



ENDCAP

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# WILD ANIMAL SANCTUARIES FACT SHEET

Throughout the world, the term 'sanctuary', to describe a facility with animals, is often used indiscriminately and for a variety of captive animal establishments from zoos (which openly breed and exhibit animals to the public) to ever-increasing private collections of unwanted animals, to facilities which rescue and rehabilitate their animals. Sanctuaries are unregulated and no standardised management protocol exists.

Currently no definition exists for an animal sanctuary in Europe. Should a definition become established and widely recognised, regulation, or even legislation specific to animal sanctuaries would become possible: standardising management procedures and ensuring high requirements in animal care. Failing to establish a definition for an animal sanctuary would continue to allow indiscriminate use of the term, sanction varying standards and levels in animal care and management, and potentially discredit those facilities which genuinely provide their animals with high standards in life-time care. Furthermore, without a specific definition is it impossible to know how many sanctuaries there are in Europe.

## ENDCAP advocates the following definition for an animal sanctuary:

*A facility that rescues and provides shelter and care for wild animals that have been abused, injured, abandoned or are otherwise in need, where the welfare of each individual animal is the primary consideration in all sanctuary actions. In addition the facility should enforce a non-breeding policy and should replace animals only by way of rescue.*

Sanctuaries for wild animals exist throughout Europe. Some specialise in the rescue, rehabilitation and release of wild animals, whilst the majority of wild animal sanctuaries provide life-time refuge for wild animals that are unable to return to the wild. For example, in the Balkans there are a number of bear sanctuaries that were established to provide refuge for ex-dancing bears, when the activity was banned in many countries. There are thought to be 10 bears sanctuaries in Europe.

## Where do the animals come from?

- Confiscations – wild animals are often confiscated by national authorities when necessary permissions are found not to be in place or the owner is not providing legally adequate care.
- Displacement – wild animals are displaced from other captive establishments such as zoos and circuses. This may come about through their closure or the discarding of unwanted or surplus animals.
- Rescue – captive wild animals once used for an activity that has become curbed (eg dancing bears), or rescued due to inadequate quality of care. Plus animals orphaned in the wild.
- Abandonment – wild animals discharged by their private owner because the animal had become too difficult to handle, or too expensive to own.
- Injury – wild animals rescued from the wild due to an injury.



ENDCAP calls for a standard definition of a 'sanctuary'

ARCTURUS

Continued overleaf

# EUROPE'S FORGOTTEN ANIMALS

## **Known wild animal sanctuaries (as defined above) in Europe**

There are believed to be hundreds of animal sanctuaries specialising in the rescue, rehabilitation and release of wild endemic animals, however the number of sanctuaries specialising in exotic animals are relatively few.

Those known include:

- Bears – Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Greece, Romania and Russia
- Primates – Spain, The Netherlands and UK
- Small mammals – Belgium, The Netherlands and UK

## **Sanctuary protocol**

Assuming sanctuaries that keep wild animals aspire to provide their animals with high standards in animal welfare and a suitable living environment that provides stimulation and allows the animals to exhibit normal behaviour, sanctuaries should ensure:

- **Sufficient space** to allow the animal to exercise (ie run, walk, climb, fly, jump, etc.). This should be dependent upon the inherent needs of the species kept. There should also be space for escape and refuge away from other animals in conflict situations.

- **Environmental enrichment** to allow the animal to receive a variety of different stimulation similar to those that it would have in a wild state, which would allow it to express normal behaviour (ie dig, forage, climb, hide, access to companionship, etc). Ideally this is often achieved by providing sanctuary for an animal in its natural habitat (ie alpine forests habitat for European bears).

- **Standardised management procedure**, which would need to be species-specific, would maintain a high level and quality of animal care, personnel safety, veterinary procedures, euthanasia policy, release protocol (if applicable), etc.

- **Qualified and experienced personnel**, to ensure that there are high standards in animal care.

- **Guaranteed life-time care** for those animals that can never be released into the wild. This has very high cost implications and the sanctuary must have substantial financial reserve to deal with all eventualities and recognise their limitations.

- **A non-breeding and non-replacement policy** that ensures only needy animals are provided the limited sanctuary space that exists.

- **Limited human contact** to ensure the animals enjoy as natural a life as possible. Public visitation should be no more than a limited number of supervised educational tours. Animals for rehabilitation and release should have no human contact.

## **The problem that needs to be addressed**

The majority of sanctuaries for wild animals only provided a limited number of places and they are therefore often full. Wild animals are continually being confiscated, displaced, abandoned and injured, and there are never sufficient numbers of available spaces. Authorities are reluctant to confiscate animals knowing that there is no where for the animal to go (allowing illegal activities to persist). Zoos that are failing to meet the requirements of the EU Zoos Directive remain in operation with no alternative home for the animals, sanctuaries themselves have huge waiting lists and animal welfare organisations struggle to find refuge for rescued animals.

The answer to this escalating problem is not easy but a concerted effort by the European Community and Member States is required, and together with existing sanctuaries and animal welfare NGOs, seek viable solutions.

## **ENDCAP advocates the following:**

- **The European Community must recognise their responsibilities in ensuring wild animals, displaced through EU legislative procedures, are provided suitable care.**

- **Member States establish more sanctuary space to meet the specific demands in that country.**

- **A definition of a sanctuary (covering both wild and domestic animals) must be established, all sanctuaries registered and a sanctuary protocol (specific to the kind of animal) must be established and adopted.**



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