

WAZA Statement – Euthanasia of a giraffe at Copenhagen Zoo

WAZA statement on the euthanasia and fate of a giraffe at Copenhagen Zoo in February 2014

The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) is an international organisation that brings together zoos and aquariums – and many national and regional associations of zoos and aquariums – to find common ground and to cooperate in efforts to advance the respectful, humane treatment of animals in our care, and to support the conservation of animals across the globe.

Care and conservation are achieved in a wide variety of ways. While there is broad regional, national and cultural variation represented by WAZA's 325 members, all are united by a deep respect for the animals in our care and a commitment to sustaining them, at both the individual animal and species population levels.

Conservation breeding is a core competency of modern zoos, and its practice is mandated by the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Species Survival Commission of IUCN. To this end, the regional association members of WAZA coordinate conservation breeding programmes for a significant number of threatened species of animals around the world.

Managing these cooperative breeding programmes is a complex process. WAZA recognises that in some circumstances, humane euthanasia can be a viable and necessary management tool, not only for addressing issues of individual animal health and welfare, but in some cases to advance the sustainability goals of *ex situ* population management. Simon Stuart, Chair of IUCN's Species Survival Commission, offered the following perspective: "The conservation of endangered species is a complicated matter that (at times) requires difficult decisions from recognised experts such as those working in EAZA's European Endangered Species Programmes".

In all instances, WAZA strongly advises that its members employ management euthanasia only as a last resort, after all options have been investigated and exhausted, and no other solution remains.

The massive global attention the fate of the giraffe at Copenhagen Zoo has garnered unfortunately distracts from the very real crisis that the rapidly shrinking numbers of wild giraffes in Africa face. The once-thriving giraffe population across the continent has been reduced by nearly half in just the last 15 years. Over 60,000 giraffes have been killed, and today fewer than 80,000 individual giraffes of multiple subspecies remain, with poaching, human population growth, habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and habitat degradation all contributing to the rapid decline of this most iconic of animals.

Zoos can play a role in preventing the loss of the giraffe as an integral and marvellous part of our world, by providing refuge and care in our facilities, and by offering millions of people the chance to directly experience the sight, sound, smell and touch of these most extraordinary creatures. The global zoo community is obligated to provide the highest level of care, not just to the species populations sustained by our facilities, but to each and every individual of those species that we have taken responsibility for. WAZA regrets the loss of

the young giraffe in Copenhagen, but we affirm the important role zoos and aquariums play in assuring species survival and individual animal well-being.