EAZA Conservation Education Standards

Approved by EAZA Annual General Meeting
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Introduction

Formed in 1992, the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) is the largest professional zoo and aquarium association in the world, with over 400 Members throughout Europe, Western Asia, and beyond, including Members in 25 of the 27 EU Member States. The EAZA community is diverse, dynamic and committed to bringing the wonder of nature to the visiting public, a public that spans young and old, all social and ethnic groups, religions, education levels and incomes. EAZA zoos and aquariums are socially inclusive and a valuable resource for conservation education and meeting many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Over the course of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) they will host an approximate 1.5 billion visits. A large part of EAZA's mission is to define and demonstrate excellence in integrated species conservation through a transparent and collaborative approach to population management, wild animal care and welfare, representation with international organisations, conservation education, and scientific research.

Purpose

This document has been developed by the EAZA Conservation Education Committee to help guide, inform and provide a coordinated approach to the practice of conservation education in zoos and aquariums. This document is an update from the EAZA Conservation Education Standards 2016 document, and brings the EAZA Standards into closer alignment with Social Change for Conservation: The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy (WZACES, Thomas 2020), with some updates being taken directly from the WZACES. It is intended for use by anyone who supports conservation education in a zoo or aquarium setting and is a living document that will evolve to meet the changing needs of conservation education. This document will be reviewed by the EAZA Conservation Education Committee every five years in line with the EAZA strategic plan.

The importance of conservation education in zoos and aquariums

If conservation is to succeed, people need to be inspired to care about and understand animals and the threats they face in the wild. To do that EAZA believes, everyone should have the opportunity to experience and learn about wildlife first-hand. EAZA Members have an important role to play protecting nature and wildlife both at our zoos and in the wild, and communicating this role through conservation education is essential in EAZA

zoos and aquariums. Conservation education is not just confined to people who visit EAZA zoos and aquariums. It can take place out in the local community, in partnership with other organisations, within in situ projects and collaboratively on a global scale. Conservation education is an explicit part of EAZA's mission and also an important part of one of EAZA's strategic focal areas: *Maximising the conservation impact and engagement of EAZA and our Members*. EAZA Member institutions support the WZACS: World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategies (WAZA, 2005 and 2015) as well as the WZACES. A key focus of the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (WZACS, 2005) is education and training. It recommends that regional associations "should provide a coordinated approach to education, both formal and informal, and provide leadership in the formulation of principles, strategies, and minimum education standards." WZACS 2015 also promotes that conservation education is an essential conservation task of zoos. However, with the passing of a decade, the conservation challenges have intensified. In response to this, WZACS 2015 highlights the additional importance of "effective engagement in order to influence behaviour change for conservation". This importance was recognized in 2020 with the publication of the WZACES focusing solely on conservation education. That strategy used the 2016 EAZA Conservation Education Standards as a foundation, and these new EAZA Conservation Education Standards aim to align EAZA more closely with the recommendations put forth in that strategy. These updates were made to acknowledge the developments and changes in conservation education and philosophy in the 6 years since the EAZA Conservation Education Standards were last updated, and also to provide more clarity and unity for EAZA Members operating in the global education community.

Terminology

Within this standards document, the term '**education**' is used to mean education and learning in the broadest sense, not confined to schools or education focused on children, but to encompass learning opportunities, experiences and activities for all ages and needs.

The term '**conservation education'** has been used to reflect that biodiversity conservation must be at the core of a programme of educational activities within an EAZA zoo or aquarium. However, EAZA acknowledges that conservation education in its broader sense can include those programmes of activities that make an indirect contribution to biodiversity conservation – such as education for sustainable development, biological, science or environmental education, ocean literacy, practical skills-based programmes, campaigns, and interpretation.

EAZA's membership is made up of lots of different physical sites of living collections. These include zoos, aquariums, safari parks, bird parks and wildlife centres. Within this standards document, the term '**zoo**' is used henceforth to mean any EAZA Member institution.

The word '**audience**' largely replaces the word 'visitors' to reflect that EAZA Members can reach a wide range of individuals and groups with their conservation education efforts. Zoo and aquarium audiences include, but are not limited to: day visitors such as families and school children, participants of outreach programmes, community projects, in situ field programmes and summer camps, annual pass holders, and those that interact with the zoo's digital platforms.

