



THE EU BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY FOR 2030

Response
of the European Association of Zoos & Aquaria (EAZA)

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Cover page: Among the 400 EAZA Ex Situ Programmes (EEP), the EEP for the bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), a species listed in Annex I of the EU Birds Directive, is one of the iconic examples of EAZA's conservation partnerships. Managed by the Vulture Conservation Foundation, the EEP brings together a network of zoos and breeding centres. It plays a vital role in restoring the bearded vulture in its natural range in Europe, in addition to providing skills, knowledge and funds and engaging local communities in the protection of this species and its habitat.

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The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Response of EAZA

Position Statement approved by EAZA Council. June 2020

EAZA welcomes the European Commission’s proposal for the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. We call on the Member States and the European Parliament to endorse the Strategy and lead the world by example towards a robust global biodiversity framework.

The EAZA community of over 400 Member institutions in 48 countries, including in 25 EU Member States, stands ready to contribute to the success of the Strategy and its objectives.

In this document, we present our **response** to the points of the Strategy that are most relevant to the mission of progressive zoos and aquariums in conservation, education and research. Secondly, we make several **recommendations** to complement the Strategy and highlight aspects that, we believe, deserve further emphasis along the road to the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Thirdly, we outline areas of the Strategy in which the EAZA community has particular **expertise** to offer to the EU, its Member States and other partners.

We would like to make the following points in response to the proposal:

1. [Deliver on the ambition,](#)
2. [Make full use of the potential of progressive zoos and aquariums,](#)
3. [Emphasise species conservation,](#)
4. [Apply an integrated One Plan Approach to conservation,](#)
5. [Ensure that biodiversity is only used sustainably and legally.](#)

1. DELIVER ON THE AMBITION

The UN Decade on Biodiversity, which the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2020 has been part of, has largely failed to ensure “that by 2020 ecosystems are resilient and continue to provide essential services, thereby securing the planet’s variety of life, and contributing to human well-being and poverty eradication”¹.

Instead, IPBES² has alarmed us that halting the decline of nature is only possible with fundamental economic, social, political and technological changes. Just months after this Global Assessment, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic starkly reminded us that besides triggering a climate crisis and a biodiversity crisis, our unbalanced relationship with nature has also led to a human health crisis.

We applaud the Commission for positioning the Biodiversity Strategy – the EU’s response to the biodiversity crisis – as a central element of the EU Green Deal. We **call on the EU Member States and their partner countries to turn the ambition of the Strategy into action.** Delivering on the Strategy and the EU Green Deal is as essential for securing the ecosystem services that we, as humans, depend on, as it is for protecting **nature’s intrinsic value.**

We **support the Strategy’s nature protection and restoration** goals and their potential to improve the condition of Europe’s ecosystems. We hope that the proposed **governance framework** will help overcome earlier implementation obstacles and will broadly **mobilize resources** and stakeholders to deliver a truly transformative change.

With the Strategy serving as a blueprint, we count on the **EU’s firm leadership towards a global post-2020 biodiversity framework** based on **ambitious, measurable** and **implementable goals and targets.**

2. MAKE FULL USE OF THE POTENTIAL OF PROGRESSIVE ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS

2.1. We welcome the Strategy’s reference to zoos and aquariums as partners in raising public awareness about biodiversity.

Influencing people’s attitudes, emotions, knowledge and behaviours about nature through **conservation education** is a key role of progressive zoos and aquariums. EAZA has therefore proudly joined the EU-led [Global Biodiversity Coalition](#) referenced in the Strategy, which aims to intensify the awareness-raising efforts all over the world. After all, “we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught³”.

Across the EAZA Membership, teams of professional educators use a variety of **formal and informal education** methods to teach and inspire children and adults from all socio-economic backgrounds. Together, we also manage the education components of the **EAZA**

Ex Situ Programmes (EEP) and EAZA [conservation campaigns](#). We join external **partnerships**, such as the EU Pollinators Initiative. In addition to the 140 million visits they host every year, our Members also reach a wider audience via online tools and social media.

The **drivers of biodiversity loss** – from changes in land and sea use, direct exploitation of nature, climate change, to pollution and invasive alien species – will remain our priority topics in education. We stay committed to inspiring our communities to **bring nature back into their lives** as called for in the Strategy.

At the same time, EAZA and its Members strive to lead by example by **reducing the environmental footprint** of our operations, which is a focal area of the upcoming EAZA Strategy to 2025.

