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STANDARDS AND
ACCREDITATION

African savannah elephants
Loxodonta africana

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STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

EAZA zoos and aquariums are recognized as the best in Europe and Western Asia, across every aspect of their operation from animal care and conservation to the state of visitor facilities and safety. This high level of achievement is made possible through our use of a set of common Standards developed by our Committees and maintained by regular peer reviews, a system that drives continual improvement at our Member institutions and inspires them to be progressive as well as highly professional.

EAZA recognizes that zoos and aquariums come in all shapes and sizes, however, it is not these elements that define a good zoo or aquarium. Good institutions share the passion to work in the service of nature both at home and in the field and are committed to the conservation of species from small invertebrates to massive mammals. They care for species that need their help, and for which they have demonstrated expertise and appropriate enclosures. They share their passion with the world and act as their community's connection to nature – both locally and in the most remote parts of the planet. They make every effort to bring visitors and animals together while respecting the privacy and safety of both, and they maintain good relations with their local and national governments in order to help ensure that the voice of nature is included in discussions about the future. This image of a good zoo or aquarium is set out in a set of Standards documents that cover requirements for EAZA Members in the areas of the accommodation and care of animals, conservation, conservation education, and scientific research.

The Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria sets out, as the name suggests, the way that individual animals and groups must be housed and maintained. The Standards look not only at the way animals live in their enclosures, but also what those enclosures must provide to make these lives as fulfilling as possible. They set out the procedures that need to be followed to ensure the health and safety of animals, their carers and the people visiting them. And finally, they introduce the framework for population management, one of the key elements in the *ex situ* conservation mission of all EAZA zoos and aquariums.

Several hundred of the species kept in EAZA institutions are part of an EEP – an EAZA Ex Situ Programme for population management. Each EEP sets out the role its species plays within the EAZA network and the wider context of species conservation, public education and scientific research. Transfers of animals between zoos and aquariums allow the population to be managed dynamically so that it can fulfill the role assigned to it over the long term. Decisions need to be taken to assure this outcome, and so every Member taking part in an EEP agrees to abide by rules and leadership structures that may not always favour their institution, but which should always strengthen the population. This is all contained in the Population Management Manual – another key element in the Standards structure.

Other Standards include those for conservation, research and conservation education, ensuring that the level of operations in these areas at any of our Members is always high and always improving. The Conservation Standards ensure that Members play an active role in the conservation of species, using their skills and funds to the most effect, and working closely with the wider conservation community to carry out conservation that meets a high scientific bar. Research Standards ensure that scientific work carried out at our Member institutions is ethically correct and serves the cause of nature protection either directly or indirectly. And the Conservation Education Standards make sure that citizens receive accurate and informative experiences that help them to engage with conservation and the natural world. EAZA's Standards are in short, the result of decades of concerted fine tuning of the basic principles of modern zoo and aquarium work across all areas.

EAZA publishes all its Standards on its website, in the interests of transparency and to inspire non-Members to examine and emulate our requirements in all these areas. Guidelines and position statements also reinforce our philosophy and working practices, and help shape the working practices of Members and non-Members across a wide variety of zoological and other issues.

But how do we know that all of our Members live up to this set of requirements, and how do we keep up the momentum of development at every zoo and aquarium? The EAZA Accreditation Programme (EAP) is a regular cycle of peer review that every Member must go through. An EAP screening is carried out by a small team of inspectors, two official screeners who are senior employees of other Full Member institutions, and one rapporteur assigned from the staff of the EAZA Executive Office. Of the two official screeners, one is almost always from a Member institution in the same country as that being screened, providing a national perspective and local knowledge of the laws and regulations binding zoos and aquariums in that country. The second screener comes from an institution in another country, with both screeners usually being Directors or Senior Curators.

The mission usually lasts for two days of intensive scrutiny of every aspect of the institution's operations, from its animal welfare policies through to the regular servicing of fire extinguishers. The screening not only checks compliance with the EAZA Standards, but also provides solid professional advice to the zoo from experienced individuals who may have seen similar situations elsewhere.



Screening missions inspect the zoo or aquarium experience of both visitors and animals

Screeners also benefit from the experience, seeing it as an opportunity to ensure that EAZA Members remain at the top of the field, to share their own experiences, and usually to take away ideas for their own institutions. In the rare cases where screeners identify a significant number of major concerns that the zoo or aquarium will need time to fix, but which should be addressed urgently, screeners may recommend in their confidential report (which is seen by the screened institution and the Membership and Ethics Committee only) that the membership status of the institution be changed to Temporary Membership until the issues are fixed. On the whole, however, where a zoo or aquarium has one or two concerns from the screeners, but the team feels that these can be fixed in short order, the institution will be recommended to retain Full Membership on condition that it provides proof that it has addressed the issues satisfactorily within a six-month period. Most screened zoos or aquariums will receive recommendations from the screeners, and so the mission is a useful learning experience that can help the institution to make changes before an issue becomes a problem.

Screenings also take place when a new Member joins EAZA and are conducted on the same terms as for existing EAZA Members - the most demanding inspections most zoos or aquariums undertake in the course of their operations. It is because of our expertise in this area that EAZA is consulted regularly by authorities from the European Union to local municipal governments to provide guidance on how best to inspect and measure a zoo's performance. A framework such as the EAZA Standards can be applied across zoos and aquariums of all sizes, and compliance is measurable on an objective basis. As a result of this, while EAZA Standards go above what the law requires in most cases, EAZA screenings are fast becoming the benchmark for licencing inspections across the European Union Member States and beyond.

CASE STUDY

STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

After the implementation of the EAZA Accreditation Programme, it became clear that additional guidance was needed for screening teams on the subject of animal demonstrations. Across the breadth of cultures that make up the EAZA Membership, there was also a spectrum of opinions and mores about what was appropriate messaging and behaviours exhibited by wild animals in displays and demonstrations.

The EAZA Membership and Ethics Committee began a long process of seeking guidance from experts in the community, surveying Members on their own demonstrations, learning about national and EU legislation on the matter, and horizon scanning on what visitors expect from demonstrations at an EAZA zoo or aquarium.

Evidence on demonstrations indicates that visitors have stronger take home messages from demonstrations than from static display viewing. Demonstrations range from simple animal feeds, keeper talks, ambassador animal interactions, husbandry training sessions and full classical shows such as dolphin and sea lion shows, falconry exhibitions and parrot shows. Across all types of demonstrations, the animal's welfare must be of the highest priority, and any demonstration animal management must meet all EAZA Standards. This includes on and off display housing, social groups, training techniques, and food management,

This led to the Committee and the EAZA Executive Office creating a robust framework for demonstrations based on welfare concerns primarily, but also with a focus on

appropriate messaging. This was then approved by the EAZA Council and the Annual General Meeting, finding consensus across the community.

Further work is being done by the Taxon Advisory Groups to create taxon-specific guidance on acceptable behaviours, messaging and training techniques.

The Members are expected to use this framework as the basis of their demonstrations and animal care but are encouraged to be creative and culturally relevant within the boundaries of the system. Since the establishment of the Animals in Demonstration standards, EAZA has seen a number of zoos and aquariums reassess and redesign their demonstrations to be more educational, focused on human/animal interaction, the intelligence and adaptability of the animals, and their natural behaviour. The EAZA Demonstration Standards have also been the basis of other international organisations to judge their own standards by. By connecting visitors to the animals through the medium of demonstrations, EAZA Members create an opportunity to inspire and engage and achieve the conservation and educational goals that all Members share.



EAZA Accreditation Programme screening in progress