

EAZA Guidelines on the use of animals in public demonstrations



Approved by Council
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Introduction

This document presents the guidelines of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) for the use of exotic animals in demonstrations. EAZA fully supports the evolution of zoos and aquaria toward becoming community-based centres of conservation, education and research. EAZA members have a responsibility to themselves and their peers to conduct the husbandry of animals according to these principles.

The role and public perception of zoos and aquaria is changing rapidly in response to:

- the continued separation of public from the natural world
- the ongoing and universal degradation of wild habitats and the need to conserve taxa that are under threat of extinction in the wild
- the influence of zoos and aquaria on the environmental consciousness of visitors and members of their local communities, and the associated responsibility to use this influence to instil responsible behaviours towards nature and animals

Zoos and aquaria provide unique animal experiences for guests, including passive exhibits, demonstrations and personal interactions, which have been proven to create an increase in pro-conservation behaviours (Faulk et al. 2007, Skibins and Powell 2013). As such, EAZA members recognise the need to continue to provide opportunities to engage their guests in such a manner as to reinforce these positive conservation attitudes, while making animal welfare the highest priority.

EAZA recognises that as modern zoos and aquaria have evolved, many historical demonstrations may not reflect the role of zoos and aquaria as centres of education and conservation. This document intends to outline what criteria should be considered by EAZA members when developing demonstrations.

EAZA defines demonstrations as any case where an animal is demonstrating behaviours, trained or natural, while under the supervision or control of a trainer in the view of guests, with the intention of educating, inspiring, and entertaining our visitors. This would also include guest interactions and experiences.

Training techniques used for demonstrations should not differ from day to day husbandry training techniques to guarantee animal welfare. Priority should also be placed on behavioural, environmental and social enrichment.

This document will serve as a guideline document for all member and applicant facilities, but for specific taxa guidelines, members should refer to TAG demonstration guidelines.

Section 1: Animal behaviour demonstrations

EAZA encourages its members to focus on behaviours that are demonstrations of their natural intellectual or problem solving ability and their physical attributes. Practices that should be phased out or avoided in future demonstrations include:

1. Any practices that provide audiences with a misleading impression of the natural behaviours of wild animals, or makes claims about wild animal behaviour that are not substantiated by scientific evidence.
2. The use of props where their use cannot be shown to demonstrate or replicate natural behaviour. Static stage sets would not be defined as props.
3. Any behaviour that when implemented poses a demonstrable or probable risk toward animal health. As such, EAZA strongly encourages welfare audits of new behaviours, routines, props or techniques prior to and after its implementation.

Section 2: Human/Animal interaction

EAZA does not support demonstrations which place humans or animals at a risk of physical or psychological harm, including:

1. Any situation where an animal, a staff member or guests safety is unnecessarily and knowingly placed at risk.
2. Any practice that requires physical disciplining of an animal to provide protection for a staff member who is in contact with that animal for any purpose other than the preservation or improvement of its health or wellbeing.
3. Direct physical contact between humans and animals in a demonstration for the sole purpose of entertainment, where there is no accompanying demonstrable educational value.

Section 3: Health of animal

EAZA does not support the use of rearing or feeding techniques for demonstrations that directly affect the welfare and health of the animal, including

1. The premature removal of an animal from the mother with the intention of hand-raising specifically for use in a demonstration when this causes psychological distress to the offspring or mother. Removing techniques that mitigate this stress (double clutch, leaving one offspring) are recommended.
2. The use of weight control to the point that it risks the health of the animal.

3. Any techniques that would negatively affect the EEP/ESB breeding programmes without approval of the coordinator.

Section 4: Demonstration and Interactive environment

EAZA does not support placing animals in a performance environment that does not reflect the EAZA Minimum Standards, particularly where these conditions could cause them stress or physical harm.

Section 5: Off-demonstration housing

EAZA Best Practice standards should be followed for all off-demonstration housing, pre-and post-demonstration holding enclosures and areas and conduits used for moving animals between their enclosures and the demonstration space.

Section 6: Animal selection

EAZA does not support the use of animals in demonstrations should they contradict any other position statement or standards approved by the association. This includes featuring animals that display recessive allele characteristics, animals that are physically unfit to participate or animals displaying aggression or symptoms of mental distress.

The use of EEP/ESB animals in demonstrations cannot interfere with the breeding programme recommendations. The breeding programme must take priority over the needs of an individual member's need for a demonstration animal.

Rescued or rehabilitated animals can be used in demonstrations within their specific medical or behavioural needs.

Procedure and sanctions

EAZA will act as a result of scheduled inspection or as a result of extraordinary inspection arranged on the basis of the properly filed complaint of another member institution or associate member. In cases where complaints have been received from members of the public or media, the institution in question will be contacted for an explanation, which will be reviewed by the Membership and Ethics Committee, and may result in a request for inspection.

Should the demonstration fail the inspection according to the listed criteria in this document or EAZA Minimum Standards, the member will be required to demonstrate conformity to the standards within a period of time determined by the M&E Committee. Failure to conform to the standard within this period, via discontinuation of the demonstration in question, or via modification of the show until it meets EAZA requirements, will also result in sanctions for the member.

A member within this determinate time period has the right to appeal for a second review, and under these circumstances will be entitled to receive specific guidance from EAZA on how to meet the standards of the association, and at the discretion of the advisory party may receive additional time in which to make the necessary changes – although this period may not exceed 6 months.

Any animal demonstration conducted by a third party contractor on behalf of and on the premises of a member institution must also follow these guidelines. It is the responsibility of the member to investigate the welfare, training techniques, off season care and holding, and breeding responsibility of the contracted organization. The member is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the contractor's work is in line with this guideline document.

Implementation

This guideline document will be implemented over three years from Council's approval. Any facility that feels that they will not be able to meet these requirements can request forbearance on a case by case basis to the Membership and Ethics committee. After the three year implementation period, these guidelines will be applied during accreditation screenings, complaint investigations, or other official visits.

References

Skibins J. C. and R. B. Powell. 2013. Conservation caring: measuring the influence of zoo visitors' connection to wildlife on pro-conservation behaviours. *Zoo Biology* 32:528-40.

Falk J. H., E. M. Reinhard, C. L. Vernon, K. Bronnenkant, N. L. Deans, and J.E. Heimlich. 2007. *Why Zoos & Aquaria Matter: Assessing the Impact of a Visit*. Association of Zoos & Aquaria. Silver Spring, MD.