Animals have traditionally been the primary focus for zoos and aquariums, as species in their care and through their conservation programmes. However, now many organisations incorporate plants into their conservation programme portfolios and into collection plans for their sites, and they acknowledge the crucial role that plants play in their conservation education efforts. To reflect the importance and inclusion of plants, where the word '**species**' is used, it explicitly represents both animals and plants. Further definitions of some terms used are available at the end of this document.

Conservation Education Mission

EAZA's mission statement on conservation education is as follows:

> *To mitigate the extinction of biodiversity through quality conservation education that raises awareness, connects people to nature and encourages sustainable behaviours in the millions of people that engage with EAZA zoos and aquariums annually.*

Conservation Education Standards

There is no single way to fulfil either EAZA's or an individual zoo's conservation education mission. Conservation education includes a broad range of purposes, methods of delivery, unique resources and messages. EAZA also acknowledges the diversity of zoos within its membership, and recognizes that the scale of conservation education in each EAZA zoo should be proportional to the size of its operations and in line with individual country's cultural expectations around conservation education in zoos. A summary of the Standards is listed below, followed by each of the Standards with further explanation to help guide Members.

Conservation Education Culture

1. The conservation education role of the zoo must be reflected in its written mission statement.
2. The zoo must have a written conservation education plan. This plan must outline the zoo's conservation education activities, how they apply to different types of audiences and the strategic thinking behind the plan's design.
3. The zoo's conservation education plan must make specific reference to how the zoo has integrated their mission and vision, as well as applicable national, regional and international policies into its conservation education programmes

4. The zoo must have appropriate facilities to deliver its conservation educational programmes.
5. Conservation education must be an integral part of exhibit design.

Purposes of conservation education

6. Conservation education in zoos should aim to:
    - Build knowledge and understanding about species, the natural world, and zoo and aquarium contributions to conservation.
    - Foster positive connections, emotions, attitudes, values, and empathy toward species, the natural world, and zoos and aquariums.
    - Promote awe, wonder, enjoyment, creativity, and inspiration about species and the natural world.
    - Motivate pro-environmental behaviours, actions, and advocacy toward species and the natural world.
    - Develop scientific, technical, and personal skills connected to zoos, aquariums, and biodiversity conservation.

Promoting conservation education for all

7. The zoo should expand their reach and must provide opportunities to learn about and get involved with conservation onsite, offsite, and online.
8. The zoo should be able to demonstrate a range of delivery approaches in their conservation education programmes to cater for different and diverse zoo audiences and needs.

Applying appropriate approaches and methods

9. In the conservation education plan, there must be a specific reference to applying a cross-curricular approach with measurable learning outcomes to all aspects of a zoo's conservation education programmes.
10. The zoo's conservation education messages must be based on scientific facts. Where cultural, religious or alternative ideas are represented they must be clearly indicated as such.
11. The zoo must present accurate and relevant information about the species, ecosystems and issues exhibited, in line with any guidance provided by EAZA.

Integrating Animal Care and Welfare into Conservation Education

12. Any use of animals for conservation education purposes at the zoo must comply with the EAZA Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria and should comply with any other relevant EAZA guidelines on animal-visitor interactions.
13. The zoo must connect audiences to the principles of animal care and show how their organisation achieves high welfare standards for the species in their care.

Prioritising Conservation and Sustainability

14. Conservation education in zoos should aspire to make conservation issues relevant to audiences' own lives and experiences and inspire people to participate in direct and indirect conservation actions for species, ecosystems and communities.
15. The zoo must educate their audiences about their own conservation and sustainability work by demonstrating how their zoo makes direct and indirect contributions to conservation.

Training and Professional Development

16. The zoo must have at least one member of staff with the necessary experience and qualifications that are responsible for leading and implementing the zoo's conservation education plan.
17. Zoos should support staff and volunteers involved in conservation education in zoos to be actively involved in local, national, regional and international conservation education networks and meetings.
18. Zoos must support staff involved in conservation education in zoos with the appropriate continuous professional development and training to be able to meet the aims of the zoo's conservation education plan.

Evidence-based practice

19. The zoo must collect and share a range of evidence to demonstrate how it is carrying out its conservation education plan.
20. The zoo must evaluate its conservation education programmes at multiple stages using appropriate methods.
21. The zoo should aspire to conduct a range of evidence-based research to demonstrate the effects that conservation education in zoos has on people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours towards the natural world.
22. The zoo should aspire to engage in partnerships with external organisations and academic institutions to conduct social research and evaluation projects.

