# Program Animal Policy

The Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) recognizes many benefits for public education and, ultimately, for conservation in program animal presentations. AZA's Conservation Education Committee's *Program Animal Position Statement* summarizes the value of program animal presentations (see pages 42-44).

For the purpose of this policy, a Program Animal is defined as "an animal whose role includes handling and/or training by staff or volunteers for interaction with the public and in support of institutional education and conservation goals". Some animals are designated as Program Animals on a full-time basis, while others are designated as such only occasionally. Program Animal-related Accreditation Standards are applicable to all animals during the times that they are designated as Program Animals.

There are three main categories of Program Animal interactions:

1. On Grounds with the Program Animal Inside the Exhibit/Enclosure:
    i. Public access outside the exhibit/enclosure. Public may interact with animals from outside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., giraffe feeding, touch tanks).
    ii. Public access inside the exhibit/enclosure. Public may interact with animals from inside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., lorikeet feedings, 'swim with' programs, camel/pony rides).
2. On Grounds with the Program Animal Outside the Exhibit/Enclosure:
    i. Minimal handling and training techniques are used to present Program Animals to the public. Public has minimal or no opportunity to directly interact with Program Animals when they are outside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., raptors on the glove, reptiles held "presentation style").
    ii. Moderate handling and training techniques are used to present Program Animals to the public. Public may be in close proximity to, or have direct contact with, Program Animals when they're outside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., media, fund raising, photo, and/or touch opportunities).
    iii. Significant handling and training techniques are used to present Program Animals to the public. Public may have direct contact with Program Animals or simply observe the in-depth presentations when they're outside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., wildlife education shows).
3. Off Grounds:
    i. Handling and training techniques are used to present Program Animals to the public outside of the zoo/aquarium grounds. Public may have minimal contact or be in close proximity to and have direct contact with Program Animals (e.g., animals transported to schools, media, fund raising events).

These categories assist staff and accreditation inspectors in determining when animals are designated as Program Animals and the periods during which the Program Animal-related Accreditation Standards are applicable. In addition, these Program Animal categories establish a framework for understanding increasing degrees of an animal's involvement in Program Animal activities.

*Program animal presentations bring a host of responsibilities, including the safety and welfare of the animals involved, the safety of the animal handler and public, and accountability for the take-home, educational messages received by the audience. Therefore, AZA requires all accredited institutions that make program animal presentations to develop an institutional program animal policy that clearly identifies and justifies those species and individuals approved as program animals and details their long-term management plan and educational program objectives.*

*AZA's accreditation standards require that education and conservation messages must be an integral component of all program animal presentations. In addition, the accreditation standards require that the conditions and treatment of animals in education programs must meet standards set for the remainder of the animal collection, including species-appropriate shelter, exercise, appropriate environmental enrichment, access to veterinary care, nutrition, and other related standards. In addition, providing program animals with options to choose among a variety of conditions within their environment is essential to ensuring effective care, welfare, and management. Some of these requirements can be met outside of the primary exhibit enclosure while the animal is involved in a program or is being transported. For example, free-flight birds may receive appropriate exercise during regular programs, reducing the need for additional exercise. However, the institution must ensure that in such cases, the animals participate in programs on a basis sufficient to meet these needs or provide for their needs in their home enclosures; upon return to the facility the animal should be returned to its species-appropriate housing as described above.*

# Program Animal Position Statement

**THE CONSERVATION EDUCATION COMMITTEE (CEC) OF THE ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS SUPPORTS THE APPROPRIATE USE OF PROGRAM ANIMALS AS AN IMPORTANT AND POWERFUL EDUCATIONAL TOOL THAT PROVIDES A VARIETY OF BENEFITS TO ZOO AND AQUARIUM EDUCATORS SEEKING TO CONVEY COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE (EMOTIONAL) MESSAGES ABOUT CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND ANIMAL WELFARE.**

Utilizing these animals allows educators to strongly engage audiences. As discussed below, the use of program animals has been demonstrated to result in lengthened learning periods, increased knowledge acquisition and retention, enhanced environmental attitudes, and the creation of positive perceptions concerning zoo and aquarium animals.

## Audience Engagement

Zoos and aquariums are ideal venues for developing emotional ties to wildlife and fostering an appreciation for the natural world. However, developing and delivering effective educational messages in the free-choice learning environments of zoos and aquariums is a difficult task.

