



EAZA Animal Management and Covid-19 Information sheet

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Introduction

The purpose of this information sheet is to **provide background information on the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic may have on EAZA's animal management programmes and activities**. The severity of the outbreak as well as the measures put in place by national governments vary significantly across the EAZA region and are subject to change, on a daily and sometimes hourly, basis. Considering this situation and the different impact on individual institutions our ambition is to provide the best general information possible and offer answers to questions where we can. This information sheet will be updated as time progresses, and the impact and related further questions become clearer and answers become available.

Operation of EEPs, ESBs and TAGs

Whilst our ambition is to continue the functionality of our EAZA Ex situ Programmes (EEP) for as much as possible, EAZA Members are likely to experience differences compared to the normal situation. Where some coordinators might have the possibility to spend more time on managing their EEP whilst working at home for example, others are under temporarily unemployment schemes or replacing members of staff that are in quarantine and thus having to deprioritise their EEP coordination activities. Managing this unfolding crisis both professionally and privately might mean that some colleagues cannot devote the normal energy and efficiency to their EAZA tasks which the EAZA Executive Office (EEO) will respect as surely EAZA Members will as well.

Depending on the length of the crisis and the species involved there will also be implications on transfer and (non)breeding recommendations for some of our EEPs. The EAZA Executive Office will keep in touch with the EEP coordinators and **will strive to at minimum ensure questions from EEP participants are acknowledged and answered wherever possible**. The same applies to EAZA Studbooks (ESBs) and Taxon Advisory Groups (TAGs). If communication with EEPs, ESBs or TAGs breaks down, EAZA Members can contact william.van.lint@eaza.net. The EEO will strive to keep an overview of EEP coordinators or ESB keepers that are not able to work on the programme including replacement contact details were applicable.

The EAZA Executive Office has opened the a [‘Corona virus Forum’](#) where we collate information on the outbreak as relevant for our EAZA community. EEO staff will be available to answer questions at the forum. Staff from the animal management team at EEO will be available from 15-17hrs (CET).

Animal Transports

With many borders closed across the EAZA region, the possibilities for transporting animals have decreased significantly. **Even where still allowed, EAZA strongly recommends postponing animal transports wherever possible** to reduce risks of disease transmission for staff involved in these transfers and avoid long waiting times and potential refusal of entry at border inspection points.

There might be exceptional circumstances where animals do need to be transported with urgency for example severely compromised welfare of individual animals that cannot be resolved at an institutional level and where culling is not appropriateⁱ. Or where the aims of an EEP might be severely negatively impacted if transport cannot take place within the next couple of months. In some of these scenarios, transfers between EAZA Members on a national level might provide for a (temporary) solution. In other cases, EAZA is available to attempt to help programmes and Members when seeking support from authorities to allow a crucial cross-border transport to take place. **EAZA Members are asked to contact the EEP coordinators and ESB keepers as per the normal EAZA procedures for the programme species.** EEP coordinators and ESB keepers that require support should contact their TAG liaison at the EAZA Executive Office.

ⁱ EAZA refers to the [‘EAZA Position Statement on Culling’](#) for when EAZA Members want or need to turn to culling as a population management tool in case the Covid-19 crisis will last for more than a few months and animal transportation options remain limited or non-existence for longer periods of time resulting in compromised welfare for individual animals. If so required EAZA Members can approach the EAZA Executive Office for support relating to any such decisions and the associated communications that might arise.

Financial difficulties and Bankruptcy

Understandably the key concern of EAZA Members is managing finances and avoiding bankruptcy given that with the widespread closure to the public, incomes have dropped to (almost) 0%. National governments are in charge of preventative measures and developing packages supporting companies, citizens and indeed their societies. Hence, through the National Associations Committee, EAZA is keeping in close contact with our National Association Members or Council members where these are not in place, supporting them wherever possible. **Our first priority is to contribute to ensuring that governments put emergency packages in place that prevent any of our Members going into bankruptcy.**

Despite the valid concerns that Members have, some more immediate and short-term than others, **we believe it is both premature and unrealistic to put general measures in place for rehoming animals *en mass* in case of bankruptcies of multiple Members.** Transport restrictions and spread of Covid-19 risks as outlined in the previous paragraph aside, there will simply be no places for entire collections of animals to be rehomed to. Therefore, any attempt to rehome such collections by governments or financial-curators is considered unrealistic. Additionally, ownership of animals might be with other EAZA Member institutions and animals would need to be moved following EEP transfer recommendations.

Whilst EAZA supports culling as one of our population management tools, **we condemn culling of entire collections as an appropriate measure in case of (preventing) bankruptcy.** In addition to any ethical debates that this might rightfully cause, EAZA is seriously concerned about the damage such action will cause to our EAZA Ex situ Programmes and indeed to species conservation in general. As stated above, EAZA strives for EEPs and ESBs to continue as much as possible and for **EAZA Members to follow the normal acquisition and disposition rules and procedures** as outlined in the EAZA Population Management Manual.

EAZA Members requiring support related to (preventing) bankruptcy can contact the EAZA Executive Office at all times.