Conservation Education Culture

1. The conservation education role of the zoo must be reflected in its written mission statement.

Explanation – EAZA understands that the words and phrases used to reflect the conservation education role in the mission statement will vary between zoos. However, zoos should be able to provide an explanation of how the conservation education role is contained within and implemented through the zoo's mission.

2. The zoo must have a written conservation education plan. This plan must outline the zoo's conservation education activities, how they apply to different types of audiences and the strategic thinking behind the plan's design.

Explanation: EAZA understands that the conservation education plan will have different formats (e.g. within a strategy, policy, plan document) depending on the individual zoo. We have used the word 'plan' meaning any strategic document that contains plans for the zoo's conservation education activities. However formatted; the plan must clearly demonstrate the zoo's key strategic areas for conservation education, an outline and justification of planned activities and programmes, and an evaluation framework for these programmes.

3. The zoo's conservation education plan must make specific reference to how the zoo has integrated their mission and vision, as well as applicable national, regional and international policies into its conservation education programmes

Explanation: Depending on the context of the zoo, there is varying internal and external factors (e.g. national curricula, local authority policies and government legislation) that need to be reflected in the zoo's conservation education plan. These are important factors that will shape how the plan is put together and carried out.

4. The zoo must have appropriate facilities to deliver its conservation educational programmes.

Explanation: Facilities in zoos that can be used for conservation education can take many different forms. Examples include outdoor learning spaces, classrooms, labs, teaching spaces, digital platforms and technological support. These facilities will vary depending on the individual zoo. These need to be in good working order, comply with relevant health and safety legislation and be fit for purpose for the conservation education programmes they host.

5. Conservation education must be an integral part of exhibit design.

Explanation: It is good practice for zoo educators to be involved in collection planning, exhibit design and interpretation planning process. This allows the conservation education staff to provide their educational expertise in the creation of various aspects of the visitor experience within the zoo and its exhibits, and facilitates the zoo's conservation education mission being included in all aspects of zoo operation.

Purposes of conservation education

6. Conservation education in zoos should aim to:
    - Build knowledge and understanding about species, the natural world, and zoo and aquarium contributions to conservation.
    - Foster positive connections, emotions, attitudes, values, and empathy toward species, the natural world, and zoos and aquariums.
    - Promote awe, wonder, enjoyment, creativity, and inspiration about species and the natural world.
    - Motivate pro-environmental behaviours, actions, and advocacy toward species and the natural world.

- Develop scientific, technical, and personal skills connected to zoos, aquariums, and biodiversity conservation.

Explanation: By having a clear purpose for conservation education, zoos can contribute to achieving global biodiversity goals such as those identified in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. These targets include increasing understanding, awareness and appreciation of the values of biodiversity*. EAZA believes that zoos can play a key role in helping the EU and national governments reach this goal, and that this framework represents both an opportunity and an important responsibility for each and every EAZA Member. EAZA also expects that conservation education in zoos will include a range of interlinked purposes which can largely be identified as cognitive, affective, inspiration, behavioural, and skills.*

Promoting conservation education for all

7. The zoo should expand their reach and must provide opportunities to learn about and get involved with conservation onsite, offsite, and online.

Explanation: By maximising the opportunities to learn, zoos can inspire and engage a wide range of audiences through conservation education. These opportunities could take place at their zoo sites, through outreach and community engagement or through their website, social media and other digital platforms. Zoos should also consider underserved and currently unreached audiences and aim to remove barriers to their participation.

8. The zoo should be able to demonstrate a range of delivery approaches in their conservation education programmes to cater for different and diverse zoo audiences and needs.

Explanation: Methods for the delivery of conservation education can come in many different forms. For example: species identification labels, interpretation panels, animal exhibits, formal sessions for school groups, permanent or temporary exhibitions, audio/visual presentations, interactive displays, information technology, zoo guidebooks and publications and zoo staff (e.g. educators, animal staff, volunteers).

Audiences: EAZA zoos have a wide range of different groups of people that make up our audience. Groups from a wide range of social, cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds visit zoos. Each zoo should therefore have a thorough understanding of the range of visitor audiences and the needs of different groups in order to be able to design, deliver and evaluate their conservation education programmes.

Resources: Each EAZA zoo has their own unique set of resources that can be used to maximise the positive effect of their conservation education programmes. For example, the very 'living' nature of a zoo's animal collections is its most engaging attribute. They provide memorable experiences, stimulate awe and wonder at the size, scale and sensory experience of being near live animals. Objects from the natural world such as

such as feathers, bones, and animal skins enrich the content and activities of conservation education in zoos. The people working for your zoo are one of its strongest assets and provide the personal stories that bring your conservation work to life.