2.2. We underline that progressive zoos and aquariums do more than raising awareness.

Besides raising public awareness and ensuring proper care for the animals, the **EU Zoos Directive**⁴ requires zoos and aquariums to **contribute to the conservation** of wild animal species inside and outside their natural range (*in situ* and *ex situ*) through population management and conservation breeding, reintroductions, scientific research or training.

All these roles are intrinsically at the heart of EAZA, and our Members go above and beyond the requirements of the Zoos Directive. Their contributions to conservation range from donating funds and staff time for field work (EAZA is part of the global professional zoo and aquarium community which ranks as the third biggest donor of conservation funds⁵) to capacity building, advocacy etc. Member staff also volunteer their specialist knowledge to support other conservation organisations, like e.g. by contributing to assessing the status of species as part of the IUCN Red Listing process.

Joint **population management programmes** (EAZA Ex Situ Programmes, EEP) lie at the core of EAZA's work since its inception. The EEPs benefit more than 400 species by serving as insurance, building knowledge and enabling transfer of skills, and strengthening populations in the natural ranges of the species.

From the past decade, the forest reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus fennicus*), the European mink (*Mustela lutreola*), the waldrapp ibis (*Geronticus eremita*), the bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and the Montseny brook newt (*Calotriton arnoldi*) are just a few examples of species whose wild populations in Europe have been boosted with EEP animals as part of broader international programmes, many of which benefit from EU LIFE funding.



Moreover, our Members are active in **research** partnerships. Over the last decade, the research output of EAZA Members has increased by more than a threefold⁶. EAZA is also committed to raising conservation **skills** – both internally (e.g. through its **EU-funded professional zookeeper training framework**) and externally with our various conservation partners worldwide.

2.3. We encourage EU Member States to fully implement the EU Zoos Directive.

In its recent evaluation, the EU concluded that the **Directive remains fit for purpose but must be better implemented by the Member States**. Membership in EAZA as well as in national zoo associations (13 of which are also affiliated in EAZA) was highlighted as a positive factor that helps zoos and aquariums **meet and exceed the requirements** set out in the Directive.

While we appreciate this recognition, we remind the Member States that **better implementation** of the Zoos Directive can enable them to raise even further the contribution of their zoos and aquariums to saving biodiversity both in Europe and globally.

We encourage Member States to take part in the Commission-led three-year process aimed at sharing best practices in implementation, and to use the [EU Zoos Directive Good Practices Document](#) which provides guidance for each of the Directive's objectives and which is now available in eight languages.

2.4. We call for better alignment of zoo licensing with other environmental laws.

Maximizing zoos' and aquariums' contribution to conservation action plans and strategies requires aligning of the official zoo licensing with other elements of the environmental legislation.

Specifically, we call for alignment between the Zoos Directive's objective of *ex situ* conservation and the rules regarding **invasive species**, laid down in the **EU Invasive Alien Species Regulation**.

Whilst we believe that the IAS Regulation offers a necessary tool for protecting native biodiversity from IAS (as underlined in our 2017 [Position Statement](#)⁷), we reiterate that certain species listed as invasive in the EU may be declining in their natural range. In consequence, they may require **ex situ conservation**, e.g. in the EAZA Ex Situ Programmes, which is only possible with country-level **exemptions**.

We applaud the aim of the Strategy to reduce by 50% the number of Red List species threatened by invasive alien species. We believe, however, that achieving this ambitious goal will require significant focus on the **eradication** of invasive species from European habitats, in addition to the prevention measures. EAZA Members take an active part in the eradication of IAS, with the bullfrog in France being one of the recent examples.

2.5. We encourage local authorities to consider zoos in greening initiatives.

Over 72% of EAZA zoos and aquariums are situated in **cities of more than 20,000 inhabitants**; many others lie adjacent to cities. Many contain valuable pockets and corridors of **undisturbed wilderness**, providing refuge to native species of flora and fauna in an urbanised environment.

We welcome the call for ambitious **Urban Greening Plans** and encourage the municipal authorities to consider the green and blue spaces in zoos and aquariums in this planning.

3. EMPHASISE SPECIES CONSERVATION

Species loss at current rates will eliminate the vital ecological and societal roles that the species fulfil, as concluded in the IPBES Global Assessment and in the **Abu Dhabi Call for Global Species Conservation Action**⁸ of which EAZA and many of our Members are signatories. We have been advocating for a biodiversity policy that specifically includes **species conservation targets** to complement the no less important habitat- and ecosystem-focused goals.

Despite the ambitions of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2020 to improve the conservation status of animal and plant species **in Europe**, many of these species still face the threat of extinction. Also **abroad**, where the EU has been donating crucial funds for biodiversity conservation, some of the EU's policies and trade patterns still continue to leave a negative footprint on ecosystems and species therein.

