

# All zoos are not Equal

Sally Walker

*Need for Guidelines for Captive / Conservation / or any sort of non-commercial wild animal Breeding*

This is Part III in a series which is to indulge my guilt and other discomforts with the current state of so called "conservation breeding" in some zoos in some countries where I have been working for years. Kindly allow me this indulgence and hope that some good may come of it. Several years ago I wrote an email to Onnie Byers at CBSG about the working group I wanted on "Conservation Breeding Guidelines" in which I said (among other things) *"In the past year in which I have been pursuing this idea of guidelines for conservation (guidelines for conservation breeding), the suggestion has met with confusion, contention and condescension from almost every single individual from the "organized" zoo community and with relief and regard by every individual from the "other" zoo world. As far as I know this is still true, with the exception of India which has leaped ahead, at least in some respects, in trying to learn what has gone wrong in the past breeding efforts. Indians, particularly foresters, would not feel relieved at all because they want to believe that they know everything about this ...it is the nature of IFS...but this belief or desire to believe and the desire that others believe, held them back at least a quarter century. I know because I have been here transmitting information about collection planning, species action plans, record systems and identification, etc., etc., and getting snubbed for over 30 years! I don't mind this ... as long as their current trend continues... and there is evidence that it might...IF the current CZA MS remains for some little more time AND if his successor does not, as is the case with most successors, want to reinvent the mechanism now in place.*

But it is not just India that needed an upgrade in their conservation implementation strategy ... it is many many countries most of which have not come so far now as India. I would like to just go over some of the problems which hinder "conservation-oriented" breeding and, for that matter, conservation generally.

## **Not all zoos are equal**

The draft World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy states unequivocally in Chapter Seven: *"Not all zoos are equal. Not all animal collections calling themselves zoos meet the standards necessary for effective conservation work in today's world; . . . yet some of them may have good intentions and may even be close to being creditable."*

## **Problems which prevent zoos from achieving success in caring for wild animals**

- Many zoos in countries which were under colonial administration still operate with the same

administrative framework ... the colonials have moved on but we are stuck with their old systems which are not conducive to progress in all areas ... and surely not highly sensitive and labour and expertise intensive fields, such as zoo management.

- frequent transfer of officials, politically-based appointments, vertical hierarchy, etc. so that individual higher officials do not acquire a "big picture" or overview of the zoo conservation potential or requirement, or even day to day needs to achieve success.

- Frequent transfers frequently result in management decisions which are inconsistent with both the science and the philosophy of modern zoo conservation.

- transfer system may also include veterinarians and even curatorial level staff as well as directors so that, in essence, the institution's progress goes back to square one every few years or, in some cases, every few months.

- Lack of education and certain day to day life habits life skills in the only staff that is NOT routinely transferred. That is the zookeeper who, in many developing countries, are non-matriculate or simply not interested in the details which lead to success. If this level of zoo staff were educated (from childhood) and also accorded some respect by seniors, they could safeguard the philosophy and technology of zoo management in between seniors' transfers providing continuity to carry on with scientific breeding programmes. In western countries, the senior staff gets immense help from zookeepers who are often more technically advanced than some of the senior staff. If Sr. Staff understand that it is no disgrace to learn from a zookeeper who has years invested in the zoos and has acquired and kept up technical knowledge, and don't mind relying on them then if there is a change of Senior, it doesn't have to be so destructive.

Ironically, in countries where Senior staff does not get transferred but elects to leave a particular institution themselves, to improve their professional status, or salary or interest, go from zoo to zoo, not zoo to coffee plantation, timber, etc. They continue to learn and build up expertise in the field of zoo management. So these countries get everything...highly experienced interested and trained senior staff AND highly experienced, interested and trained zookeepers.

- Additionally, many of the "unequal" zoos are in countries for which English (or any western language) is not the first language, and this deprives even those zoo personnel who are educated and motivated from access to most of the published scientific and technical material in the world today. And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

### What happened to the IUCN Technical Guidelines on the Management of *Ex Situ* populations for conservation published in 2002?

Last issue we reprinted these and also an article interpreting them. These are good guidelines but only for the zoos which are in a position to do them. Most of the world's zoos are not. Undoubtedly many of those zoos are not well-intentioned, do not have conservation interest, do not care for their animals as sentient beings ... they exist for the sake of making money for their own, being it private or public, ngo or Government. In future, perhaps all such zoos can be done away with but NOW is my interest and NOW there are zoos with staff of good intentions who are struggling with this issue, whether they know it (or even want to know it) or not.

My interest, for now, is trying to improve the quality of zoos of good intention in all respects. One of the first things we need is a means of evaluation of the zoo which would tell the zoo owners and managers unequivocally if their zoo is qualified to conduct conservation breeding programmes. If not, they should not do it. They should join in some other conservation activity, such as education, such as simply going green, such as simple research, etc. until they can improve and acquire the expertise and facilities (including finance) they need to take up breeding programmes.

