

The British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums

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Guidelines for Education Standards in Member Collections of BIAZA

The main aims of modern zoos include conservation and education. The charitable status of many collections rests solely on education as the 'charitable purpose'. If conservation is to succeed, people need to be inspired to care about and understand animals and the threats they face in the wild. Everyone should have the opportunity to experience and learn about wildlife at first hand. One of BIAZA's stated aims is to promote knowledge and understanding of the natural world through the medium of zoos. BIAZA zoos are a valuable educational and cultural resource, together with museums and botanical gardens. The World Zoo Conservation Strategy (IUDZG, 1993) concludes that, given a professional approach, a knowledge of the zoo public and a clear-cut education plan, zoo education programmes can be successful in increasing the public's awareness of the irreplaceable value of nature. Education is therefore an essential conservation task of zoos.

- A. The education role of the zoo is to be clearly stated in its written mission statement.**
- B1.** The zoo should have a written education policy identifying educational components and setting out the methods by which these components are directed towards the different sections of the zoo visitor audience. Quantifiable objectives appropriate to each collection should be stated. The concept of zoo education is broader than a programme for schools and should be targeted at the entire zoo visitation. This should be consistent with the World Zoo Conservation Strategy. Educationalists should work closely with marketing colleagues in collecting, collating and disseminating information on public opinion and public perception of the educational role of zoos.

Explanation:

Educational components might include such topics as: animal behaviour, zoo animal management, variety of life, a variety of animal-based topics, global or local conservation/habitat issues, threats to species, the role of zoos in conservation and a respect for and appreciation of wildlife.

Methods of delivering educational programmes might include a combination of: the exhibits themselves, identification labels, graphic

displays, audio-visual presentations, interactive displays, information technology, zoo guide books, education staff, animal staff, zoo volunteers, permanent or temporary exhibitions, zoo publications, media articles and zoo websites.

Quantifiable objectives might include minimum numbers of visitors to be involved in direct contact with educational activities; volunteer recruitment levels; interpretation coverage of the collection etc.

Visitor audiences may vary from zoo to zoo, but each zoo should have some idea of how the visitor audience is constituted in order to target its education programme. Examples might include: general visitors, locals, tourists, families, mixed age groups, friends, school groups, same age groups, teenagers, elderly, handicapped, literate and illiterate people.

- B2.** The zoo should be able to demonstrate that it is carrying out its education policy by reference to specific projects, figures of attendance and research.

It is a condition of BIAZA membership that information requested through surveys be made available to BIAZA.

- C.** **At least one member of staff within the institution should be responsible for the implementation of the education policy.**

Explanation: Medium-sized zoos would be expected to employ at least one member of staff with overall responsibility for education. Larger zoos should also have additional education staff. Staff would be expected to have some training in education, preferably with a university degree and/or teacher training qualification. In smaller zoos, the education role might be combined with other functions and be carried out by personnel such as the director, curator, senior keeper and researchers. Staff involved should be familiar with education practice and ideally have some formal or informal training in education (via education conferences and regional workshops for example).

- D.** **Animals should be clearly and correctly identified on their enclosures. Threatened species and species in regional, national and international co-ordinated breeding programmes should be highlighted**

Explanation: There should be some uniformity in the nomenclature used for threatened species. It is recommended that the current IUCN Red Data list be followed.

- E. When animal demonstrations form part of the programme, they should contain an education or conservation message.**

Explanation: Displays should allow animals to demonstrate or extend their natural ability and show behaviours that are of intrinsic value to the species. They should not be compromised by being made to perform unnatural acts or to become humanised.

Care should be taken to avoid the impression that the animals make wonderful, exotic pets. It should be possible to focus on endangered species and to give reasons why they are in the zoo. Conservation issues such as loss of habitat and animal products' trade can be included. Successful breeding programmes in the zoo and any reintroduction to the wild should be mentioned. Where visitors are brought into direct contact with animals via displays or 'animal handling' sessions, any BIAZA guidelines relating to such activities should be observed.

- F. It should be emphasised that for education programmes to be successful, zoo animals must be exhibited in the best conditions, in enclosures that enable them to lead near natural lives and to participate in natural behaviours as far as possible.**

Explanation: Animals that appear to suffer from physical and/or psychological restraint are counter-productive to education and will spoil the conservation message.

Interpretation/education should be an integral part of zoo exhibits and should be incorporated at the planning stage of new exhibits.

- G. A reference library appropriate to the size and complexity of the zoo should be maintained and made available to all staff members, and possibly the public where practical.**

Explanation: Books and current journals enable staff to improve their knowledge and to keep abreast of recent trends in zoo biology and conservation. In turn, this enables them to provide accurate information to zoo visitors.

- H. Resource material/education information should be made available to the general public and zoo audience. This might include: leaflets, guide books, teachers' notes, resource packs, and worksheets and should be displayed and available for purchase or for free.**

- I. **The zoo should demonstrate a willingness to share experiences and information with other collections by attending, e.g. regional workshops and conferences. Smaller collections in particular will benefit from informal networking opportunities.**

References:

IUDZG, (1993): The World Zoo Conservation Strategy: The Role of Zoos and Aquaria of the World in Global Conservation. IUDZG - The World Zoo Organization and the Captive Breeding Specialist Group of IUCN/SSC. Chapter 4.

WAZA, (2005): Building a Future for Wildlife: The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy.

IUDZG, (1995): Zoo Future 2005.