison, Arabian oryx, Partula snails and Mauritian pink pigeon would not exist today without scientifically driven *ex situ* conservation by accredited zoos and aquariums working together.

Lastly, *ex situ* conservation can help provide animals for the restoration of wild populations. If the conditions for the survival of the species in the wild exist, and if there is a need to add animals to a wild population or completely restart a wild population, zoos and aquariums might be able to provide healthy and well-prepared animals. Reintroduction of animals is a complex and difficult task, often taking decades, and the long-term involvement of zoos and aquariums can be essential for its success. Key to that role is the long-term professional management of populations of animals for genetic and demographic diversity, a central task of the modern progressive zoo or aquarium.

**Baer's pochard**  
*Aythya baeri*

© Phoebe Vaughn

In summary then, wherever an animal species can be helped through the use of expert scientific knowledge and solid practical experience, EAZA Members are active in providing the resources it needs to survive over the short, medium and long terms. EAZA and its colleague organisations for accredited zoo and aquariums across the world together form a network that is unique in its abilities to carry out species conservation both at home and abroad and to enlist the help of the citizens in doing so. Our Members and programmes also work closely with conservation organisations all over the world to ensure that our efforts are coordinated, and that *ex situ* and *in situ* populations work together to save their species.



*Partula affinis* are one of the species of critically endangered snails EAZA Members are reintroducing to Polynesia.

© Paul Pearce Kelly

## CASE STUDY

## SILENT FOREST CONSERVATION

An incredible example of EAZA's capacity for international partnerships working toward conservation is the EAZA Silent Forest Campaign. Every two years EAZA creates a community-wide conservation campaign centered around a conservation issue to raise awareness, funds, partnerships, and frameworks for future action.

In 2015, members of the EAZA Songbird Taxon Advisory Group helped to organize the first Songbird Crisis Summit held in Singapore. This meeting of bird-focused zoo professionals, conservationists and researchers pushed the working group to approach the EAZA Conservation Committee with an innovative conservation campaign idea around the Asian songbird crisis. The Silent Forest Campaign would bring EAZA together with important conservation partners like TRAFFIC, BirdLife International and the recently formed IUCN Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group to raise awareness and funds for conservation organizations fighting the illegal and unsustainable trade of songbirds.

The campaign launched at the EAZA Annual Conference in 2017, with the aim of improving the situation of Asian songbirds in their natural habitat; it also aimed to increase knowledge and understanding of threats and how zoos can contribute to saving the species. EAZA bird specialists worked with experienced zoo educators to set ambitious goals around outreach and engagement that would encourage visitors. Ambitious targets for participation and fundraising were set and conservation programmes preselected.

