



## **EAZA Response to inquiries about the welfare of bonobos at Wuppertal Zoo, Germany**

**Amsterdam 11 February 2019:** The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) has been made aware of media reports in Germany about the welfare of a young male bonobo at Wuppertal Zoo, a Member of EAZA in good standing. The animal, known as Bili, was transferred from Frankfurt Zoo to Wuppertal Zoo in November 2018 as part of the EAZA Ex Situ Programme (EEP).

The Bonobo EEP scientifically manages bonobos in EAZA Member zoos to ensure a genetically and demographically healthy population. This involves making recommendations about breeding and transfers of animals to keep the population healthy. Bili was born at an EAZA Member zoo in the UK in 2008 and unfortunately rejected by his mother. The EEP Species Committee recommended for Bili to move to Frankfurt zoo to be fostered by a female caring for her own offspring; this solution proved effective over the first years of his life. However, with Bili unable to participate in the breeding group at Frankfurt (due to his relatively close genetic profile to other animals at Frankfurt), and with the zoo at full capacity for bonobos, the EEP made the decision to relocate Bili to another facility. After several years of discussion and planning, Wuppertal zoo was identified as the best option for Bili, and he was transferred there in November 2018. In making this decision, the EEP evaluated each of the nine other EAZA Members that house bonobos and also discussed a transfer to the American Species Survival Plan (SSP) Programme.

The Bonobo EEP is clear that transfer of young males without their mother is not an easy process; in the wild, bonobo males rely heavily on the social standing and support of their mother. The EEP therefore aims, if necessary, to transfer young males along with their mothers or other familiar group members, to ensure that they remain under maternal protection. Due to the circumstances surrounding his birth and young life this has not been possible with Bili. The EEP and Wuppertal zoo have taken measures to reduce the risk to him from other animals during the long and delicate process of introducing him to a new group.

Despite their peaceful public image, bonobos can inflict serious wounds. Both in the wild and in zoos female attacks on males occur more than any other type. Female bonobos will often form coalitions against males, and males without a mother in the group are typical victims. Introductions in apes can be a lengthy process. With bonobos most introductions initially go very smoothly but often after a few weeks, social relationships begin to develop and alliances are formed. It is a dynamic system that can change from one day to the next. While aggression in primates is often spectacular, it is more important to look for what happens after a fight, and whether the bonobos also make up after the aggression. While aggression has happened during the introduction of Bili, behavioural observations have also shown that reconciliation has also occurred, and certain individuals in his new group have also begun to protect Bili against the attacks.

Keepers, veterinarians, ethologists and other animal care professionals from Wuppertal and the EEP have discussed Bili's case throughout the period since his transfer. While there is no easy way to introduce an effectively orphaned male bonobo into a group, these experts have recommended a system of "time out" for Bili, to mimic the fission-fusion dynamics that bonobos have in the wild. Bili, while always in the company of other group members, has the opportunity to be separate from any individuals exhibiting high levels of violence against him; this is aimed at gradually increasing acceptance of Bili by these animals and the alpha female, which is key to his integration.

There is no logical sense in moving Bili to another troupe where he is likely to face the same issues. Equally, Bili cannot be moved to another zoo without a bonobo group, as living alone for the rest of

his life would represent a far greater compromise to his long-term welfare. In the meantime, the EEP will continue to monitor this introduction and if there is no sufficient progress, will undertake steps to find alternative solutions, including the possible transfer of more socially flexible animals to other facilities within the EEP. EAZA and the EEP take very seriously the responsibilities that accompany the *ex situ* conservation of Endangered species and have extensive expertise in mitigating the high level of complexity involved; we are equally committed to the highest possible levels of animal welfare and will always seek to find effective and humane solutions that do not subvert the natural behaviours and welfare needs of animals in our care.

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**About the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria:** The membership organization of Europe's most progressive zoological institutions, the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria comprises more than 400 zoos, aquariums and other institutions across 47 countries, collaborating for the advancement of conservation, research and education. EAZA is a significant stakeholder in the fight to protect the future of the natural world, both in Europe and across the world.