

# EAZA Education Standards



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## Introduction

The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) is a non-profit conservation organisation, committed to the promotion of cooperation in regional collection planning and wildlife conservation.

If conservation is to succeed, people need to be inspired to care about and understand animals and the threats they face in the wild. Everyone should have the opportunity to experience and learn about wildlife at first hand. One of EAZA's aims is to promote knowledge and understanding of the natural world through the medium of zoos. Zoos are a valuable educational and cultural resource, together with museums and botanical gardens. Every year over 125 million people visit the zoos in Europe.

EAZA member institutions support the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (WAZA, 2005). This Strategy concludes that, given a professional approach, a knowledge of the zoo public and a clear-cut education plan, zoo education programmes can be successful in increasing public awareness of the irreplaceable value of nature. Education is therefore an essential conservation task of zoos.

EAZA's Mission Statement on conservation education is as follows:

*'To create an urgent awareness among the many millions of European zoo visitors of the fact that the long-term survival of a thriving human population on earth is fully dependent on the rapid development of sustainability on a global scale. And, through the creation of this awareness, to evoke individual and collective political action aiming at reaching global sustainable levels of all human activities within the next three to five decades.'*

## Purpose

This document has been developed by the EAZA Education Committee to help guide and inform the practice of zoo education and provide a coordinated approach. It is intended for use by educators, exhibit developers, curators, directors, board members, peer reviewers, and others who support education both inside and outside the zoo premises. This living document will evolve to meet the changing needs of education philosophy and will be reviewed by the EAZA Education Committee regularly.

## Standards

The main aims of modern zoos\* include conservation and education. Since there is no single way to fulfil a zoo's educational mission and zoo education includes a broad range of responsibilities, the following standards and principles of best practice apply to all whose work focuses on zoo education:

- 1) The education role of the zoo is to be clearly stated in its written mission statement.
- 2) The zoo must have a written education policy, identifying educational components and setting out the methods by which these components are directed towards the different sections of the zoo's visitor audience.

\* The word 'zoo' is used for any institution that is a member of EAZA or is applying to become a member of EAZA.

### Explanation

- *The concept of zoo education is broader than a programme for schools and should be targeted at the entire zoo visitation. This should be consistent with the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy.*
- *Groups from a wide range of social, cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds visit zoos. Each zoo should therefore have a thorough understanding of how the visitor audience is constituted and what the needs of different target groups are in order to be able to target its education programme. Target groups can include: general visitors, locals, tourists, families, mixed age groups, friends, school groups, same age groups, teenagers, elderly, disabled, literate and illiterate people.*
- *Educational components can include topics as: animal behaviour, zoo animal management, variety of life, a variety of animal-based topics, global or local conservation, in situ and ex situ issues, threats to species, the role of zoos in conservation, sustainability and respect for and appreciation of wildlife.*
- *Methods for delivering educational programmes amongst others can include (a combination of): signs (e.g. identification labels, graphic displays), exhibits, permanent or temporary exhibitions, audio/visual presentations, interactive displays, information technology, zoo guidebooks and publications and staff members (e.g. educators, animal staff, volunteers).*

3) The zoo's educational message must be based on scientific facts.

### Explanation

- *The main educational message of a zoo must focus on scientific facts and not on unproven facts such as the Creation narrative.*

4) Education can encourage local action. Wherever possible, the zoo must make environmental issues (e.g. sustainability) relevant to visitors by relating the issues to their own lives and experience.

### Explanation

- *The zoo must 'practice what it preaches' in order to be able to make strong educational statements. In case a zoo wants to raise awareness on sustainability, it should act in an as 'green' or sustainable way as possible. For example, the zoo could show its visitors how to act 'green' by managing its waste, recycling its water, using energy saving light bulbs and sensors etc.*

5) The zoo must use a diversity of techniques to communicate their educational message in ways appropriate to their location, size and budget.

### Explanation

- *Media can include the internet, newspapers, radio and television.*
- *The internet provides easy and rather cheap ways to share techniques and resources and to disseminate the educational message globally, even to non-visitors.*

6) Via annual reports, the zoo must be able to demonstrate that it is carrying out its education policy, by reference to specific projects, figures of attendance, evaluation procedures and research.

7) At least one member of staff within the zoo should be responsible for a professional implementation of the education policy.

### Explanation

- *Medium-sized zoos should employ at least one member of staff with overall responsibility for education. Larger zoos should also have additional education staff. Staff must have some training in education, preferably with a university degree and/or teacher training qualification.*

- *In smaller zoos, the education role might be combined with other functions and be carried out by personnel such as: the director, curator, senior keeper and researcher. Staff involved must be familiar with education practice and ideally have some formal or informal training in education (through education conferences and regional workshops).*

8) A zoo must use scientific methods to evaluate the impact of their education programmes.

Explanation

- *Evaluating educational programmes helps planning for the future (e.g. exhibit design, long-term strategic planning) and illustrates the effectiveness of the zoo as a centre of conservation education.*
- *Evaluation techniques can include surveys and questionnaires, comparative assessments of the effectiveness of different exhibits, observations of visitor behaviour, conversations, records of donations received etc. (see World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy, p.40)*

9) Animal training may be a helpful educational tool. When animal demonstrations form part of the educational programme, the zoo must in all cases be able to report on the educational effectiveness of the demonstration and on the effects on the animal's welfare.

10) Animals must be clearly and correctly identified at their enclosures (if practicable).

Explanation

- *Displays (e.g. signs, exhibits and interactive elements) should demonstrate or extend the animal's natural ability and show behaviours that are of intrinsic value to the species. They should not be compromised by being made to perform unnatural acts or to become humanised.*
- *Care should be taken to avoid the impression that the animals make wonderful, exotic pets. It should be possible to focus on endangered species and to give reasons why they are in the zoo. Conservation issues such as loss of habitat and animal products' trade can be included. Successful breeding programmes in the zoo and any reintroduction to the wild should be mentioned.*

11) It should be emphasised that for education programmes to be successful, zoo animals must be exhibited in the best conditions in enclosures that enable them to live as natural as possible and to participate in natural behaviours as far as possible.

Explanation

- *Animals that appear to suffer from physical and/or psychological restraint are counter-productive to education and will spoil the conservation message.*

12) Interpretation/education should be an integral part of zoo exhibit planning and the collection planning process.

13) Staff members should be provided with access to a relevant information/ references (e.g. through a library or internet) appropriate to the size and complexity of the zoo.

Explanation

- *Books, current journals, access to internet and other media, enable staff to improve their knowledge and to stay informed on recent trends in education, zoo biology, conservation and environmental issues. In turn, this enables them to provide accurate and up-to-date information to zoo visitors.*

14) Staff members involved in education should be encouraged to participate in local, national, regional and international networks. They should be encouraged and provided with the means to engage in productive dialogues with zoo colleagues and educators at schools and universities, but also with their counterparts in museums, botanic gardens, science centres and other relevant institutions.

15) The zoo should pursue opportunities for partnerships with local colleges or other educational institutions.

16) Resource material/education information should be made available to the general public and zoo audience. This can include: leaflets, guide books, teachers' notes, resource packs and work sheets.

*Approved by EAZA Council on 19 September 2008*