



Amsterdam, 22nd June 2010

Statement on behalf of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) and the EAZA conservation breeding programme for tigers (the Tiger EEP) in reference to the recent conviction of staff of Zoo Magdeburg for the management euthanasia of three hybrid tigers

Ex situ conservation breeding carried out by zoos and other *ex situ* facilities is recognised and endorsed by the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN as a legitimate and important aspect of species conservation. Within Europe such managed conservation breeding programmes in zoos and aquariums are coordinated by the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) under the European Endangered species Programme (EEP) and European Studbook (ESB) structures, and are managed with the aim of providing the maximum possible conservation support for the relevant species in the wild.

The EAZA conservation breeding programme for tigers (the Tiger EEP) has made and continues to make significant contributions to the conservation of Amur and Sumatran tigers in the wild¹, via fundraising for wild tiger conservation projects, raising awareness and providing educational opportunities, and assisting with relevant research and training. If it is to continue to do so in the future, and also to provide in the form of the zoo tigers themselves a “genetic insurance policy” against the extinction of either tiger subspecies in the wild, the tiger population in EAZA zoos – as for all zoo populations of endangered species – must be demographically and genetically managed in accordance with known and documented scientific principles. This management takes many aspects, such as the selection of pairs for breeding on genetic grounds, contraception of animals not appropriate for breeding or who are genetically over-represented in the *ex situ* population, and on some occasions management euthanasia of individuals to provide space for necessary breeding.

In 2008, respected genetic experts identified a hybrid strain in the Amur tiger portion of the EEP population. All affected tigers have consequently been prevented from further breeding and the genetic integrity of the programme is being restored. Unfortunately the hybrid male at Zoo Magdeburg had already sired a litter when this information became available. In

¹ Why keep tigers in zoos? Christie, S., 2010. In: *Tigers of the World II; the Science, Politics and Conservation of Panthera tigris*. Eds Tilson, R. and Nyhus, P. Elsevier.



these circumstances the humane euthanasia of the cubs sired by this male was, in the view of EAZA and of the Tiger EEP, an entirely reasonable and scientifically valid action. EAZA and the Tiger EEP are unable to understand how, when it is judged acceptable to cull wild animals on grounds of hybridisation or overpopulation and farm animals on grounds of economic viability, it can be judged unacceptable to do the same with zoo animals in order to further the conservation of endangered species.

We support the actions of Zoo Magdeburg in ensuring that this important conservation resource, the EAZA population of Amur tigers, is managed to the highest scientific, conservation and welfare standards. We believe the conviction of the three Magdeburg staff, on the grounds that humane management euthanasia is not a reasonable course of action for conservation purposes, to be a retrograde step.

Signatories

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Simon Tonge, Chairman, EAZA

This statement is also endorsed by;

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission (SSC)
Conservation Breeding Specialist Group

Robert Lacy, Ph.D., Chairman

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