Zoo and aquarium educators are constantly challenged to develop methods for engaging and teaching visitors who often view a trip to the zoo as a social or recreational experience (Morgan and Hodgkinson, 1999). The use of program animals can provide the compelling experience necessary to attract and maintain personal connections with visitors of all motivations, thus preparing them for learning and reflection on their own relationships with nature.

Program animals are powerful catalysts for learning for a variety of reasons. They are generally active, easily viewed, and usually presented in close proximity to the public. These factors have proven to contribute to increasing the length of time that people spend watching animals in zoo exhibits (Bitgood, Patterson and Benefield, 1986, 1988; Wolf and Tymitz, 1981).

In addition, the provocative nature of a handled animal likely plays an important role in captivating a visitor. In two studies (Povey, 2002; Povey and Rios, 2001), visitors viewed animals three and four times longer while they were being presented in demonstrations outside of their enclosure with an educator than while they were on exhibit. Clearly, the use of program animals in shows or informal presentations can be effective in lengthening the potential time period for learning and overall impact.

Program animals also provide the opportunity to personalize the learning experience, tailoring the teaching session to what interests the visitors. Traditional graphics offer little opportunity for this level of personalization of information delivery and are frequently not read by visitors (Churchman, 1985; Johnston, 1998). For example, Povey (2001) found that only 25% of visitors to an animal exhibit read the accompanying graphic; whereas, 45% of visitors watching the same animal handled in an educational presentation asked at least one question and some asked as many as seven questions. Having an animal accompany the educator allowed the visitors to make specific inquiries about topics in which they were interested.

## Knowledge Acquisition

Improving our visitors' knowledge and understanding regarding wildlife and wildlife conservation is a fundamental goal for many zoo educators using program animals. A growing body of evidence supports the validity of using program animals to enhance delivery of these cognitive messages as well.

- MacMillen (1994) found that the use of live animals in a zoomobile outreach program significantly enhanced cognitive learning in a vertebrate classification unit for sixth grade students.
- Sherwood and his colleagues (1989) compared the use of live horseshoe crabs and sea stars to the use of dried specimens in an aquarium education program and demonstrated that students made the greatest cognitive gains when exposed to programs utilizing the live animals.
- Povey and Rios (2002) noted that in response to an open-ended survey question ("Before I saw this animal, I never realized that . . . "), visitors watching a presentation utilizing a program animal provided 69% cognitive responses (i.e., something they learned) versus 9% made by visitors viewing the same animal in its exhibit (who primarily responded with observations).
- Povey (2002) recorded a marked difference in learning between visitors observing animals on exhibit versus being handled during informal presentations. Visitors to demonstrations utilizing a raven and radiated tortoises were able to answer questions correctly at a rate as much as eleven times higher than visitors to the exhibits.

## Enhanced Environmental Attitudes

Program animals have been clearly demonstrated to increase affective learning and attitudinal change.

- Studies by Yerke and Burns (1991) and Davison and her colleagues (1993) evaluated the effect live animal shows had on visitor attitudes. Both found their shows successfully influenced attitudes about conservation and stewardship.
- Yerke and Burns (1993) also evaluated a live bird outreach program presented to Oregon fifth-graders and recorded a significant increase in students' environmental attitudes after the presentations.
- Sherwood and his colleagues (1989) found that students who handled live invertebrates in an education program demonstrated both short and long-term attitudinal changes as compared to those who only had exposure to dried specimens.
- Povey and Rios (2002) examined the role program animals play in helping visitors develop positive feelings about the care and well-being of zoo animals.
- As observed by Wolf and Tymitz (1981), zoo visitors are deeply concerned with the welfare of zoo animals and desire evidence that they receive personalized care.

## Conclusion

Creating positive impressions of aquarium and zoo animals, and wildlife in general, is crucial to the fundamental mission of zoological institutions. Although additional research will help us delve further into this area, the existing research supports the conclusion that program animals are an important tool for conveying both cognitive and affective messages regarding animals and the need to conserve wildlife and wild places.

## Acknowledgements

# References

Bitgood, S., Patterson, D., & Benefield, A. (1986). Understanding your visitors: ten factors that influence visitor behavior. Annual Proceedings of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, 726-743.

Bitgood, S., Patterson, D., & Benefield, A. (1988). Exhibit design and visitor behavior. Environment and Behavior, 20 (4), 474-491.

Churchman, D. (1985). How and what do recreational visitors learn at zoos? Annual Proceedings of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, 160-167.

Davison, V.M., McMahon, L., Skinner, T.L., Horton, C.M., & Parks, B.J. (1993). Animals as actors: take 2. Annual Proceedings of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, 150-155.