We commend the Commission for addressing these challenges comprehensively in the Strategy for 2030. We strongly recommend that the overarching goal of 'putting biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030' includes robust species conservation action. This is particularly important for species with small and/or fragmented populations, as they may be unable to recover even when the primary threats to their survival diminish. Extracting them from the extinction vortex caused by vulnerability to genetic and demographic factors may require intensive care.

Therefore, for the implementation of the EU Strategy and for the road to CBD CoP15, we:

3.1. Call on the EU, its Member States and other CBD Parties to establish:

- robust emergency measures to **halt the decline of species by 2030** and prevent human-driven extinctions by tackling the key threats;
- integrated measures to **ensure recovery of all threatened species by 2050**;
- clear and ambitious **targets on species conservation**, supported by an effective work programme to meet the targets;
- legal and **institutional frameworks** for species conservation that are transparent and accountable.

With over 30 years of working in partnership with others to develop and implement effective frameworks for integrated conservation, EAZA stands ready to share our expertise in contribution to these objectives.

3.2. Call for a strong target on genetic diversity of wild species.

Genetic diversity is a crucial factor in the long-term survival of species as well as in the resilience of entire ecosystems and the provision of ecosystem services. Loss of genetic variation is one of the major threats to population persistence⁹. Therefore, measuring and safeguarding genetic diversity should be a key element of the conservation, restoration and management of nature.

Yet, the current global biodiversity framework has failed to address the genetic diversity of all species: its Aichi Target 13 only refers to the genetic diversity of crops and domesticated animals. Similarly, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2020 only considers agricultural genetic diversity.

The EU Strategy for 2030 broadens this focus by recognizing the importance of **preventing genetic isolation** in wild species by designating **ecological corridors** within the Trans-European Nature Networks. While certainly a step in the right direction, this still falls short of introducing a **strong target for measuring, maintaining and, where possible, improving genetic diversity** in wild species.

We count on the EU's leadership in including such a much-needed target in the global post-2020 framework.

On our end, EAZA remains committed to contribute to **maintaining genetic variation of wild populations**. One of the common goals of our *ex situ* activities is to improve the demographic and genetic viability of our zoo and aquarium populations which can consequently support wild populations by translocating individuals from the EAZA Ex Situ Programmes (EEP) where needed and by sharing our experts' knowledge in this area. This is one of the key contributions of *ex situ* management for conservation, recognized by the IUCN. The professional zoo and aquarium community contributes significantly to progressing small population management science and developing tools used for managing animal population both *in situ* and *ex situ* (e.g. VORTEX and PMx under the [Species Conservation Toolkit Initiative](#) – SCTI of which EAZA is a partner). See more in section 4.

3.3. Recommend that the EU's National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs):

- emphasise the need for the **scaling up** of species conservation planning;
- take account of **species potentially being unable to** recover on their own when only the primary drivers of decline are being addressed, and possibly needing 'intensive care' at the level of populations or individuals to extract them from an extinction vortex driven by stochastic (genetic and/or demographic) threats;

- ensure that EU-wide species conservation action plans for **species** at risk of extinction are in place;
- encourage cooperation with partners to **pool all available expertise** and tools to develop these plans;
- provide measures that allow the plans to be **acted upon** in an integrated and effective manner.

We welcome the Strategy's call for stronger implementation, monitoring and review of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP) of parties to CBD as a way of ensuring that these national commitments together enable the accomplishment of the post-2020 targets. We strongly recommend that **the NBSAPs take into account species conservation plans and strategies** already developed or to be developed during the period, such as those facilitated by the IUCN SSC Conservation Planning Specialist Group (CPSG).

The Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) is one of the iconic examples of species that have greatly benefited from such facilitation. In a project of the Spanish government, CPSG brought together all the stakeholders, including EAZA zoos, to develop a robust long-term conservation strategy that has already led to a threefold increase of the population size. This has allowed the species to be down-listed from Critically Endangered to Endangered¹⁰.

4. APPLY AN INTEGRATED ONE PLAN APPROACH TO CONSERVATION

Complementing section 3 above, we would like to stress that protecting wild species of fauna and flora is most effective when multi-disciplinary expert teams consider not one conservation strategy but a portfolio of strategies that are implemented simultaneously, proactively and early, i.e. before the species is reduced to a very small number of individuals¹¹.

The 73 species **Extinct in the Wild** and the 6,127 species classified as **Critically Endangered** in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species owe this status in part to human failure to intervene on time.