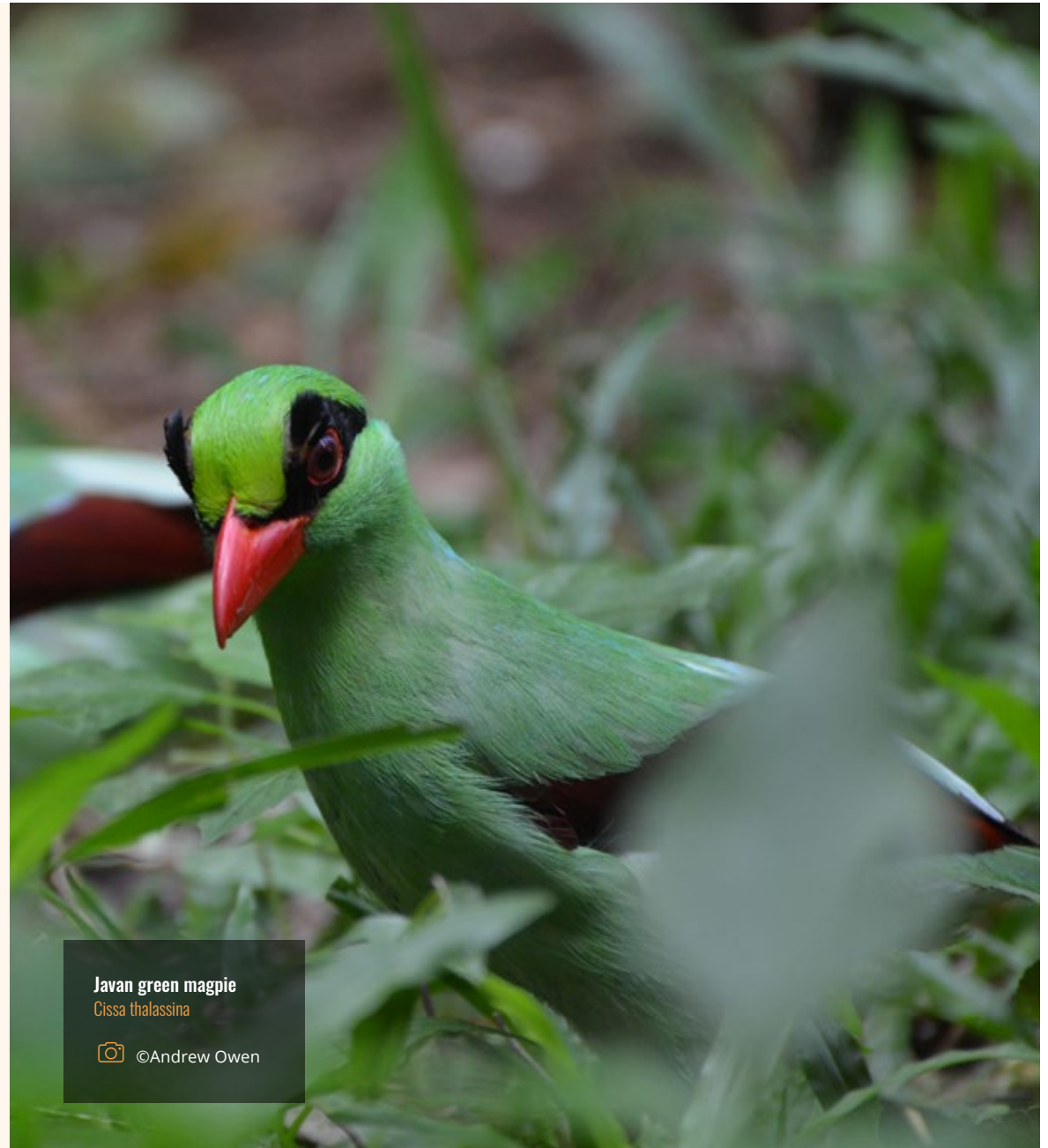
Zoos and aquariums began creating incredibly creative exhibits to inform their public about the songbird crisis, and how they as European visitors could help songbird populations both in Asia and in their own backyards. These exhibits were intended to be temporary, but their success has led to many of them remaining as permanent educational displays. Themed songbird days, special fundraising activities like fun runs and even special Silent Forest Campaign branded merchandise sold in zoo shops all over Europe continue to raise funds for specially selected conservation programmes. The funding target was exceeded by a large margin and will continue to provide direct conservation funding for years to come.

One of the key points of the campaign was to not only raise awareness around the songbird trade in Asia but also in Europe's role in perpetuating this destructive trade. In conjunction with the Campaign partners, EAZA produced the EAZA Position Statement on Songbird Trade. Created on behalf of EAZA Members, it encourages greater enforcement of existing bans on songbird imports in the EU and offers EAZA specialists to assist national authorities to improve their knowledge to better implement these bans.

---

In addition, EAZA supported the further closing of loopholes around zoos to import animals, requiring clear conservation benefit to be required for such imports.

The wide scope of the campaign was made possible by the strength and diversity of the EAZA community and its drive for action to save animals in crisis. The partnerships established during the campaign continue to bear fruit with closer international working relationships, greater stakeholder and public awareness, and a stronger focus on the songbird crisis at EU level. The Silent Forest Campaign shows the level of commitment our members have to conservation, and their dedication to working as a community to solve the extinction crisis.



**Javan green magpie**  
*Cissa thalassina*

©Andrew Owen