Johnston, R.J. (1998). Exogenous factors and visitor behavior: a regression analysis of exhibit viewing time. Environment and Behavior, 30 (3), 322-347.

MacMillen, Ollie. (1994). Zoomobile effectiveness: sixth graders learning vertebrate classification. Annual Proceedings of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, 181-183.

Morgan, J.M. & Hodgkinson, M. (1999). The motivation and social orientation of visitors attending a contemporary zoological park. Environment and Behavior, 31 (2), 227-239.

Povey, K.D. (2002). Close encounters: the benefits of using education program animals. Annual Proceedings of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, in press.

Povey, K.D. & Rios, J. (2002). Using interpretive animals to deliver affective messages in zoos. Journal of Interpretation Research, in press.

Sherwood, K. P., Rallis, S. F. & Stone, J. (1989). Effects of live animals vs. preserved specimens on student learning. Zoo Biology 8: 99-104.

Wolf, R.L. & Tymitz, B.L. (1981). Studying visitor perceptions of zoo environments: a naturalistic view. In Olney, P.J.S. (Ed.), International Zoo Yearbook (pp.49-53). Dorchester: The Zoological Society of London.

Yerke, R. & Burns, A. (1991). Measuring the impact of animal shows on visitor attitudes. Annual Proceedings of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, 532-534.

Yerke, R. & Burns, A. (1993). Evaluation of the educational effectiveness of an animal show outreach program for schools. Annual Proceedings of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, 366-368.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING AN INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAM ANIMAL POLICY

LAST REVISION 2003
Re-authorized by the Board June 2011

## Rationale

Membership in AZA requires that an institution meet the AZA Accreditation Standards collectively developed by our professional colleagues. Standards guide all aspects of an institution's operations; however, the accreditation commission has asserted that ensuring that member institutions demonstrate the highest standards of animal care is a top priority. Another fundamental AZA criterion for membership is that education be affirmed as core to an institution's mission. All accredited public institutions are expected to develop a written education plan and to regularly evaluate program effectiveness.

The inclusion of animals (native, exotic and domestic) in educational presentations, when done correctly, is a powerful tool. CEC's **Program Animal Position Statement** describes the research underpinning the appropriate use of program animals as an important and powerful educational tool that provides a variety of benefits to zoo and aquarium educators seeking to convey cognitive and affective messages about conservation and wildlife.

Ongoing research, such as AZA's Multi-Institutional Research Project (MIRP) and research conducted by individual AZA institutions will help zoo educators to determine whether the use of program animals conveys intended and/or conflicting messages and to modify and improve programs accordingly and to ensure that all program animals have the best possible welfare.

When utilizing program animals our responsibility is to meet both our high standards of animal care and our educational goals. Additionally, as animal management professionals, we must critically address both the species' conservation needs and the welfare of the individual animal. Because "wild creatures differ endlessly," in their forms, needs, behavior, limitations and abilities (Conway, 1995), AZA, through its Animal Welfare Committee, has recently given the responsibility to develop taxon- and species-specific animal welfare standards and guidelines to the Taxon Advisory Groups (TAG) and Species Survival Plan® Program (SSP). Experts within each TAG or SSP, along with their education advisors, are charged with assessing all aspects of the taxons' and/or species' biological and social needs and developing Animal Care Manuals (ACMs) that include specifications concerning their use as program animals.

However, even the most exacting standards cannot address the individual choices faced by each AZA institution. Therefore, each institution is required to develop a program animal policy that articulates and evaluates program benefits. The following recommendations are offered to assist each institution in formulating its own Institutional Program Animal Policy, which incorporates the AZA Program Animal Policy and addresses the following matters.

## The Policy Development Process

Within each institution, key stakeholders should be included in the development of that institution's policy, including, but not limited to representatives from:

- the Education Department

- the Animal Husbandry Department
- the Veterinary and Animal Health Department
- the Conservation & Science Department
- the Behavioral Husbandry Department
- any animal show staff (if in a separate department)
- departments that frequently request special program animal situations (e.g., special events, development, marketing, zoo or aquarium society, administration)

Additionally, staff from all levels of the organization should be involved in this development (e.g., curators, keepers, education managers, interpreters, volunteer coordinators).

To develop a comprehensive Program Animal Policy, we recommend that the following components be included:

# I. Philosophy

In general, the position of the AZA is that the use of animals in up close and personal settings, including animal contact, can be extremely positive and powerful, as long as:

1. The use and setting is appropriate.
2. Animal and human welfare is considered at all times.
3. The animal is used in a respectful, safe manner and in a manner that does not misrepresent or degrade the animal.
4. A meaningful conservation message is an integral component. Read the AZA Board-approved Conservation Messages.
5. Suitable species and individual specimens are used.

