



Engaging younger visitors at Zoo Ústí nad Labem

© Zoo Ústí nad Labem

7

EDUCATION AND THE EAZA ACADEMY

Zoos and aquariums are unique among conservation facilities, in that they incorporate a clear mission to educate citizens about nature and animals. While education has always been a key part of the zoo offering, it is only relatively recently that such education evolved to include a specific purpose: to help engage the public directly in the global effort to protect nature.

EAZA Members excel in this mission, sharing resources and knowledge to do everything from helping meet global targets for biodiversity awareness to helping a primary school class learn about what actions they can take to help support local wildlife. Research shows that knowledge of an animal species doesn't increase our commitment to save them – making a connection by seeing, smelling, hearing an animal, makes all the difference provided that the encounter includes education about the actions needed to save the species; our programmes aim to provide visitors with engaging, informative and empowering experiences that meet this need.

EAZA's Conservation Education Committee is made up of experienced professional educators from across the Association's international network across the continent and beyond. As such, the Committee represents a broad range of cultures and perspectives that encourages clarity of communication – something that translates into the shared Conservation Education Standards and further into the educational work of each Member. The Conservation Education Standards not only affect how education is planned and delivered, but also how the zoo should be designed to allow for the best possible learning experience. They encourage Members to aspire to make species conservation interesting and relevant to the daily lives of visitors and encourage them to take part in nature



Lisbon zoo's innovative online education programmes reach students all over the world

 © Antonieta Costa

protection activities locally. They ask Members to take every technological opportunity to provide education to people outside the zoo or aquarium, indeed sometimes on the other side of the world; and they strive for a wide range of varied educational approaches, each with its own measurement to assess its effectiveness and to help with its continual refinement.

This structured approach allows Members to write a standardized educational strategy that is also flexible enough to take into account the local culture and learning norms of the community and which is delivered by qualified professional educators. Programmes can be anything from an hour long lesson to a summer camp of a few days, part of the national educational curriculum or a privately organized learning experience during the holidays. They may link directly to specific species or campaigns being highlighted by the zoo or aquarium or may be much more general. What they all have in common is a commitment to the highest levels of educational delivery – all with the aim of producing a well informed and environmentally sensitive community that is actively working for a better future for nature.

Outside of the public domain, EAZA is also committed to education and professional development for the staff of its Member zoos and aquariums. The EAZA Academy was set up to provide training in key elements of zoo and aquarium operations and the shared population management work of the Association as a whole. The EEP Management courses induct curators and animal managers into the working structure of the EAZA Ex Situ Programmes. This provides them with the skills they need for the successful management of an EEP population, from understanding the pedigree and genetic records of animals to make breeding recommendations, to the research and analysis that helps them design a Long-Term Management Plan and fulfill the roles of the programme.



Other Academy courses include Exhibit Design, to help zoo and aquarium managers provide the ideal conditions for the animals in their care; Animal Training courses to help managers prepare animals for transportation or medical care; Fundraising for conservation projects; Animal Welfare Training to ensure the highest standards of care and positive welfare; Record Keeping; and aspects of public education practice. Courses take place both at the EAZA Executive Office and in zoos and aquariums across our network. In some cases courses are organized locally and presented in association with EAZA, and more recently, Academy courses have been taking place online, vastly increasing the ability of tutors to reach

Zoo education helps raise biodiversity awareness through applied activities such as art classes.

 © Pavla Jarošová

audiences both inside and outside EAZA. These tutors are professionals from the EAZA network and beyond, and bring a wealth of personal experience and knowledge that is key to mentoring Academy students. We believe that sharing knowledge and practices helps to improve the work and outcomes of zoos and aquariums whether or not they are EAZA Members and therefore make access to materials such as video lectures and discussions as accessible as possible.

EAZA is also acknowledged by the European Commission as a partner in both public education and zoo and aquarium-related capacity building. Along with many of our Members, we are an enthusiastic participant in the European Commission-led United for Biodiversity Coalition, a global initiative that brings together science engagement facilities to build pressure on politicians to act with ambition in the service of species and ecosystem conservation. On the professional side, EAZA experts are part of a coalition helping to train EU Member State authorities in the successful implementation of the European Union Zoos Directive.

EAZA zoos and aquariums seek every day to find innovative ways to harness their knowledge and passion to make a difference to the planet and its animals. A strong conservation education philosophy at all stages and to all audiences helps us to do better conservation work with the active support of the public and their representatives – as such, it could not be more important to the success of any modern zoo or aquarium.

CASE STUDY

TRAINING IN ACTION: THE IMPACT OF APPLIED KNOWLEDGE ON DAILY PRACTICE

Dr. Georgina Spyres is Head of Education and Research at Attica Zoological Park since 2010. She works with other environmental NGOs and participates in international education networks, including as facilitator of the Evaluation and Research group of the EAZA Conservation Education Committee. Her love of nature began as a child in a Greek seaside village and since then she has worked in chemical oceanography research before starting her journey as an environmental educator in 2002.

My favourite question is “How do you know that?” How do you know? Is it hearsay? Did you read it? Did you observe it? Maybe this questioning is annoying for some people, but it’s useful for an educator!

When I started working at Attica Zoological Park, the first thing I did was read the EAZA Conservation Education Strategy. I had more questions. Do our programs help us achieve the strategy? Which methods are most effective? Are visitors learning and changing?

I wanted to evaluate our work to better understand our visitors, what we offer them and whether we are successful in creating pro-conservation behaviour change. I attended the EAZA Academy Survey Design Course in October 2014 held at London Zoo to increase my capacity to answer these questions. The course covered visitor

survey design and data collection and analysis. The sessions on research and survey design were most helpful for me.

Afterwards, my journey with evaluation started simply with customer satisfaction surveys. We have had wonderful reviews and this survey data gives me confidence when communicating to stakeholders. Negative feedback also helped; we could change materials that were not being used as intended. We then evaluated visitor attitudes, which helped us identify effective and ineffective presentations.

I'm also working with the EAZA Conservation Education Committee to create new training on evaluation.

To make a long story short, evaluating our work is a journey of discovery which makes us better educators, and good educators are essential for conservation to succeed!

EAZA's Academy allows staff to grow and develop their skills through professional development and expert training in their field.



Dr. Spyres leads an education briefing at Attica Zoological Park

© Attica Zoological Park