Applying appropriate approaches and methods

9. In the conservation education plan, there must be a specific reference to applying a cross-curricular approach with measurable learning outcomes to all aspects of a zoo's conservation education programmes.

Explanation: For EAZA's purposes, a cross-curricular approach is defined as an interdisciplinary and dynamic blend of learning topics, academic disciplines, and skills/ competencies/ learning styles used within education and learning. A measurable learning outcome is defined as a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) statement of what an individual/group is expected to be able to do, know about and value as a result of a conservation education activity, event, or programme, and how well they should be expected to achieve those outcomes. It states both the substance of learning and how its attainment is to be demonstrated e.g. learners will be able to discuss their own experiences with nature.

10. The zoo's conservation education messages must be based on scientific facts. Where cultural, religious or alternative ideas are represented they must be clearly indicated as such.

Explanation: It is essential that the messages communicated by EAZA zoos are factually correct and based on scientific knowledge. This makes sure that our visitors receive clear, consistent and evidence-based messages about animals, their habitats and the natural world. Where appropriate, zoos should also seek to integrate indigenous knowledge and practice into this scientific framework.

11. The zoo must present accurate and relevant information about the species, ecosystems and issues exhibited, in line with any guidance provided by EAZA.

Explanation: On species signage, this should include as a minimum, the species name (both scientific and common), its natural habitat and some of its biological characteristics and details of its conservation status. It is best practice to use the IUCN red list status and your country's national species status databases (e.g. Swedish Species Information Centre) as a universal conservation status. If the species is involved in an EAZA Ex situ Programme (EEP) then the sign should include this information and the appropriate logo.

Where appropriate, zoos are also expected to follow guidance and information provided by EAZA about EEP species where education roles have been identified through the Regional Collection Plan (RCP) and Long Term Management Plan (LTMP) process.

Integrating Animal Care and Welfare into Conservation Education

12. Any use of animals for conservation education purposes at the zoo must comply with the EAZA Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria and should comply with any other EAZA guidelines on animal-visitor interactions.

Explanation: Live animals can be a very important resource for zoo-based conservation education, however it is vital that positive welfare states are promoted for zoo animals regardless of their participation in conservation education activities All animals involved in conservation activities must be kept in accordance with the EAZA Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria, and activities must be carried out in accordance with these standards and any species-specific guidance produced by EAZA.

13. The zoo must connect audiences to the principles of animal care and show how their organisation achieves high welfare standards for the species in their care.

Explanation: Zoo audiences may lack a full understanding of the work done by EAZA Members, so zoos should aim to connect audiences to the science and research involved in animal health, husbandry, behaviour and training, and foster improved audience understanding and positive attitudes towards the work of zoos. This can be achieved by sharing engaging stories of animal care from within their own institution.

Prioritising Conservation and Sustainability

14. Conservation education in zoos should aspire to make conservation issues relevant to audiences' own lives and experiences and inspire people to participate in direct and indirect conservation actions for species, ecosystems and communities.

Explanation: People can take conservation action in many different ways, from donating money, volunteering time to making changes to their everyday lives (e.g. reduce, reuse, and recycle). Zoos and their conservation education programmes can provide the inspiration and support people need to start taking some of these actions.

15. The zoo must educate their audiences about their own conservation and sustainability work by demonstrating how their zoo makes direct and indirect contributions to conservation.

Explanation: Using the definition for EAZA conservation contribution - an EAZA contribution to conservation may be a donation of time, expertise, monies, materials and/or in-kind support from an EAZA Member institution that is aiming to secure long-term populations of species in natural ecosystems and habitats.

Training and Professional Development

16. The zoo must have at least one member of staff with the necessary experience and qualifications that are responsible for leading and implementing the zoo's conservation education plan.

Explanation: The number of staff undertaking conservation education should be commensurate with the zoo's size and budget. EAZA acknowledges qualifications and experience appropriate to undertake conservation education in zoos will vary between countries and between individual zoos. However, the zoo should be able to provide evidence and justify the range of qualifications and experiences of their conservation education staff.

17. Zoos should support staff and volunteers involved in conservation education in zoos to be actively involved in local, national, regional and international conservation education networks and meetings.

18. Zoos must support staff involved in conservation education in zoos with the appropriate continuous professional development and training to be able to meet the aims of the zoo's conservation education plan.

