



PRESS RELEASE

Joint response from the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria and the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums to the release of the Born Free Foundation's 'Beyond the Bars' report on wild animal welfare in the United Kingdom

The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) and the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) have been made aware of the release by animal rights group the Born Free Foundation of a report providing recommendations for the welfare of animals in human care at zoos in the United Kingdom. As the regional and national zoo associations with strong commitment to ensuring their members have the highest levels of welfare, we are concerned that the report groundlessly conflates the keeping of animals at zoos with the exotic pet trade and travelling circuses. The Born Free Foundation's 'Beyond the Bars' campaign makes five principal demands of UK legislators in relation to zoos without consultation with the zoo profession and as such we have addressed each of these demands:

1. "Publication and independent review of summary statistics on causes of deaths of animals in zoos. "

While UK Members of EAZA and BIAZA have nothing to hide regarding the cause of death of animals in their care, the Associations have concerns regarding the "independent review" called for in the report. Should UK legislators choose to follow this recommendation, EAZA and BIAZA call for a truly independent review system that does not prioritise the views of animal rights groups who are ideologically opposed to zoos, over legitimate scientific oversight. In practice, this would mean the appointment by the UK Government of a review body made up of qualified zoologists capable of identifying both normal and abnormal mortality rates and causes of animal death from objective evidence. BIAZA and EAZA would work conscientiously to comply with requests for information and testimony from any such objective body.

2. "Establishment of a full-time and centralised independent zoo inspectorate to ensure consistency in licensing and inspection of zoos."

BIAZA's position on this issue has been made clear:

"Defra inspectors and the Secretary of State's Standards for Modern Zoo Practice coupled with strong training for inspectors provide a framework for local authorities to maintain consistency across the United Kingdom in the licencing of zoos and aquariums."

While such a centralised inspectorate does not necessarily run contrary to the need for stringent licencing conditions (with which both Associations are in full agreement, having Association Standards which go beyond the requirements of the EU Zoos Directive and UK law) BIAZA and EAZA understand that the Born Free Foundation aims to position itself as such an inspectorate. We reject absolutely any suggestion that animal rights activists employed by Born Free would in any way constitute an objective or even qualified panel to judge welfare, housing and other standards. Should such an inspectorate be constituted by the UK, it must be staffed by recognized experts in animal welfare and accommodation, and the human care of animals housed at zoos.

3. “When considering planning applications for development of zoos and similar facilities, introduction of a mechanism to assess whether the animals’ welfare is likely to comply with existing animal-keeping legislation and standards before permission to build is granted.”

EAZA and BIAZA welcome any measure designed to ensure the highest level of animal welfare at zoos in the United Kingdom and beyond. Nonetheless, judging likelihood of compliance with animal-keeping legislation and standards based on applications for planning permission appears to place an unrealistic burden on local authorities tasked with giving such permission. EAZA’s framework for Membership includes a category of Temporary Member Under Construction, which provides access to the Association’s Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria (2014). These Standards provide a comprehensive guide to the construction requirements demanded the Association for such a zoo to become a Full Member upon completion of construction. Should UK legislators choose to enact the measure demanded by Born Free, EAZA would be glad to provide these Standards to authorities tasked with reviewing applications for planning permission from new build zoos and aquariums.

4. “Removal of the legal exemption which permits the pinioning (mutilation to prevent flight) of birds in zoos.”

Zoos in the United Kingdom are required by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Zoo Licencing Act 1981 to prevent the escape of non-native species into the wild, and all UK Members of BIAZA and EAZA undertake strict measures to ensure their compliance, including pinioning of birds. Pinioning is the removal of part of a bird’s wing and happens almost without exception while the animal is a few days old; these animals do not display any sign of distress while undergoing the procedure, which is always carried out quickly by a licenced veterinarian (or in Northern Ireland, a trained aviculturalist). While EAZA and BIAZA encourage the use of closed aviaries over pinioning, the Associations recognise that for certain species, pinioning may represent a more favourable long-term welfare outcome, if, as required by our Associations, a decision to use pinioning is made on the strength of scientific evidence. Pinioned birds are almost always waterfowl which require large water enclosures, and research shows that these species in the wild usually spend up to 95% of their time on land or water. EAZA and BIAZA continue to research the issues of behaviour and welfare of pinioned animals, and, as with all elements of animal welfare research, are committed to following recommendations of impartial welfare scientists.

