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SUPPORTING THE WIDER COMMUNITY
OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS

Coquerel's sifaka
Propithecus coquereli

© Chester Zoo

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Zoos and aquariums have changed immeasurably in recent decades – or rather, good zoos and aquariums with a solid visitor and revenue base and solid staff training regime have changed, with huge advances in enclosure design, population management and indeed every aspect of zoo and aquarium operations.

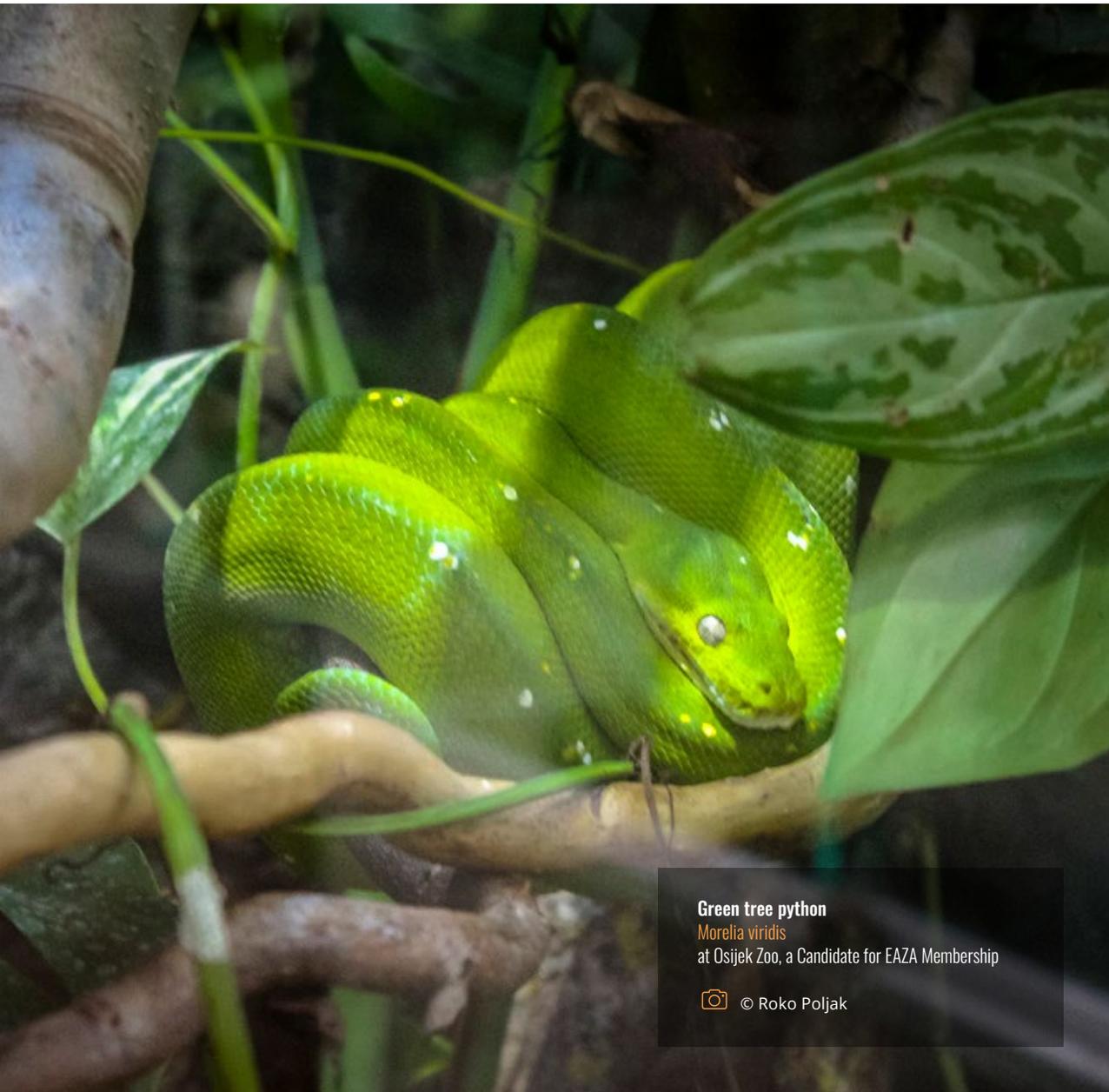
A lot of the knowledge about how to make a zoo or aquarium successful is shared among the EAZA community and beyond, but that doesn't assure success, and there are many pressures, historical, geographical and political that can prevent institutions from working effectively. For many years, this was primarily the case in the developing economies of the Eastern part of Europe, and EAZA felt strongly the moral obligation to provide guidance and assistance to these zoos and aquariums; as a result, the Association established a group, now called the Technical Assistance Committee, in 1995.

The Technical Assistance Committee (TA for short) is made up of a group of senior professionals from EAZA Member institutions, who act as supervisors and mentors of zoos and aquariums that have asked for help to improve. The mentors provide this assistance and advice as part of the EAZA Candidate for Membership programme, a structured system for providing experience and knowledge to zoos and aquariums with the aim of helping them meet EAZA Standards.

Many zoos and aquariums have significant challenges to face if they are to survive and become contributors to conservation, education and scientific research. Most importantly, there are many institutions which cannot provide a high standard of care to their animals. The TA Committee's mentors understand clearly the factors that hold back some of these zoos and aquariums and are able to provide a roadmap that, if conditions are met, can help them to take their place in the EAZA community and become long term contributors in all of the major areas of animal care, conservation, conservation education and research.

