

EAZA Position Statement on Circus Membership of the Association



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Introduction

The EU Zoo Directive (1999/22/EC) defines what a zoo is within the EU:

“For the purpose of this Directive, ‘zoos’ means all permanent establishments where animals of wild species are kept for exhibition to the public for 7 or more days a year, with the exception of circuses, pet shops and establishments which Member States exempt from the requirements of this Directive on the grounds that they do not exhibit a significant number of animals or species to the public and that the exemption will not jeopardise the objectives of this Directive.”

By definition, therefore, circuses are not zoos and they cannot be members of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA). Further guidance on membership of EAZA is outlined in the Constitution of EAZA whereby there are no membership categories that apply to circuses.

The Association fully supports the evolution of zoos and aquaria toward becoming community-based centres of conservation, education and research. Its 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 continual process of the public becoming separated 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 no longer reflect the modern role of zoos and aquaria as centres of education and conservation. Earlier documents outline what criteria should be considered by EAZA Members when developing demonstrations (**EAZA Guidelines on the use of animals in public demonstration 2014**).

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.

EAZA recognises that 'animal demonstrations' are, in a broad sense, also a key part of the offering of circuses. No plain and simple definition of a circus exists that would allow unambiguous discrimination between a demonstration in an EAZA zoo and a circus, yet the distinction is clear and obvious to most people. It relates to the context in which the demonstration is offered and the detail of how it is performed. For the purpose of this document an animal performance in a circus will be termed a 'show'.

Good practice

In its definition of what is acceptable in animal demonstrations by its members EAZA encourages a focus on behaviours that are demonstrations of animals' natural intellectual or problem solving abilities 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.

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.

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

EAZA does not support placing animals in a performance environment that does not reflect the **EAZA Standards for the Accommodation of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria (2014)**, particularly where these conditions could cause them stress or physical harm.

Additionally, 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.

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.

Conclusion

In view of the above statements it is perceived that it is not possible for a circus to achieve the standards of membership of the Association and so no circus can be accepted as a member, neither can any zoo or aquarium in financial or managerial partnership with a circus. Additionally, members that permit circus-type shows to be constructed on their premises leave themselves open to sanctions up to, and including, the possibility of expulsion from the Association.

References

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.

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.