5. “An end to the import of elephants into the UK, and the introduction of a moratorium on the breeding of elephants in UK zoos; and an end to the use of free-contact handling of elephants and the use of an ankus (bullhook).”

In the UK, concerns regarding the welfare of elephants in zoos are already within the remit of the multi-stakeholder Elephant Welfare Group that BIAZA was tasked by the Government to convene and administer. This group, under direction from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity, works to produce evidence-based guidelines to improve the management and welfare of elephants in the UK. Ultimately this will ensure that decisions made by the UK government on the future of elephants within the UK will be based on evidence not opinion.

The import of elephants born in European zoos as part of the European Endangered Species Programmes (EEP) is carried out in compliance with the welfare requirements of UK and European law. Forbidding the import of elephants to the UK may severely compromise the effectiveness of the Elephant EEPs across the entire European continent, depriving all populations of genetic and demographic diversity. BIAZA and EAZA do not allow the import into our Member institutions of wild-caught animals contrary to CITES regulations in range and importer states, and will only allow new wild-caught elephants to be imported with the agreement of national authorities based on an urgent conservation need backed by robust evidence.

A moratorium on the breeding of elephants, coupled with a ban on imports, would lead inevitably to these long lived animals being condemned to live solitary lives as members of their herd succumb to old age or disease, and being deprived of the opportunity to express natural behaviours such as breeding and family dynamics, which would have welfare implications. This is clearly not in the best interest of such animals, and indeed, the Born Free Foundation has campaigned strongly on this issue. Undoubtedly, Born Free would demand the transferral of such animals to a sanctuary, however:

No such sanctuary exists in the United Kingdom, and there are currently no plans to construct one.

Welfare standards at such sanctuaries are uneven at best, as they are not required to meet the same standards as zoos. Transferral of animals to a sanctuary that cannot demonstrably meet the same welfare standards as an EAZA Member would be against the Association’s Code of Ethics (2015).

Free contact management of elephants is a matter of extensive discussion in the zoo community worldwide. While there is no clear consensus on the superiority of one management system over the other, BIAZA’s elephant management guidelines and the Secretary of State’s Standards for Modern Zoo Practice clearly outline best practice in the use of ankus. There is no need for the excessive use of an ankus or other physical discipline of an elephant, and BIAZA and EAZA would sanction severely any Member found to be causing physical or psychological harm to an elephant in its care.

ENDS

Notes to editors:**BIAZA media contact:**

Zoe Williamson - Email communications@biaza.org.uk or Tel: 0207 4496599

Communications and Membership Manager

EAZA media contact:

David Williams-Mitchell – Email david.williams-mitchell@eaza.net or Tel: +31 20 5200750

Communications and Membership Manager

BIAZA

The British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) is a conservation, education and wildlife charity (charity no. 248553). Founded in 1966, it represents 117 member organisations including all the significant zoos and aquariums in Britain and Ireland. BIAZA's vision is 'to be a powerful force in the care and conservation of the natural world' and the Association's mission is to support and lead its members:

- to inspire people to help conserve the natural world
- to participate in effective co-operative conservation programmes
- to deliver the highest quality environmental education, training and research
- to achieve the highest standards of animal care and welfare in zoos, aquariums and in the wild

www.biaza.org.uk

EAZA

Representing 321 zoos and aquariums across 44 countries in Europe and the Middle East, EAZA is the world's largest zoo Membership organisation. Founded in 1992 on the premise that progressive zoos working together could improve the impact of conservation, husbandry, welfare, research, and education work done by zoos, the Association requires the highest standards of its Members in each of these areas, and is active in assisting zoos in developing countries to meet the same high standards. EAZA is responsible for the administration of 400 breeding programmes, including the European Endangered Species Programmes (EEP).

www.eaza.net