Mentors work with the Candidate for Membership (CfM) to review the facilities and funding available, review the political context in which the CfM operates (especially if it is a municipally owned zoo), and suggest changes that are appropriate to the long-term success of the individual institution. This may mean convincing the owners that not all species can currently be held by the institution (especially ones requiring complex housing and/or experienced zookeeping), and that other species could occupy the space more effectively; it could mean securing small amounts of funding to help renovate existing structures or add furniture that make the environment more stimulating for the animals; or it could mean convincing the mayor's office that the institution could operate more effectively as an independent company owned by the city. Almost all CfMs benefit from the injection of knowledge, and afterwards seek to continue to increase their own knowledge base via ongoing training of their staff and interactions with the wider EAZA community.

EAZA has 24 Candidates for Membership under supervision as of 2020. These zoos are extremely diverse in terms of locations and operational circumstances, and their relationship with EAZA and its Members illustrates our belief that zoos and aquariums can be a positive force for nature and our relationship with it that transcends other boundaries. Current CfMs range from Kazakhstan in the East, via Iran and Russia, through Croatia to Belgium, and each is provided with a mentor who has experience of the issues facing it, and strategies to overcome them. In other cases, mentors and Members closer to the CfM can also provide a more constant supervision – such as Qaliqilya Zoo in the West Bank of Palestine and mentored by Jerusalem Zoo, or material assistance provided by Budapest Zoo to Tirgu Mures Zoo in Romania.



Green tree python
Morelia viridis
at Osijek Zoo, a Candidate for EAZA Membership

© Roko Poljak

The TA mentors cannot be everywhere, though. The Committee therefore prioritises institutions that show a commitment to change, and which have the clear potential to become successful Members of EAZA or partners in conservation. CfMs have to show an accurate picture of their current situation in detail, as well as demonstrating a sense of dynamism in their management.

The Candidates for Membership programme is not a replacement for the national authorities who are responsible for licensing zoos and aquariums, and whose remit includes all instances where wild animals are shown to the public. EAZA, made up of and financed by its Members, does not have the resources to ensure that all such places meet welfare standards and local regulations and laws, and no mandate to act if they do not. As a result, the Association does everything it can to encourage struggling zoos and aquariums not in the CfM programme to improve their knowledge and practices, and with them provide better outcomes for the animals in their care and potential partners in conservation, education and research. EAZA publishes “The Modern Zoo: Foundations for Management and Development”, a manual that is freely available, alongside the Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria, the benchmark for any zoological institution serious about its future. We also provide open access to our Journal of Zoo and Aquarium Research, Best Practice Guidelines, some Academy courses, and a whole suite of our conferences including the EAZA Zoo Nutrition Conference, EAZA Education Conference, Animal Welfare Forum and Conservation Forum events.

EAZA also advises government agencies on the inspection of zoos, especially compliance with the EU Zoos Directive, the legislation that governs the operation of any publicly accessible institution with wild animals in the European Union. The Association is committed to providing ongoing support to the EU and Member States to help implement

the Zoos Directive effectively. As our Standards go beyond the requirements of the Directive, and because of our long involvement with Technical Assistance, Accreditation and animal care and welfare, EAZA is a trusted partner of the European Commission and EAZA Standards are a model for zoos and aquariums across the continent and beyond.

So while not every zoo or aquarium can be a Full Member of EAZA in the short term, the Association has designed and implemented a structure that can help them on the road to becoming a Full Member. We believe that all zoos and aquariums in our region should aspire to work with the very best, and that efforts to reach our Standards should be encouraged and rewarded. Good zoos and aquariums can make a significant difference to species conservation and education, and that does not depend on their size – it depends on their commitment to change and our commitment to help them; we stand ready to assist zoos and aquariums that wish to make the most of the facilities, expertise and advice we can offer so that the sector can truly contribute.

CASE STUDY

KALININGRAD ZOO: PATHWAYS TO EAZA MEMBERSHIP

One of the first zoos to become a Candidate for Membership, shortly after this new category was established, was Kaliningrad Zoo. Founded in 1896 as the 'Königsberger Tiergarten', Kaliningrad Zoo is now one of the three oldest zoos in Russia. Their EAZA involvement began in 2004, and their first mentor was the director of Moscow Zoo, Vladimir Spitsin. Later their mentorship was taken over by André Stadler (Alpenzoo Innsbruck, Austria).

Kaliningrad Zoo's progress towards meeting EAZA Standards had its ups and downs, and the zoo has been a Candidate for Membership for quite a bit longer than the standard term of five years. But their work got a boost around 2013, when new strategic plans were developed for the zoo. In the following years, zoo staff committed to their EAZA involvement by attending a number of EAZA Academy workshops on topics such as record keeping, animal welfare and enrichment. According to the zoo's staff, their mentor played an important role in this learning process: he provided "a deeper and more up-to-date approach to animal welfare and enrichment practices", and helped with "detailed information and lots of kind advice".

Two members of EAZA's Technical Assistance Committee visited Kaliningrad Zoo in 2017 and drafted a roadmap for the zoo's final phase as a Candidate for Membership. In 2019 Kaliningrad Zoo became a Temporary Member of EAZA. At the time of writing of this book, there were still a few issues that needed to be resolved before Kaliningrad Zoo could be awarded Full Membership. But while this has not been achieved yet, the zoo is certainly on its way to become a fully accredited and valued member of the EAZA community.

Kaliningrad Zoo also has some advice for other zoos and aquariums that receive technical assistance: "Be as open to your mentor as you can, show them not only the most attractive sides of your zoo, but all the problems as well. Follow your mentor's advice but try to keep the things that make your zoo unique!"



Aquarium exhibit at Kaliningrad zoo

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