



ENDCAP

www.endcaptivity.org

ZOOS AND AQUARIA FACT SHEET

Introduction

Estimates have put the number of zoos and aquaria in Europe at around 1,500, although if all premises displaying captive wild animals to the public are included, this figure could be more than 5,000 (for example, the UK alone has 500+ such facilities).

Legislation

EU Member States were required to implement the European Directive 1999/22/EC relating to the keeping of wild animals in zoos into national legislation. The EU Zoos Directive defines zoos as 'all permanent establishments where animals of wild species are kept for exhibition to the public for seven or more days a year, with the exception of circuses [and] pet shops...'; and sets out requirements for conservation, education and animal welfare in zoos, along with a licensing and inspection regime.

However, it is clear there are considerable differences and problems in how this has been interpreted, transposed and enforced, such as:

- Delays transposing the Directive into national legislation
- Differences in definition of what constitutes a 'zoo'
- Automatic licensing of zoos without inspection



Tens of thousands of animals are kept in zoos in Europe

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Animal Welfare Issues

Tens of thousands of animals are kept in zoos in Europe, and the potential for compromised animal welfare and suffering is great. While one objective of the EU Directive was to ensure minimum welfare standards, there is significant evidence that these are both insufficient and, in many cases, rarely enforced. Several Member States have yet to implement the licensing and inspection requirements of the Directive. Even in countries where the Directive has been fully implemented, animal welfare remains an ongoing concern in zoos and problems regularly arise. Investigations by ENDCAP member organisations across Europe have revealed that, in many cases, the behavioural and environmental needs of wild animals are not being met in zoos.

Conservation Issues

Captive breeding:

"Today, fewer than 200 species of threatened mammals are sustainably propagated in the world's zoos."

William Conway, Wildlife Conservation Society (USA)

Captive breeding for conservation has become a 'fashionable' objective for many zoos within Europe and worldwide, where threatened species are kept and bred in captivity as insurance against extinction and for possible reintroduction to the wild. At the pan-European level, co-ordinated captive breeding programmes (known as EEPs) are organised by the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA). However, only around 160 such programmes exist for mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians – a stark contrast to the huge number of species threatened in the wild.

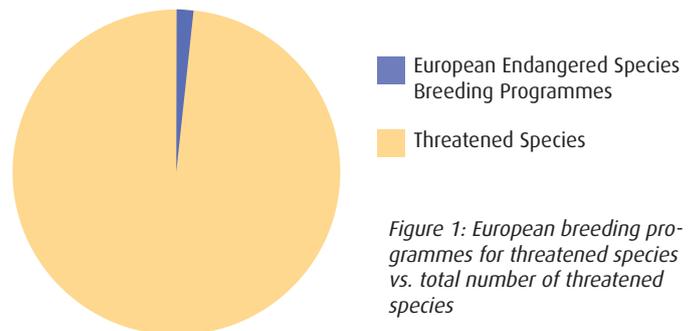


Figure 1: European breeding programmes for threatened species vs. total number of threatened species

Continued overleaf

Indeed, many such programmes do not focus on the most threatened species – for example, more than 25% of EEPs cover species that are not threatened in the wild.

The success of co-ordinated captive breeding programmes for threatened species is equivocal: for example, despite an Asian elephant EEP, there remains the purported need to import further elephants into captivity from the wild to support the dwindling captive population. The then-Chairman of EAZA stated in 2004 that:

“...both elephant programmes [African and Asian elephant EEPs] also conclude that – in order to reach the ultimate goals of population size and sustainability – additional imports from the wild are still needed.”

Animals are also being bred for less ‘admirable’ purposes – in 2007, tigers from two zoos in Belgium were killed, and their skins sold for taxidermy. The full extent of such activities is unknown, but there are indications that zoos in other EU Member states may be involved. In addition, several German zoos were recently implicated in selling big cats to zoos in China, and suspicions have been raised that the animals were destined to be killed for their body parts for traditional Chinese medicine.

It is clear zoos do not necessarily breed animals for conservation purposes, and in many cases are unable to guarantee lifetime care for those animals that are bred.

Reintroduction to the wild:

The vast majority of the few ‘successful’ reintroductions of animals from captivity to the wild have involved individual animals from establishments other than zoos (such as dedicated breeding centres, where animals are not on display to the public).

Conservation in the field:

Many zoos claim to support conservation projects in the field. However, analysis of several prestigious, non-profit zoos in the UK has shown that financial support to field conservation is as little as 4-7% of the zoos’ annual income, and it is likely that the vast majority of other zoos contribute less.

The year-long EAZA (European Association of Zoos and Aquariums) Save the Rhino campaign 2005/6 raised 1 €515,842.81 for international rhino conservation. However, this only represents €4,194 per participating

zoo, and only €0.004 per visitor to EAZA zoos (approx).

Education:

Much is claimed about the educational role of zoos in modern society, yet the fact remains that little evaluation of the effectiveness of zoo-based education has been undertaken.

“The past three decades of research in zoos has ‘superficially’ described the interests, knowledge, and beliefs of the visiting public, and those studies tended to investigate public perception of animals, with little attention paid to the overall conservation messages conveyed.”

Sterling, Lee & Wood 2007

Furthermore, many zoos do not undertake formal education programmes, relying on the display of animals in enclosures alone to serve as ‘education’. Of the small number of conservation education programmes in zoos, few receive formal evaluations.

Despite repeated claims of their value in education, it remains to be proved that zoos lead to a demonstrable increase in public education and awareness of biodiversity conservation.

Through investigation, advocacy and campaigns ENDCAP seeks to ensure that, as a minimum, all European Member States (and Applicant Countries) must fully implement and enforce the requirements of the Directive 1999/22/EC (relating to the keeping of wild animals in zoos). Ultimately, ENDCAP believes that wild animals belong in the wild.



There is great potential for compromised animal welfare

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EUROPE'S FORGOTTEN ANIMALS