

WAZA Position Statement on the Use of Sedated Animals in Visitor Interactions

This statement outlines the position of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) on the use of sedated animals in zoos and aquariums for interactions with visitors to these institutions. This position statement is based on the 2003 *WAZA Code of Ethics and Animal Welfare*¹, the 2015 *World Zoo and Aquarium Animal Welfare Strategy*² and the 2015 WAZA resolution on animal interactions³.

Zoos and aquariums have seen a rapid growth in interactive experiences in recent years, taking advantage of a general affinity between humans and animals to encourage visitors to act to conserve wildlife. The progression from simply exhibiting zoo and aquarium animals for visitors to observe, which was common in the past, to present approaches that bring humans and animals into close proximity, has gained momentum because it engages visitors more effectively and thereby provides better opportunities to educate them about animals, and conservation of wildlife.

Interactive experiences vary between organisations. They may be minimal with visitors having access to a behind-the-scenes area. There are also situations where people are brought into the animals' exhibits and other situations where animals and humans may have hands-on contact.

All interactive experiences should be assessed for their impact on the welfare of the animals by: applying ongoing welfare assessment and monitoring; referring to the frequency, duration and timing (time of day) of the interactions; noting whether actual physical contact is necessary and, if so, with how many visitors; noting visitor characteristics; and evaluating how consistently the interactive experience is provided.

Interactive experiences should accommodate the animals' natural history and behavioural repertoire; should not require great effort on the part of zoo or aquarium staff members to engage the animal in taking part; should represent to visitors our respect for the animal; and should have overriding conservation messages consistent with the purpose of modern zoos and aquariums.

WAZA notes with great concern the misuse of animals in such interactive experiences in some zoos and aquariums. Notably, the use of sedated animals for interactions with visitors clearly violates the above preconditions for an acceptable interactive experience. This violation is with regards to both the compromised well-being of the individual animals involved (e.g. distress from sedation, handling and exposure) and the misguided message of the interactive experience for the visitors present.

Therefore, WAZA condemns the use of drugs to sedate animals used in animal encounters, presentations or shows. No WAZA member shall use sedated animals in visitor interactions.

¹ [WAZA \(2003\) *WAZA Code of Ethics and Animal Welfare*. Berne: WAZA.](#)

² [Mellor, D. J., Hunt, S. & Gusset, M. \(eds\) \(2015\) *Caring for Wildlife: The World Zoo and Aquarium Animal Welfare Strategy*. Gland: WAZA.](#)

³ Resolution 70.1 adopted at the 70th WAZA Annual Conference (2015).