The **European bison**, the Polynesian **partula snail** or the **Arabian oryx** are just a few of the many examples of animal species saved from near extinction – with important input from direct *ex situ* action based at zoos. **Amphibians** are another taxon where such collaboration has been vital, with EAZA being part of the global amphibian conservation movement.

While the *ex situ* community (professional zoos, aquariums, botanic gardens and other predominantly *ex situ* actors) is a valuable source of species management expertise, its potential is **often overlooked** in the planning and implementation of species conservation, *in situ* or *ex situ*. In addition, *ex situ* management offers a valuable and diverse set of tools within the larger conservation toolkit.

All too often, it is applied at the last minute when all other strategies have failed. Such last-ditch attempts are not only less effective: sometimes they simply come too late to save a species.

Therefore, we:

4.1. Call on all Parties to CBD to fully implement Art. 9 of the Convention.

Article 9 requires Parties to adopt measures for *ex situ* conservation as far as possible and as appropriate, complementing *in situ* measures¹². We call on Parties to CBD to use all available conservation tools effectively **and plan *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation interventions** in an integrated and timely manner.

4.2. Recommend applying the One Plan Approach.

Adopted by the IUCN, the One Plan Approach¹³ promotes joint development of management strategies and conservation actions for all populations of a species by all responsible parties to produce a single, comprehensive conservation plan for that species.

One Plan Approach is being broadly adopted in the zoo community: it is the guiding framework for the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy¹⁴ as well as for EAZA's joint population management¹⁵.

We also encourage a much broader use and promotion of **IUCN's Guidelines on the Use of *Ex Situ* Management for Species Conservation**¹⁶ which provide practical guidance on evaluating the suitability and requirements of an *ex situ* component for achieving species conservation objectives.

We call for recognition of the **full range of available *ex situ* conservation roles** as defined in the guidelines including the potential of molecular tools and **biobanking** in conservation. Additionally, we call for better coordination on, and recommend the development of, **global strategies for biobanking for fauna**.

[The FAZA Biobank](#) provides genetic support to population management and conservation research. Samples of genetic material are stored in four hubs: Antwerp Zoo, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) Edinburgh Zoo, Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW) in Berlin and Copenhagen Zoo.

Samples contribute to maintaining and improving genetic diversity of species in order to safeguard their long term survival and can also be shared with authorities to combat illegal wildlife trade, e.g. to support reference databases of threatened species (as is the case for tigers with [TigrisID](#)).



4.3. Call on the EU and its Member States to build and promote a holistic approach to conservation.

We call for an approach that will tackle all threats in a balanced way and that will enable input from and participation of all relevant disciplines and sectors. From our perspective, the following elements should not be omitted in such an approach:

- involving **experts from the *ex situ* community** in species conservation planning and implementation,
- **assessment of *ex situ* needs** for species conservation,
- linking ***ex situ* actions** to such needs,
- incorporating **genetic diversity** into conservation planning and action.

5. ENSURE THAT BIODIVERSITY IS ONLY USED SUSTAINABLY AND LEGALLY

EAZA and its Member zoos and aquariums are committed to the fight against illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade and use. Besides supporting anti-trafficking projects all over the world, educating the public and carrying out joint campaigns (see box below), many EAZA Members cooperate with their CITES authorities by providing emergency care to thousands of confiscated animals each year.

Building on the above, EAZA has been increasing its engagement as an observer organisation in CITES and as a stakeholder in EU wildlife trade policy.

Examples of trade-related EAZA Conservation Campaigns:



Bushmeat Campaign (2000-2001) in partnership with IFAW, gathered 1.9 million signatures on a petition on the protection of threatened species from unlawful hunting and trade – one of the biggest petitions ever submitted to the European Parliament.



Silent Forest Campaign (2018-2019) focusing on Asian songbird crisis in partnership with BirdLife International, TRAFFIC and IUCN Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group.



Which Fish? Campaign (2020-2021), together with European Association for Aquatic Mammals and European Union of Aquarium Curators, with a focus on sustainable use of aquatic resources.

We also strive to lead by example. EAZA Ex Situ Programmes (EEP) are entirely **non-commercial** and the selling of EEP animals is not permitted. EAZA Members also implement the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy¹⁷ which restricts obtaining animals from the wild only to a minimum of special cases with clear conservation objectives. Moreover, EAZA Members record and trace animal data by using the professional ZIMS (Zoological Information Management System) database hosted by Species360.

Welcoming the Commission's declaration to continue cracking down on illegal wildlife trade through the Strategy for 2030, we encourage the Member States to endorse and further strengthen these efforts.

