

Minutes of the European Species Initiative (ESI) Workshop

EAZA Annual Conference 2025

Date: Friday, 12 September 2025

Location: Łódź, Poland

Workshop title: How to Fund Nature Conservation Projects in Zoos: Examples and Funding

Facilitators:

- Andrea Bračko, Zagreb Zoo
- Tomislav Krizmanić, Zagreb Zoo
- Dijana Beneta, Zagreb Zoo

Speakers:

- André Stadler & Laura Ganner, Alpenzoo Innsbruck
- Sonja Mandić, Palić Zoo
- Dalila Frasson, Immersive Parks (pre-recorded)
- Alice Albertini, EAZA

35 participants attended the workshop.

1. Welcome and Introduction

Andrea Bračko opened the workshop with an introduction to the European Species Initiative (ESI), outlining its role in supporting European zoos and aquaria in the conservation of native European species. The initiative focuses on practical tools, peer-to-peer learning, and capacity building, with particular attention to institutions starting conservation work. The objectives of the workshop were to improve understanding of EU funding mechanisms, share practical project experience, and build confidence in evaluating and developing funding proposals.

2. Workshop Purpose and Structure

The workshop aimed to:

- Explore EU funding instruments relevant to zoo-based conservation projects
- Share concrete examples of projects funded through EU mechanisms
- Practice project evaluation through a hands-on group exercise (“Evaluator’s Shoes”)

The session combined short presentations with an interactive group exercise and a final wrap-up discussion.

3. Presentations: Projects and Funding Mechanisms

André Stadler & Laura Ganner (Alpenzoo Innsbruck) presented an integrated ex situ and in situ conservation project for the critically endangered Bavarian pine vole. The presentation highlighted the importance of combining zoo-based breeding, field conservation, research, and collaboration to support species recovery.

Sonja Mandić (Palić Zoo) shared long-term experience with EU-funded projects, particularly Interreg and IPA cross-border cooperation. The presentation focused on practical lessons learned, including partner selection, administrative requirements, co-financing, and the importance of early involvement of local authorities and communities.

Dalila Frasson (Immersive Parks) introduced the EU LIFE-funded project ZOO LIFE Pollinators, positioning zoos as hubs for pollinator conservation, habitat restoration, research, and public engagement. The presentation demonstrated how large-scale, multi-country LIFE projects can combine biodiversity conservation with education, citizen science, and policy alignment.

Alice Albertini (EAZA) addressed the broader policy context, focusing on coalition-building for conservation in a changing EU political and funding landscape. The contribution emphasised the role of partnerships, strategic narratives, and cross-sector collaboration in sustaining conservation impact during challenging times.

4. Workshop Exercise: “Evaluator’s Shoes” – Project Evaluation

Participants worked in small groups to evaluate short project descriptions using a simplified EU funding perspective. For each project, groups selected the most appropriate funding instrument, identified strengths and limitations, and scored the projects against three criteria: Impact, Sustainability, and Feasibility.

Project 1: Green Minds for Kids (Education in the Zoo)

Groups identified Interreg as the most suitable funding instrument due to its support for cross-border cooperation and educational exchange between zoos. The project was rated very highly for impact and feasibility, given its strong educational value and realistic activities. Sustainability received a moderate score, as continuation would depend on future funding and long-term institutional commitment. Some groups noted potential eligibility limitations for private zoos and the strong education focus as possible constraints.

Project 2: Safe Havens for Amphibians (Infrastructure for Animals)

LIFE was identified as the best fit due to the project’s focus on direct species conservation and habitat restoration. Impact and sustainability were rated very highly, reflecting the long-term benefits of habitat restoration and public involvement. Feasibility was assessed as strong in terms of partnerships, but more challenging financially, as LIFE funding may not fully cover all planned activities and would likely require complementary funding sources.

Project 4: Birds Without Borders (Small Cross-Border Project)

Interreg was considered a strong match because of the project's clear cross-border cooperation, joint monitoring, and shared education activities. The project scored well for impact and feasibility, particularly for migratory bird conservation and partner collaboration. Sustainability was rated moderate, with concerns that long-term continuation would depend on securing follow-up funding beyond the project duration.

5. Key Insights from the Group Work

Across all projects, participants highlighted several recurring themes:

- The importance of matching project scope and objectives carefully to the chosen funding instrument
- Sustainability planning beyond the funding period remains a key challenge
- Strong partnerships and clear cross-border or conservation impact significantly improve project credibility
- Education and public engagement are valuable components but may need to be balanced with core conservation actions depending on the fund

6. Participant Poll Feedback

A short participant poll received limited input, suggesting interest in future updates on EU policy and coalition-building topics, and proposing Waldrapp conservation as a potential EU-funded project example.

7. Wrap-up and Next Steps

The workshop concluded with a summary of common challenges and lessons learned from both the presentations and the group exercise. Participants were encouraged to use the workshop materials as practical references when developing their own conservation projects.

Feedback collected during the session will contribute to further development of the European Species Conservation Starter Kit.

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