Explanation: Zoo education is one of the most important professions in EAZA zoos. Conservation education staff should be supported in developing and maintaining the necessary skills to create, deliver and evaluate high quality conservation education programmes. This support should involve continued professional development of effective communication skills and knowledge and understanding of the various disciplines connected to biodiversity conservation. Professional development may involve participating in a course, training sessions or workshops, such as the EAZA Academy. It could involve attending local, national or regional conferences such as the EAZA Education Conference. Zoos should also support self-guided learning by providing time and access to appropriate materials (e.g. books, peer-reviewed journals, internet access).

Evidence-based practice

19. The zoo must collect and share a range of evidence to demonstrate how it is carrying out its conservation education plan.

Explanation: Collating meaningful evidence (e.g. curricula documents, lesson plans, examples and photographs of activities, database of resources) of how a zoo carries out its education plan is importance to show both internal colleagues and external bodies (such as the EAZA accreditation screening committee) how the conservation education team develops, delivers and evaluates its programmes.

20. The zoo must evaluate its conservation education programmes at multiple stages using appropriate methods.

Explanation: There are many ways to use evaluation in zoos to measure the effectiveness of the conservation education outcomes detailed in the zoo's conservation education plan. There are many appropriate quantitative and qualitative methods that can be used depending on what the zoo is trying to evaluate.

21. The zoo should aspire to conduct a range of evidence-based research to demonstrate the effects that conservation education in zoos has on people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours towards the natural world.

Explanation: It is important for zoos to aspire to provide a wide range of evidence of the short, medium and longer term contributions conservation education in zoos can make changes in people's knowledge and understanding, skills, attitudes and values, enjoyment, inspiration and creativity; activity, behaviour and progression towards the natural world.

22. The zoo should aspire to engage in partnerships with external organisations and academic institutions to conduct social research and evaluation projects.

Explanation: Making long term connections with other organisations and academic partners is a great way to support the undertaking of social research and evaluation in zoos. Academic institutions can provide specialist knowledge, skills and research students who could support and undertake some of the evaluation and research projects the zoos require.

Glossary of Terms

In order to provide clarity and confidence about the meaning of certain words and phrases used in the standards, a brief list defining some key education terms is given below. These definitions are taken from the WZACES.

Advocacy

A combination of individual and social actions designed to gain awareness, political commitment, policy support, social acceptance, and systems
support for a particular goal or programme.

Behaviour change

A broad range of coordinated interventions, activities, and approaches that focus on the individual, community, and environmental to motivate and influence specified behaviour patterns

Conservation education

The process of influencing people's attitudes, emotions, knowledge, and behaviours about biodiversity conservation.

Cross-curricular approach

An interdisciplinary and dynamic blend of learning topics, academic disciplines, and skills/ competencies/ learning styles used within education and learning.

Education for sustainable development

An approach to learning that empowers learners to make informed decisions and take responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity.

Education for sustainability

A lifelong learning process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy, and commitment to engage in responsible individual and cooperative actions.

Evaluation

A systematic and objective assessment using qualitative and quantitative data of the design, implementation, and results of an ongoing or completed project, program, or policy.

- Formative evaluation: Happens usually during the development of conservation education activities, in order to make early refinements and improvements, and influence design decisions.
- Impact evaluation: Focuses on evaluating long-term, sustained changes as a result of conservation education activities, both positive and negative, and intended and unintended.
- Monitoring: Continuous and systematic collection and analysis of data against specific indicators to check progress toward conservation education aims and outcomes.
- Outcome evaluation: Focuses on evaluating the changes (both short-and long-term results) in knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and practices (or other described outcome) that result from conservation education activities.
- Process evaluation: Focuses on evaluating the activities of a conservation education programme, its quality, who it is reaching, and how it is implemented. Compares what was supposed to happen with what is actually happening.
- Summative evaluation: Focuses on evaluation conducted at the end of a conservation education programmes (or a phase of that programme) to determine the extent to which anticipated outcomes were produced. It is designed to provide information about the merit or worth of the programme.

Evidence-based

An approach that emphasizes the practical application of the findings of the best available current research.

Measurable learning outcome

A SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) statement of what an individual/group is expected to be able to do, know about and value as a result of a conservation education activity, event, or programme, and how well they should be expected to achieve those outcomes. It states both the substance of learning and how its attainment is to be demonstrated.

Ocean Literacy

The understanding of individual and collective impact on the ocean and its impact on people's lives and wellbeing.

Social research

A logical and systematic method of scientifically exploring, analysing, and conceptualizing social life.