These zoos, even if they are determined to qualify for conservation breeding at some point, can do much for conservation by education. It is, in the

final analysis, changing the mind and hearts of human beings that might ... keyword *might* ... save the natural world, not conservation breeding.

This month's contribution of past documents is the Report of the Working Group at the 2004 Annual CBSG meeting, which I requested, on this topic. After the group was finished, I was still not at all satisfied. I didn't think much progress in this had been made. Now, CBSG has asked me to convene another group and have another go. Meetings of CBSG now are so packed with issues and topic, I shudder to think of adding one more, but we will try.

Next issue's document is very recent and limited to one taxon group, e.g. amphibians. It is in some ways the most important so far, as it takes into consideration through a decision tree, decisions NOT to even attempt to hold or breed amphibians.

The IUCN Policy Statement is not a substitute for Guidelines for Conservation Breeding of the type referred here. No doubt, the current IUCN Technical Guidelines will be helpful in formulating some parts of the intended Guidelines and even could be "translated" into normal speak which would be more helpful for countries whose English is more simple, either for reading or for translating into the local language.

With thanks for your patience,  
**Sally Walker, Editor Emeritus, ZOOS' PRINT**

---

## Conservation Breeding Guidelines Working Group Report (CBSG meeting held in Taipei, Taiwan in November 2004)

Group members: Chen-Yang Lin, Taipei Zoo; Chien-Jen Yang, Taipei Zoo; Franck Haelewyn, Lille Zoo, France; Alex Hon-Tsenyu, National Taiwan University, Taiwan; Kurtis Jai-Chyi Pei, Wildlife Conservation Trust, Taiwan; Kristin Leus, Antwerp Zoo, Belgium (recorder); Jansen Manansang, Taman Safari Indonesia, Indonesia; Abdul Qadeer Mehal, SAZARC, Pakistan; Mei-Hsiu Hwang, Institute of Wildlife Conservation, Taiwan; Mark Pilgrim, Chester Zoo, UK (reporter); Karin Schwartz, Milwaukee Zoo, USA; Mark Stanley-Price, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, UK; Kathy Traylor-Holzer, CBSG, USA (facilitator); Sally Walker, ZOO/CBSG, South Asia/SAZARC, India

### 1. What are "conservation breeding guidelines"?

- Zoos that are just starting the process of thinking about systematic breeding and conservation programs should have some guidelines regarding how to start and how to decide what level of management to target.

E.g., Some zoos think that in order to contribute to

conservation, they have to take on the highest possible task (i.e., breeding animals for reintroduction). This sometimes works against effective conservation as it may mean they acquire animals without knowing how to maintain and breed them.

- If we only talk about breeding it may lead us down the wrong path. The issue is captive management and deciding at what level to manage populations of particular species – the entire spectrum of rationale for keeping animals in captivity
- The term "conservation breeding guidelines" is a bit confusing; are we talking about only captive programs? If so, we should specify that these are "captive" or "*ex situ*" guidelines.
- Confusion arises from the fact that "Conservation Breeding Specialist Group" is not entirely descriptive of what CBSG does. Here we are looking for guidelines for *ex situ* management, not the entire spectrum of what CBSG does.
- Important elements of these guidelines: *ex situ*,

linked to conservation (or to responsible management of animals that is not in conflict with conservation), population management, decision structure of different levels/purposes of management (like collection planning)

- Possible names: *ex situ* conservation management guidelines (current working title), population management guidelines; however, there is a problem with how “management” is interpreted in some countries
- Indonesian zoos are specifically requesting guidelines for conservation – this is more than just “conservation breeding” guidelines
- Often zoos do not have the resources for full blown breeding programs. A first strategy may be to maintain animals, keep them well, and do a basic level of management and perhaps exchange animals with other zoos in the region.

The guidelines being produced, whatever their name ends up being, need to be guidelines on how facilities (zoos, rescue centers, etc.) can determine how they should manage animals and small populations for conservation – taking into account the specific situation of the facility (available resources, etc.) — and include information on how to achieve specific levels of management. They must include general guidelines for animals in captive settings, as well as specific guidelines on how to determine management types and goals.