Specifically, we would like to:

5.1. Call for ensuring that wildlife trade and use are sustainable and legal.

We call for more **synergies between all relevant tools** that national governments and other stakeholders have at their disposal, including multilateral environmental agreements, especially **CBD, CITES and CMS**.

5.2. Encourage the EU to lead by example, through:

- **revising the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking** by 2021 as announced and rolling out a robustly funded successor to the Action Plan that will be fully integrated within the EU Biodiversity Strategy;
- fully enforcing **wildlife crime penalties** adequately reflecting the scale and impact of the crime;
- further **increasing synergies** between relevant EU policies, especially on nature, development cooperation, trade and security;
- stepping up the efforts to **close the domestic EU ivory markets**.
- With regard to recent exposures of trafficking networks for **products originating from tigers** bred in Europe, we call on the EU Member States to ensure that the *ex situ* tiger population in human care within Europe serves non-commercial purposes such as research, education and conservation breeding, as exemplified by the EAZA Ex situ Programmes¹⁸.

5.3. Welcome the pledge to ensure that EU policies, including trade agreements, do not contribute to biodiversity loss,

nor to a weakening of environmental policies in- or outside the EU. We commend the EU's readiness to liaise with its trade partner countries to help them transition to biodiversity-friendly trade.

Similarly, we welcome the declaration to minimise EU's role in **imported deforestation**. We encourage the EU to promote an international system of sustainable and certified agricultural production to eliminate imported deforestation worldwide.

5.4. Applaud the commitment to One Health Approach.

We welcome the Commission's commitment to One Health Approach, which recognizes the intrinsic connection between human, animal and ecosystem health, as called for in the previous CBD CoP¹⁹.

Whilst the origin and pathways of **SARS-CoV-2** remain to be verified, this pandemic is a reminder that wildlife trade, too, must be considered not only for its long-studied effect on species, ecosystems and livelihoods, but also for its **potential to spread zoonotic diseases**.

To this end, we welcome the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) recent **pledge to design a zoonotic risk-and-response programme²⁰ to help countries reduce the threats and map the health risks** of unregulated wildlife trade, habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss. We encourage the EU to support the establishment and implementation of this programme.

Our partner: European Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians

Founded over many years of collaboration, a close partnership links EAZA and the European Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians (EAZWV). We work together to improve wildlife health both in free-living and ex-situ populations, through capacity building, training and research. We also share the veterinary expertise from our sector with country authorities and the EU institutions.



CONCLUDING

EAZA has recently adopted its new vision: *Progressive zoos and aquariums saving species together with you.* It will guide our work in the upcoming strategic periods, starting with the period 2021-2025. 'Together with you' reflects our determination to increase our conservation impact through intensified partnerships: with the visitors of our Member zoos and aquariums,

with public authorities and with likeminded organisations on all levels, from municipal to global.

With two thirds of EAZA Members based in the European Union, the EU Biodiversity Strategy is an important reference framework for the partnerships we form and join. We look forward to seeking synergies between the EAZA Strategy and that of the EU and to contributing to our shared objective of leaving planet Earth, our only home, in a better and more resilient state for the next generations.

ABOUT EAZA

Established in 1992, EAZA is world’s largest regional zoo and aquarium association, with over 400 Member institutions (341 zoos and aquariums, 13 national and sub-regional zoo associations, other affiliated organisations) **in 48 countries, including in 25 EU Member States.**

EAZA facilitates cooperation within the European and Western Asian zoo and aquarium community towards the goals of education, research and conservation, centred around the animals in our Members’ care. Membership in EAZA is based on strict accreditation requirements and binding Standards.

With 140 million visits made to EAZA Members each year, we are uniquely placed to inspire the public to learn about and contribute to biodiversity conservation. Teams of experts from EAZA Member institutions work together in 40+ Taxon Advisory Groups (TAGs), overseeing the EAZA Ex situ Programmes (EEPs) for some 400 primarily threatened species which are guided by the One Plan Approach. EAZA works closely together with the IUCN SSC Conservation Planning Specialist Group, taxon-specific IUCN SSC Specialist Groups and other conservation partners.

EAZA’s high standards and good practices have been recognized in the text of the EU Zoos Directive (1999/22/EC) which aims to raise zoos’ conservation impact, as well as in the [Zoos Directive Good Practices Document](#) which guides the implementation of the Directive. We see this recognition as a duty for EAZA to support the EU – and other countries in which our Members are based – in creating the right policy conditions for making full use of the potential of progressive zoos and aquariums. We do so, among others, by sharing and promoting EAZA’s openly available [Standards and Guidelines](#).

*EAZA is a member of the **World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA)** and the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**.*



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