Institutional program animal policies should include a philosophical statement addressing the above, and should relate the use of program animals to the institution's overall mission statement.

# II. Appropriate Settings

The Program Animal Policy should include a listing of all settings both on and off site, where program animal use is permitted. This will clearly vary among institutions. Each institution's policy should include a comprehensive list of settings specific to that institution. Some institutions may have separate policies for each setting; others may address the various settings within the same policy. Examples of settings include:

I. On-site programming
   A. Informal and non-registrants:
      1. On-grounds programming with animals being brought out (demonstrations, lectures, parties, special events, and media)
      2. Children's zoos and contact yards
      3. Behind-the-scenes open houses
      4. Shows
      5. Touch pools
   B. Formal (registration involved) and controlled settings
      1. School group programs
      2. Summer Camps
      3. Overnights
      4. Birthday Parties
      5. Animal rides
      6. Public animal feeding programs
II. Offsite and Outreach

1. PR events (TV, radio)
2. Fundraising events
3. Field programs involving the public
4. School visits
5. Library visits
6. Nursing Home visits (therapy)
7. Hospital visits
8. Senior Centers
9. Civic Group events

In some cases, policies will differ from setting to setting (e.g., on-site and off-site use with media). These settings should be addressed separately, and should reflect specific animal health issues, assessment of distress in these situations, limitations, and restrictions.

# III. Compliance with Regulations

All AZA institutions housing mammals are regulated by the USDA's Animal Welfare Act. Other federal regulations, such as the Marine Mammal Protection Act, may apply. Additionally, many states, and some cities, have regulations that apply to animal contact situations. Similarly, all accredited institutions are bound by the AZA Code of Professional Ethics. It is expected that the Institution Program Animal Policy address compliance with appropriate regulations and AZA Accreditation Standards.

# IV. Collection Planning

All AZA accredited institutions should have a collection planning process in place. Program animals are part of an institution's overall collection and must be included in the overall collection planning process. The AZA Guide to Accreditation contains specific requirements for the institution collection plan. For more information about collection planning in general, please see the Collection Management pages in the Members Only section.

The following recommendations apply to program animals:

1. Listing of approved program animals (to be periodically amended as collection changes). Justification of each species should be based upon criteria such as:
   o Temperament and suitability for program use
   o Husbandry requirements
   o Husbandry expertise
   o Veterinary issues and concerns
   o Ease and means of acquisition / disposition according to the AZA code of ethics
   o Educational value and intended conservation message
   o Conservation Status
   o Compliance with TAG and SSP guidelines and policies
2. General guidelines as to how each species (and, where necessary, for each individual) will be presented to the public, and in what settings
3. The collection planning section should reference the institution's acquisition and disposition policies.

# V. Conservation Education Message

As noted in the AZA Accreditation Standards, if animal demonstrations are part of an institution's programs, an educational and conservation message must be an integral component. The Program Animal Policy should address the specific messages related to the use of program animals, as well as the need to be cautious about hidden or conflicting messages (e.g., "petting" an animal while stating verbally that it makes a poor pet). This section may include or reference the AZA Conservation Messages.

Although education value and messages should be part of the general collection planning process, this aspect is so critical to the use of program animals that it deserves additional attention. In addition, it is highly recommended to encourage the use of biofacts in addition to or in place of the live animals. Whenever possible, evaluation of the effectiveness of presenting program animals should be built into education programs.

# VI.  Human Health and Safety

The safety of our staff and the public is one of the greatest concerns in working with program animals. Although extremely valuable as educational and affective experiences, contact with animals poses certain risks to the handler and the public. Therefore, the human health and safety section of the policy should address:

1. Minimization of the possibility of disease transfer from non-human animals to humans, and vice-versa (e.g., handwashing stations, no touch policies, use of hand sanitizer)
2. Safety issues related to handlers' personal attire and behavior (e.g., discourage or prohibit use of long earrings, perfume and cologne, not eating or drinking around animals, smoking etc.)

AZA's Animal Contact Policy provides guidelines in this area; these guidelines were incorporated into accreditation standards in 1998.