## 2. Needs

- Hard and fast guidelines are needed on which species can be kept in what type of holding area (i.e., there is a lack of knowledge about species requirements for husbandry, etc.)
- Will this not be included in ZIMS?
- ZIMS may not be available in these zoos in the short-term; there are also language and other problems.
- There is a need to know how to make a collection plan.
- This is starting to sound like guidelines on how to run a zoo. That scope is big – is it too big?
- In Indonesia, conservation is understood to include three things: protection, preservation and utilization. In a zoo setting this means: release or rescue = protection; breeding = preservation; education and exhibition = utilization. Indonesia is specifically asking for guidelines for bringing conservation into a zoo.
- Is “how to run a zoo” not more a task for WAZA and the zoo associations, and is “how to bring conservation into a zoo” not a more suitable task for CBSG?
- Still, everything is important if you are trying to do conservation.
- It should/could perhaps be done by WAZA but the fact that CBSG is not a zoo association may be beneficial.
- Some zoos are not so much “poor” as they are lacking in good record-keeping. This can be done in the form of cards or Excel files or something more

sophisticated. Keepers can contribute a lot to this process.

Suggestion: Working group members could all search for the best guidelines and other relevant documents (for nutrition, husbandry, breeding, etc.), send them to a coordinator, and then adapt these to local needs if necessary. In that way all regional associations have the potential to contribute. This information is available but often is not in a form that is useful to the needs of many zoos.

**CONCLUSION: The main need is to provide access to the existing information for guiding *ex situ* population management and conservation activities.**

## 3. Components for Guidelines

- Husbandry: general and species-specific (include zoos that have expertise with particular species – e.g., Taipei Zoo with pangolins)
- Enrichment
- Welfare issues
- Record-keeping
- Staff training (keepers, veterinarians, and other staff)
- Collection planning (why and how to develop a collection plan, what are the input parameters and how do you deal with them)
- Importance of networking, collaboration and cooperation, and how to go about this (some of this may be mentioned in documents like SSP/EEP MOUs, etc.)
- Population management (genetics, demography, etc), both within and between institutions/ both national and regional/ including meta-populations (captive and wild)
- Guidelines on when a species should perhaps not be in a zoo. This could be done by translating the IUCN guidelines for the management of *ex situ* populations into less academic verbiage.
- How to contribute to *in situ* conservation: research, funding, reintroduction guidelines, etc.
- Conservation education in zoos
- Guidelines should include information about processes as well as content (e.g., how to create a husbandry manual)
- Confiscated animals (can “translate the IUCN guidelines for the placement of confiscated animals into a less academic form)
- Are we providing a conservation resource manual for zoos?

Eventually this document will need to get wide CBSG review and endorsement. If we call it a “policy”, it will need IUCN Council endorsement. This may be difficult both in terms of process and content/scope. There are also ways to just keep it as a CBSG document. This can be decided later.

The above is starting to show similarities with the WZACS tool kit. We must make sure there is

sufficient communication between the two groups so we do not work independently but in parallel.

#### 4. Strategies for Action

Given the working group discussion, there are three different strategies that we can take, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

1. Gather all existing information and make it widely accessible (on a website).
2. Gather all existing information; distribute to people in different countries in different regions (the kind of people that would be using it) to see how they perceive the information and get feedback regarding how to make the documents/information useful in the region; modify the information to make it accessible (e.g., simplify language, translate, etc.); distribute revised information.
3. Gather all existing information and glean some general strategies (e.g. how do you approach caring for mammals, evaluating nutrition, compiling husbandry manuals) for distribution.

#### Short-term strategy:

- Working group members will locate already existing information on the components identified above and send to Sally (Sally will distribute a list of what she has received already to minimize duplication of effort).
- We will see what it comes in and what form it has; then we will evaluate which of the three strategies, or parts thereof, would be appropriate.

#### Partial list of sources of information:

- IUCN
- Zoo associations
- Legislation
- Husbandry manuals
- World Zoo Conservation Strategy

#### Recommended actions:

1. Send all types of information identified to Sally. Highest priority is collection planning guidance as this is the type of help that was specifically identified by the Indonesian zoos.
2. Post the information on the website (filtered and categorized by Sally).
3. Sally may possibly set up a list serve to facilitate communication and process.
4. Identify a point person in each regional association/entity secretariat to send the official documents from that region. This also ensures the "buying in" of the regions into this process.

The results of this effort possibly could be endorsed by CBSG at a general level, i.e., the "process" involved (e.g., if you are going to have animals in captivity you need to consider collection planning, veterinary care, adequate nutrition, population management, etc.). CBSG endorsement of the "product" (e.g., no animal should move from one collection to another without quarantine, etc.) is less certain.

### Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai

Bombay Natural History Society for its Delhi office requires **Programme Officer** to implement nature conservation programmes, to liaise with government functionaries & mobilize resources.

**Qualifications:** Post graduates preferably in biological sciences with excellent English & Hindi skills essential.

**Salary:** commensurate with experience & qualification.

Apply within 10 days to Director, Bombay Natural History of Society, Hornbill House, Mumbai – 400 001. E-mail: [bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in](mailto:bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in)

