



World Association of Zoos  
and Aquariums | **WAZA**  
*United for Conservation*

# WAZA CODE OF ETHICS AND ANIMAL WELFARE

(Adopted November 2003, San José, Costa Rica)

## Preamble

The continued existence of zoological parks and aquariums depends upon recognition that our profession is based on respect for the dignity of the animals in our care, the people we serve and other members of the international zoo profession. Acceptance of the WAZA World Zoo Conservation Strategy is implicit in involvement in the WAZA.

Whilst recognising that each region may have formulated its own code of ethics, and a code of animal welfare, the WAZA will strive to develop an ethical tradition which is strong and which will form the basis of a standard of conduct for our profession. Members will deal with each other to the highest standard of ethical conduct.

Basic principles for the guidance of all members of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums:

- (i) Assisting in achieving the conservation and survival of species must be the aim of all members of the profession. Any actions taken in relation to an individual animal, e.g. euthanasia or contraception, must be undertaken with this higher ideal of species survival in mind, but the welfare of the individual animal should not be compromised.
- (ii) Promote the interests of wildlife conservation, biodiversity and animal welfare to colleagues and to society at large.
- (iii) Co-operate with the wider conservation community including wildlife agencies, conservation organisations and research institutions to assist in maintaining global biodiversity.
- (iv) Co-operate with governments and other appropriate bodies to improve standards of animal welfare and ensure the welfare of all animals in our care.
- (v) Encourage research and dissemination of achievements and results in appropriate publications and forums.
- (vi) Deal fairly with members in the dissemination of professional information and advice.

- (vii) Promote public education programmes and cultural recreational activities of zoos and aquariums.
- (viii) Work progressively towards achieving all professional guidelines established by the WAZA.

At all times members will act in accordance with all local, national and international law and will strive for the highest standards of operation in all areas including the following:

### **1. Animal Welfare**

Whilst recognising the variation in culture and customs within which the WAZA operates, it is incumbent upon all members to exercise the highest standards of animal welfare and to encourage these standards in others. Training staff to the highest level possible represents one method of ensuring this aim.

Members of WAZA will ensure that all animals in their care are treated with the utmost care and their welfare should be paramount all times. At all times, any legislated codes for animal welfare should be regarded as minimum standards. Appropriate animal husbandry practices must be in place and sound veterinary care available. When an animal has no reasonable quality of life, it should be euthanased quickly and without suffering.

### **2. Use of Zoo and Aquarium Based Animals**

Where "wild" animals are used in presentations, these presentations must:-

- (a) deliver a sound conservation message, or be of other educational value,
- (b) focus on natural behaviour,
- (c) not demean or trivialise the animal in any way.

If there is any indication that the welfare of the animal is being compromised, the presentation should be brought to a conclusion.

When not being used for presentations, the "off-limit" areas must allow the animal sufficient space to express natural behaviour and should contain adequate items for behavioural enrichment.

While the code focuses on zoos and aquarium based "wild" animals, the welfare of domestic animals, e.g., sheep, goats, horses, etc., in, e.g, petting zoos should not be compromised.

### **3. Exhibit Standards**

All exhibits must be of such size and volume as to allow the animal to express its natural behaviours. Enclosures must contain sufficient material to allow behavioural enrichment and allow the animal to express natural behaviours. The animals should have areas to which they may retreat and separate facilities should be available to allow separation of animals where necessary, e.g., cubbing dens. At all times

animals should be protected from conditions detrimental to their well-being and the appropriate husbandry standards adhered to.

#### **4. Acquisition of Animals**

All members will endeavour to ensure that the source of animals is confined to those born in human care and this will be best achieved by direct zoo to zoo conduct. The advice of the appropriate Species Co-ordinator should be sought before acquiring animals. This will not preclude the receipt of animals resulting from confiscation or rescues. It is recognised that, from time to time, there is a legitimate need for conservation breeding programmes, education programmes or basic biological studies, to obtain animals from the wild. Members must be confident that such acquisitions will not have a deleterious effect upon the wild population.