# VII.  Animal Health and Welfare

Animal health and welfare are the highest priority of AZA accredited institutions. As a result, the Institutional Program Animal Policy should make a strong statement on the importance of animal welfare. The policy should address:

1. General housing, husbandry, and animal health concerns (e.g. that the housing and husbandry for program animals meets or exceeds general AZA standards and that the physical, social and psychological needs of the individual animal, such as adequate rest periods, provision of enrichment, visual cover, contact with conspecifics as appropriate, etc., are accommodated).
2. Where ever possible provide a choice for animal program participation, e.g., retreat areas for touch tanks or contact yards, evaluation of willingness/readiness to participate by handler, etc.)
3. The empowerment of handlers to make decisions related to animal health and welfare; such as withdrawing animals from a situation if safety or health is in danger of being compromised.
4. Requirements for supervision of contact areas and touch tanks by trained staff and volunteers.
5. Frequent evaluation of human / animal interactions to assess safety, health, welfare, etc.
6. Ensure that the level of health care for the program animals is consistent with that of other animals in the collection.
7. Whenever possible have a "cradle to grave" plan for each program animal to ensure that the animal can be taken care of properly when not used as a program animal anymore.
8. If lengthy "down" times in program animal use occur, staff should ensure that animals accustomed to regular human interactions can still maintain such contact and receive the same level of care when not used in programs.

# VIII.  Taxon Specific Protocols

We encourage institutions to provide taxonomically specific protocols, either at the genus or species level, or the specimen, or individual, level. Some taxon-specific guidelines may affect the use of program animals. To develop these, institutions refer to the Conservation Programs Database.

Taxon and species -specific protocols should address:

1. How to remove the individual animal from and return it to its permanent enclosure, including suggestions for operant conditioning training.
2. How to crate and transport animals.
3. Signs of stress, stress factors, distress and discomfort behaviors.

Situation specific handling protocols (e.g., whether or not animal is allowed to be touched by the public, and how to handle in such situations)

1. Guidelines for disinfecting surfaces, transport carriers, enclosures, etc.  using environmentally safe chemicals and cleaners where possible.
2. Animal facts and conservation information.
3. Limitations and restrictions regarding ambient temperatures and or weather conditions.
4. Time limitations (including animal rotation and rest periods, as appropriate, duration of time each animal can participate, and restrictions on travel distances).
5. The numbers of trained personnel required to ensure the health and welfare of the animals, handlers and public.
6. The level of training and experience required for handling this species
7. Taxon/species-specific guidelines on animal health.
8. The use of hand lotions by program participants that might touch the animals

# IX.  Logistics: Managing the Program

The Institutional Policy should address a number of logistical issues related to program animals, including:

1. Where and how the program animal collection will be housed, including any quarantine and separation for animals used off-site.
2. Procedures for requesting animals, including the approval process and decision making process.
3. Accurate documentation and availability of records, including procedures for documenting animal usage, animal behavior, and any other concerns that arise.

# X.  Staff Training

Thorough training for all handling staff (keepers, educators, and volunteers, and docents) is clearly critical. Staff training is such a large issue that many institutions may have separate training protocols and procedures. Specific training protocols can be included in the Institutional Program Animal Policy or reference can be made that a separate training protocol exists.

It is recommended that the training section of the policy address:

1. Personnel authorized to handle and present animals.
2. Handling protocol during quarantine.
3. The process for training, qualifying and assessing handlers including who is authorized to train handlers.

4. The frequency of required re-training sessions for handlers.
5. Personnel authorized to train animals and training protocols.
6. The process for addressing substandard performance and noncompliance with established procedures.
7. Medical testing and vaccinations required for handlers (e.g., TB testing, tetanus shots, rabies vaccinations, routine fecal cultures, physical exams, etc.).
8. Training content (e.g., taxonomically specific protocols, natural history, relevant conservation education messages, presentation techniques, interpretive techniques, etc.).
9. Protocols to reduce disease transmission (e.g., zoonotic disease transmission, proper hygiene and hand washing requirements, as noted in AZA's Animal Contact Policy).
10. Procedures for reporting injuries to the animals, handling personnel or public.
11. Visitor management (e.g., ensuring visitors interact appropriately with animals, do not eat or drink around the animal, etc.).

# XI.  Review of Institutional Policies

All policies should be reviewed regularly. Accountability and ramifications of policy violations should be addressed as well (e.g., retraining, revocation of handling privileges, etc.). Institutional policies should address how frequently the Program Animal Policy will be reviewed and revised, and how accountability will be maintained.

# XII.  TAG and SSP Recommendations
Following development of taxon-specific recommendations from each TAG and SSP, the institution policy should include a statement regarding compliance with these recommendations. If the institution chooses not to follow these specific recommendations, a brief statement providing rationale is recommended.