

European Local Species Conservation Interest Group Presentation

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Event: EAZA Annual Conference, Albufeira, September 2022

Experience and Background

- First EAZA Meeting (Warsaw, 2007): Overwhelming experience with challenges in joining projects, keeping species, participating in breeding programs, and raising funds.
- Early Challenges: As a non-EU zoo without a national association or action plans, the initial lack of funding and personnel led to developing small, low-budget local projects, gradually expanding with each new connection.
- TAIEX Program: Reflected on the experience of beginning conservation work, sharing these lessons to help others avoid "reinventing the wheel."

Need for Local Species Conservation

- Establish Conservation Projects for Local Species: There is a pressing need to focus on local (European) species, particularly for small zoos that cannot compete with larger institutions on global conservation programs.
- Support for Small Institutions: The creation of an interest group would help smaller zoos that face challenges in field conservation and funding.

Issues with European Species Conservation

- TAGs Focus on Non-European Species: Most Taxon Advisory Groups (TAGs) prioritize non-European species, leaving European species projects underrepresented.
 - Only 10.53% of breeding programs focus on European species (47 programs out of 448).
 - Many conservation projects for European species go unnoticed or underfunded.

Financial Support and Conservation Work

- EAZA Zoos' Financial Support: EAZA zoos provide financial support for European species conservation, with contributions ranging from 12% to 16.7% between 2019 and 2021.
- Conservation Database: Of 3052 projects listed in the EAZA Conservation Database, only 27% focus on European species. The group aims to increase this representation.

Benefits of Local Species Conservation

- Small and New Institutions: Smaller institutions, new to conservation or looking to diversify their conservation efforts, would benefit from a focused group.
- Better Connections and Funding Opportunities: A local focus would strengthen ties between zoos, local communities, and EU-level stakeholders, providing easier access to funding (e.g., LIFE, Interreg, Erasmus projects).

- Conservation of Local Species: European species, already adapted to local climates and conditions, are easier and less costly to conserve, especially in times of crises such as rising energy costs.

Potential Challenges

- Diverse Conservation Cultures: Different countries face varying pressures and attitudes toward conservation, making it essential to tailor approaches for local contexts.
- Limited Resources: Zoos without national associations or access to EU funding often struggle with staffing, expertise, and fundraising.

Priorities for European Species Conservation

- Species of Greatest Need: Focus on EU-endangered species listed under the Habitats and Birds Directives. These species are prioritized by EU Member States and included in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.
- Ex Situ Conservation: Promote the One Plan approach, integrating in situ and ex situ efforts for priority species.

Measuring Success

- Key Metrics: Improved conservation status of species at local, regional, and national levels, increased collaboration between institutions, more financial support for European species, and additional breeding programs (EEP) for European species.

Examples of Ongoing Projects - presentations

- **Hoopoe and Habitat Management (Petr Sramek, Brno Zoo)**
- **Red Squirrel Project (Dijana Beneta, Zagreb Zoo)**
- **Alpine Beetle Project (Cristiane Bohm, Alpen Zoo)**

Poll and Final Thoughts

Attendees were invited to share their challenges in European species conservation by participating in a live poll using their mobile phones.

The key challenges, rated on a scale from 1 to 6, were:

1. Connecting/networking with national ministries and agencies: 5.4
2. Finding external funding to do the work: 4.9
3. Identifying possible partners to work with: 4.5
4. Identifying the species to work with or contribute to: 4.4
5. Connecting/networking with local NGOs: 4.3
6. Determining what knowledge/expertise my institution can contribute: 2.8

7. Knowing what "value" EU species conservation can bring from an educational perspective: 1.9

8. Dealing with EU native species and EU policy while not being an EU member: 1.5

The poll results helped highlight the main areas where zoos and institutions need support, particularly in building networks, finding funding, and identifying appropriate partners and species for conservation efforts.