

“Catalysts for Conservation: a Direction for Zoos in the 21st Century” February 19-20, 2004

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A symposium on the role of zoos and aquaria as catalysts for *in situ* wildlife conservation was held in London on February 19-20, 2004. Co-hosted by the Zoological Society of London and the Wildlife Conservation Society with additional support from the North of England Zoological Society, the symposium attracted over 230 participants from five continents. The organisers anticipate that the articles upon which the 22 formal presentations at the meeting were based will be published in an edited volume that will be available in 2005. In the meantime, however, in order to maintain the momentum that was built up at the symposium we are circulating to all presenters, session chairs and participants the following synthesis of challenges and conclusions that was compiled by Alex Rübél over the course of the meeting and presented by him in the final session on February 20th.

As the result of discussions since the symposium, it has been proposed that a steering committee be formed to oversee the response of the international zoo and aquarium community to the challenges identified in the following summary, in collaboration with the World Association of Zoos and Aquaria (WAZA) as the organisation mandated by its worldwide membership to coordinate such issues at the global level. Initially, this process will be led by the organisers of the February symposium to whom participants are encouraged to address any comments arising from the present summary document. A preliminary list of specific follow-up activities is proposed at the end of this document.

GLOBAL CHALLENGE

Reaching agreement among zoos and aquaria worldwide to adopt *in situ* conservation as the primary overall goal of each individual institution.

- Other goals (e.g. serving the community) should feed into achieving the primary goal
- We should make species conservation our highest moral imperative, while embracing other ethical values such as animal and human welfare

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

1. All activities of zoos and aquaria should be conceived and designed to contribute to achieving the overall goal of *in situ* conservation

Issues to be addressed:

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- 1.1. Develop and implement zoo-related linkages to *in situ* conservation (extractive reserves, reinforcing zoos in developing countries, etc.)
- 1.2. Design ambitious and radical professional programmes as zoo-based engines to fight pressing conservation concerns
- 1.3. The composition of animal collections should be designed to contribute to the achievement of our overall conservation goal

- 1.4. Discourage the view of captive-breeding in zoos feeding into speculative reintroductions “somewhere down the line” as an important contribution of zoos to *in situ* conservation
- 1.5. Instead, pursue recovery of an endangered species through integrated *in situ* and *ex situ* activities (incl. translocations)
- 1.6. Use zoo-based research as part of forging a conservation identity for zoos
- 1.7. Visual and cognitive messages given to zoo visitors must reinforce and not contradict each other
- 1.8. Integrate collection and *in situ* activities to achieve credibility
- 1.9. Reshape education to inspire
- 1.10. Develop and apply stricter accreditation criteria
- 1.11. Adhere always to national and international conventions and legislation

2. Concentrate activities around a set of strengths and skills that are unique to zoos and aquaria

- 2.1. Use live animals’ potential to provide an emotion-based experience, to inspire, affect, educate and reconnect people to nature
- 2.2. Maximise the fund-raising potential of zoos through inspiring zoo visitors
- 2.3. Train and use your staff effectively: they are the most credible to put the conservation message across
- 2.4. Use staff skills and interest to address local conservation problems
- 2.5. Dedicate space for breeding, research and buying time for endangered animals
- 2.6. Develop and apply small population management skills to minimise extinction
- 2.7. Use unique opportunity to educate visitors and decision-makers in such a way that they change their behaviour
- 2.8. Create an international network of extractive reserves in response to the need for a sustainable and transparent source of animals for zoos
- 2.9. Develop partnerships with zoos in developing countries
- 2.10. Explore fields where zoo-based skills can best be applied (education, professional training, fund-raising, genetics, veterinary and reproductive techniques, invasive species, health issues, unsustainable harvesting, management of confiscated animals and surplus wild

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populations...)

- 2.11. Identify species that can benefit from management at meta-population level (“nearly-dodos”)
- 2.12. Develop mechanisms for zoos to become catalysts/engines for local conservation
- 2.13. Shape in-country legislation relating to species conservation
- 2.14. Communicate actively, honestly, transparently and consistently regarding the conservation message
- 2.15. Prioritize applied research relevant to conservation-related questions over studies with no direct conservation output
- 2.16. Market and re-brand zoos as conservation organisations

3. Identify and put in place the alliances needed to achieve the overall goal

- 3.1. Explore all forms of alliances (with other zoos, universities, NGOs, decision makers, private sector companies, etc.) in order to be more effective and to make the most of limited resources
- 3.2. Use selected individuals (champions) to build vital programs with continuity
- 3.3. Work with dedicated partners
- 3.4. Attract external funds for *in situ* conservation activities
- 3.5. Be aware that charity-led zoos are often more effective in terms of *in situ* conservation than private or municipal ones

4. Design and implement mechanisms to measure and demonstrate the impact of zoos and aquariums on *in situ* wildlife conservation

- 4.1. Research and challenge impacts of conservation research, institutions PR and *ex situ* breeding regarding its effect to minimize extinction
- 4.2. Evaluate methods to measure post-visit experiences
- 4.3. Develop methods to measure and demonstrate the indirect benefits of zoos for *in situ* conservation
- 4.4. Use scientific approaches to evaluate programs
- 4.5. Develop and implement ways to evaluate conservation impact of education, training, research, species and habitat conservation programs
- 4.6. Evaluate conservation impact of formal education programs, especially those focusing on children

Follow-up

It has been suggested that the best way to address the various challenges and associated issues identified during the symposium would be through a series of workshops organised under the aegis of WAZA in order to ensure coordination with the on-going WZACS process. Specific subjects that might be addressed include:

1. Evaluating the conservation impacts
 - a) of individual zoo exhibits and b) of zoo visitor education
2. Conservation psychology: implications for zoos and in the field
3. Inspirational zoo exhibit design
4. Reviewing the mission of zoos
5. Branding/marketing of zoos
6. Captive breeding, viable populations & “reintroducability”

7. Instilling conservation ethics in staff (“backyard approach”)
8. Benchmarks for achieving conservation impact
9. Using accreditation/certification as a lever for increasing *in situ* conservation impact
10. Ethical frameworks
11. Linkages/coalitions, incl. models for linking exhibits to *in situ* conservation

This is a preliminary list with some overlap between issues, each of which would not necessarily justify an entire workshop. One of the first tasks to be undertaken in the coming weeks will be to refine and prioritize the list, identifying sets of topics that can usefully be tackled in single workshops and in such a way that they lead as quickly and directly as possible to practical measures to address the four challenges described above. The proposed workshops may thus be an effective way for us as a community to respond to the challenges identified at the symposium. We will be discussing this with WAZA in the coming weeks. We are optimistic too that the book based on the symposium will help to catalyze further concrete action. At the level of individual institutions, however, there may be issues on the above list that directors and their staff can think about, explore and act on independently, developing further models of best practice that can be used to help the entire international zoo and aquarium community move a step closer to realizing our common goal of contributing as effectively as possible to *in situ* wildlife conservation. In that spirit, we hope that the exchanges of views that occurred at the symposium will continue in response to this document. Any comments from presenters, session chairs or participants in response to this summary will be very welcome.

Finally, we want to signal our thanks to all participants at last month’s symposium for their many contributions to the success of the meeting. If we can maintain the level of interest and commitment that was apparent at the symposium, we can certainly rise to the challenges identified in this summary.