Human-Animal disease transmission

Scientific literature on Covid-19 transmission from animals to humans and vice versa is limited in number and in those studies that are available observation and feedback times are at present far too short. EAZA's longstanding MoU partner the European Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians (EAZWV) have made **an excellent paper available (see chapter 6.5 of the [Transmissible Disease Handbook](#)) describing the current state of play.** It includes examples of reassuring statements about risk of transmission. EAZWV will continue to update this paper as more scientific literature becomes available. **We recommend that this paper is used by EAZA Members to address any queries about Covid-19 disease transmission.**

Whilst there is still need for further research to understand the transmission of Covid-19, it is important to stress that EAZA Member institutions are subject to strict local and/or European animal health legislations as well as subject to EAZA's own veterinary standards as described in the 'EAZA Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria'. **The main concern in the Covid-19 pandemic is disease transmission between humans. The risk of spread of disease from zoo animals to visitors is considered nil and there is no need for panic regarding the animals held by the EAZA Membership.** With most EAZA Members being closed to the public and staff with clinical symptoms not allowed to work, there is also only limited risk of disease transmission from humans to animals held in EAZA Member collections. **Despite the risk being small, working in hygienic and sanitary conditions with the animals remains important. This is part of normal routine for staff at EAZA Members and indeed part of EAZAs accreditation criteria.** We do recommend EAZA

Members, with support of their veterinarian to, where necessary, update the animal care teams about the risk of zoonoses and that normal hygienic routines continue to apply also during the human Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, we recommend that zoos evaluate the need for any direct contact between staff and animals and avoid this wherever possible. Finally, in light of the above, we would like to stress that in several countries across the EAZA region there is a shortage of masks and that those available should be made available to human health staff instead of being used for routine animal care.

EAZA Biobank

The EAZA Biobank is mostly operating according to the normal working procedures. However, we are **recommending postponement of sample shipments until further notice**. In situations where zoos have appropriate staffing, and adequate storage facilities, they are encouraged to continue to collect samples and store them on site until further notice. Colleagues should practice common sense and only work within their limits at this time. For further questions about the EAZA Biobank please contact ania.brown@eaza.net.

TAG and EEP meetings / EAZA Annual Conference

All EAZA events and EAZA midyear meetings are cancelled until mid-June which includes TAG and EEP related meetings. Meetings from 22 June onwards are currently still planned to go ahead. EAZA will continue to monitor the Covid-19 situation across the EAZA region and will adapt this timeline if required at a later stage.

For some of these meetings it might be possible to use online platforms instead of a face-to-face meeting. The EAZA Executive Office staff can provide support in setting these up via our subscriptions to some of these online packages for TAG and EEP meetings. Please contact your TAG liaison for support when required.

The team at the EAZA Executive Office will look to start rescheduling RCP and LTMP meetings when travel is possible and safe. Travel-budget limitations for participants and the existing RCP and LTMP meeting scheduled for the second half of 2020 are likely to limit the possibilities for rescheduling meetings to a time in the autumn. However, we will prioritise rescheduling meetings that were prepared to take place in the period March-June 2020 over those not yet planned but listed for 2021. Please contact the relevant TAG liaison at the EAZA Executive Office to discuss further details in this regard.

At this moment in time we expect the EAZA Annual Conference in Leipzig to go ahead as planned in the last week of September. Given that some TAGs, EEPs and Working Groups will not have been able to meet we expect there might be request for additional meeting time. **We will shortly start collating requests for the annual conference programme and will aim to accommodate these for as much as realistically**

possible realising we might not be able to fulfil all requirements. Please contact lauren.florisson@eaza.net in case of any further questions.

EAZA Executive Office (EEO) Conservation and Population Management (CPM) Team

The CPM team, as indeed the rest of the EEO, will work from home until (at least) 4 May. We are managing to keep our operations and support for our programmes and Members in place fairly well and we are becoming very efficient in using online tools for these purposes.

The TAG liaisons are working on the publication of the Regional Collection Plans that took place late 2019 and at the beginning of this year. The EAZA Population Management Centre will shortly introduce an updated process for the preparations of LTMPs that is based on work that can be done via online meeting platforms. The programmes for which the TAG has had their new style RCP completed will be contacted by the PMC team in the next couple weeks to schedule such a meeting.

We are also aiming to complete the migration process for ZIMS for Studbooks for as much as the Covid-19 situation will allow us. Those EEP coordinators and ESB keeper that have not migrated will be contracted shortly as well those overseeing a Mon-P and using a SPARKS dataset for this purpose.

Otherwise **the team is available to provide support to Members, TAGs, EEPs and ESBs as well as for curating the Contraceptive Database.** Those EEP coordinators and ESB keepers that have more time available due to mandatory homeworking schemes and are up for it might use it to work on the implementation of the LTMPs, attend a ZIMS for Studbooks Q&A session or work with the team to get your assumptions sorted in preparation for your next studbook analyses.

We wish everyone much success in dealing with this crisis both for you and your family, your staff as well as your animals. Although it might not feel like it right now, EAZA believes that if we stand together in these difficult times, we will come out of this crisis stronger as a community of professional zoos and aquariums that is saving species together with you!