

# Festivals as a Conservation Tool

to prevent illegal trading of wild fauna

by Sandra Milena Correa Montoya | Head of Education and Conservation | Matecaña Zoo Pereira | Colombia

Creating a community festival to teach citizens about local environmental concerns may take between three to six months time, but the rewards can last a lifetime. The following steps are vital when developing such festivals:



## 1 Location information

Research the municipality where the festival will be held and also study the cultural and economic dynamics of the area. The city or municipality's archives is a good place to begin searching for such general information.

## 2 Identify participants

Key participants include teachers, students, community leaders, shopkeepers, farmers, ranchers, hunters, employees of private and public institutions, tourists, environmental agencies, policing authorities and animal protection groups.



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A successful, fun-filled festival empowers an entire community to learn about local environmental concerns.

### 3 Create strategies

Once participants are identified, their relationship to the existing problem must be examined and understood. This process helps to create the best strategies to involve all the participants into the festival. With nearly eight years of experience, the Matecaña Zoo has designed various educational strategies for diverse groups of participants. See **Table 1** for examples.

### 4 Select theme & begin training

After contact is made with participants, volunteer teams can then be established with each group and a theme chosen. The theme is related to the species or ecosystem that best fits the environmental concerns of the community. Teams will be asked to network and discuss ways they can eradicate illegal wildlife trading within their area.



PARTICIPANTS	STRATEGY	EDUCATIONAL ELEMENTS
Teachers	Training workshop	Manual of games and conservation actions
Preschool students	Identification workshop	Drawings of animals, coloring, Animal Tales and animal costuming
Elementary students	Scenario workshop	Wonderful world of animals slide show, puppet show, memory game and animal identification chips
High school students	Scenario workshop	Slide show of the importance of animals, videos on illegal animal trading and challenge games
Stores	Establish dialogue from store to store	Promotional posters
Cattle ranchers	Informative workshop on benefits of conserving the species and the forest	Folding conservation strategies
Farmers	Rural parent briefings	
Tourists	Training of hotels/resorts, support for road checkpoints	Poster, zip control (Environmental Authority)
Police, Environmental Authorities	Wildlife handling skills, legislation	First aid in wildlife care
Conveyors	Training workshop	"I Don't Trade with Wild Animals" sticker distribution (Environmental Authority)
General community	Poll community to learn about the use and perception of wildlife, distribute materials that the community can view or listen to through advertising and media	3 x 3 meter banners, videos and business involvement, polls
Public and private institutions	Training workshop	Slide shows and videos
Hunters	Meeting Mayor and municipal inspector, legislation	Decree brochure by Environmental Authority, "Why you don't have to hunt?" program

**Table 1:** Key festival participants and possible strategies for selected groups.

### 5 Finalize specifics

Working with government authorities for required permits and permission, festival dates and locations are selected and agreed upon by the participants. When communities are close to rural areas, country walks are made to identify other opportunities for involvement.

### 6 Establish support networks

Festivals should be designed to empower groups to remain responsible for conservation efforts after the start up process is completed. A network of participating community leaders can continue the educational process throughout the year.



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## 7 Festival time!

Leaders encourage the entire community to join in. Children can dress up as part of the theme and parade through the village, ending in a square where they invite the community to join in through cultural dances, poems, songs and other activities connected to the chosen area and theme.



## Results

Matecaña Zoo has helped to create 10 festivals in different Colombian municipalities. Themes have included white-footed tamarins, red howler monkeys and tropical and dry forests. About 50,000 people have been involved and educated during these festivals. The main goal is to reduce wildlife ownership, disable areas of wildlife sales, denounce illegal hunters and establish draft agreements to make municipal festivals an annual event.

## Discussion

Establishing permanent teams in each municipality is key to the continued community involvement of future festivals. It has also helped local people identify the problems related to the extraction and purchase of wild animals and, most importantly, how to become part of the solution. In addition, community meetings allow for the development of future strategies for saving local ecosystems.



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Representation of "don't buy, don't sell, don't have wild animals as pets!"

## Conclusion

Wildlife trading is considered the third largest worldwide illegal business after drugs and arms trading. In Colombia, the environmental authorities create strategies to combat this problem. The Matecaña Zoo supports these strategies through education and development of festivals where the illegal possession and sale of animals usually begins. Festivals are an educational tool that allows communities to learn about their relationships with the environment and to change perceptions about a species or ecosystem. Festival events also empowers people to establish a strategy to promote their own conservation ideas, raises awareness and allows the communities to take pride in an environmental theme that is unique to their area.

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**Author Contact:** Sandra Milena Correa Montoya | sandraeduzoo@yahoo.com



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Festivals are unique learning experiences for all ages.