#### **5. Transfer of Animals**

Members will ensure institutions receiving animals have appropriate facilities to hold the animals and skilled staff who are capable of maintaining the same high standard of husbandry and welfare as required of WAZA members. All animals being transferred will be accompanied by appropriate records with details of health, diet, reproductive and genetic status and behavioural characteristics having been disclosed at the commencement of negotiations. These records will allow the receiving institution to make appropriate decisions regarding the future management of the animal. All animal transfers should conform to the international standards and laws applying to the particular species. Where appropriate, animals should be accompanied by qualified staff.

#### **6. Contraception**

Contraception may be used wherever there is a need for reasons of population management. The possible side effects of both surgical and chemical contraception, as well as the negative impact on behaviour, should be considered before the final decision to implement contraception is made.

#### **7. Euthanasia**

When all options have been investigated and the decision is taken that it is necessary to euthanise an animal, care will be taken to ensure it is carried out in a manner that ensures a quick death without suffering. Euthanasia may be controlled by local customs and laws but should always be used in preference to keeping an animal alive under conditions which do not allow it to experience an appropriate quality of life. Whenever possible a post-mortem examination should be performed and biological material preserved for research and gene conservation.

#### **8. Mutilation**

Mutilation of any animal for cosmetic purpose, or to change the physical appearance of the animal, is not acceptable. Pinioning of birds for educational or management purposes should only be undertaken when no other form of restraint is feasible and marking animals for identification should always be carried out under professional supervision, in a way that minimises suffering.

## **9. Research Using Zoo Based Animals**

All zoos should be actively involved in appropriate research and other scientific activities regarding their animals and distribute the results to colleagues. Appropriate areas of research include exhibit design, observations, welfare, behaviour, management practices, nutrition, animal husbandry, veterinary procedures and technology, assisted breeding techniques, biological conservation and cryopreservation of eggs and sperm. Each zoo undertaking such research should have a properly constituted research committee and should have all procedures approved by a properly constituted ethics committee.

Invasive procedures designed to assist in medical research are not to be performed on zoo animals however the opportunistic collection of tissues during routine procedures and collection of material from cadavers will, in most cases, be appropriate.

The well-being of the individual animal and the preservation of the species and biological diversity should be paramount and uppermost in mind when deciding upon the appropriateness of research to be undertaken.

## **10. Release-to-the-Wild Programmes**

All release-to-the wild programmes must be conducted in accordance with the IUCN/SSC/Reintroduction Specialist Group guidelines for reintroduction.

No release-to-the-wild programme shall be undertaken without the animals having undergone a thorough veterinary examination to assess their fitness for such release and that their welfare post-release is reasonably safeguarded. Following release, a thorough monitoring programme should be established and maintained.

## **11. Deaths of Animals Whilst in Care**

Unless there are sound reasons not to do so, each animal which dies in captivity, or during a release to the wild program, should undergo post-mortem examination and have a cause of death ascertained.

## **12. External Wild Animal Welfare Issues**

While this code of practice is designed for animals held within Zoos, Aquariums, Wildlife Parks, Sanctuaries, etc., WAZA abhors and condemns ill-treatment and cruelty to any animals and should have an opinion on welfare issues for wild animals external to its membership.

**WAZA requires that:**

- The taking of animals and other natural resources from the wild must be sustainable and in compliance with national and international law and conform with the appropriate IUCN policy.
- Any international trade in wild animals and animal products must be in compliance with CITES and the national legislation of the countries involved.

**WAZA opposes:**

- Illegal and unsustainable taking of animals and other natural resources from the wild, e.g. for bush meat, corals, fur or skin, traditional medicine, timber production.
- Illegal trade in wild animals and wild animal products.
- Cruel and non-selective methods of taking animals from the wild.
- Collecting for, or stocking of animal exhibits, in particular aquariums, with the expectation of high mortality.
- The use, or supply of animals for “canned hunting”, i.e. shooting animals in confined spaces, or when semi tranquilised or restrained.
- Keeping and transporting of animals under inadequate conditions, e.g., the keeping of bears in confinement for extraction of bile, dancing bears, roadside zoos or circuses / entertainment.

WAZA and its members should make all efforts in their power to encourage substandard zoos and aquariums to improve and reach appropriate standards. If it is clear that the funding or the will to improve is not there, WAZA would support the closure of such zoos and aquariums.

This document was prepared on the basis of the 1999 Code of Ethics and the 2002 Code of Animal Welfare. It was adopted at the Closed Administrative Session of the 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2003 at San José, Costa Rica