

WAZA Code of Ethics

(San Diego, October 2023)

Preamble

This Code of Ethics is framed in four foundational documents that guide WAZA's position on Animal Welfare, Conservation, Sustainability and Social Change. These documents are:

Caring For Wildlife: The World Zoo and Aquarium Animal Welfare Strategy (2015) [\[link\]](#) Guides WAZA members to establish and maintain suitable animal welfare standards, best practices, measures and professional conduct within the wider zoo and aquarium community. It encourages all WAZA members to achieve positive animal welfare for the animals in their care; to be animal welfare leaders, advocates, and authoritative advisers; and to provide environments that focus on the animals' physical and behavioural needs.

Committing to Conservation: The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (2015) [\[link\]](#) Guides WAZA members to commit to become effective conservation organisations. It provides steps toward conservation leadership and coordinates a "One Plan Approach" toward the integration of conservation efforts in wild and zoo and aquarium populations. It also catalyses zoos and aquariums to become sources of inspiration and action for staff, visitors, and the wider communities. It encourages active collaboration among WAZA members and the conservation community globally.

Protecting our Planet: The World Zoo and Aquarium Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030 (2020) [\[link\]](#). Guides WAZA members in reaching sustainability outcomes in their operations and strategies. It shows the synergy between sustainability and conservation and suggests ways to integrate sustainability into their strategies and operations based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Social Change for Conservation: The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy (2020) [\[link\]](#) Guides WAZA members and the wider zoo and aquarium community to build expertise, leadership, and capacity to achieve educational and social outcomes crucial to their conservation mission. It specifically calls for the creation of a culture of conservation supported by measurable learning outcomes for diverse audiences. It also defines the wide range of approaches to conservation education — such as creating connections to nature, fostering empathy for wildlife, capacity building, and motivating pro-environmental behaviours.

These foundational documents indicate that progressive zoos and aquariums must hold themselves to the highest ethical standards in all endeavours, including animal welfare, conservation, environmental sustainability, education, research, business practices, and human relations.

Periodic Review: It is expected that this Code of Ethics is reviewed every five years to reflect the dynamic nature of cultural, ethical, scientific, and regulatory trends for progressive zoos and aquariums.

WAZA members embrace and embody the following set of Ethical Values

- Present the animals in our care with dignity and respect, including the animals with which we engage in population management, conservation, research, and education programmes.
- Implement best practices to ensure optimal physical, psychological, environmental, behavioral, and social conditions that allow all individuals in our care to thrive.
- Continuously improve policies and practices that support staff, improve facilities, enhance the welfare of animals in our care, and build a safe and respectful environment for the animals, the visitors, and the staff.
- Utilise science, experience, respect, empathy, and compassion in all our decisions that affect animals, people, habitats, or the environment.
- Acknowledge and respect the cultural complexity and differing values that may exist among WAZA members, and engage one another with openness, respect, wisdom, and patience.

WAZA Members Prioritise Ethical Decision Making in All Aspects of their Operations

WAZA members must follow general ethical principles in all areas of operation. Ethical decision making must be a priority for all WAZA members. When it comes to general ethical principles associated with operational practices, WAZA members must:

- Act with compassion, inclusivity, and empathy because they are charged with caring for living animals and interacting with people of all varied backgrounds and abilities,
- Act with an environmental conscience,
- Collaborate wherever possible to achieve shared conservation goals,
- Operate in the interest of the natural world and the community, developing their own policies that are consistent with this goal.
- Present animals in a respectful manner, that meets their environmental, behavioural, nutritional and health care needs, in accordance with our current understanding of animal welfare science (Mellor & Beausoleil, 2015) and progressive zoo and aquarium standards and evolving best practices.
- WAZA members engage in population management activities that are based on and contribute to legal, sustainable, and ethical sourcing and placement of animals.

WAZA Members Prioritise Animal Welfare and Associated Ethical Considerations

As part of the [WAZA 2023 Animal Welfare Goal](#), all WAZA National and Regional Associations must have an animal welfare evaluation process in place and such a process must include specific elements approved by WAZA. All WAZA institutional members must comply with the animal welfare evaluation process established by their National and Regional association.

WAZA members should ensure that animals in their care are allowed opportunities to have positive experiences in their day to day lives, as recognised through the Five Domains of Animal Welfare (Mellor and Beausoleil 2015), such as:

- a) Receive proper nutrition, and an engaging pleasurable diet,
 - b) Live in environments that promote comfort,
 - c) Experience good physical health, and are safe from injury and disease,
 - d) Can express choice and control over their interactions with the environment and other animals, and engage in species appropriate behaviours, in ways that the animal finds rewarding, and
 - e) Have lives where positive mental experiences are occurring, while negative mental experiences are minimal.
- Address inadequacies in animals' abilities to reach positive outcomes in each of the Five Domains and to assure staff are aware of current animal welfare science practices and theories in animal welfare science.
 - Consider the potential animal welfare outcomes of each aspect of animal management, such as choosing appropriate species for display or other use, exhibit planning, animal care, animal health procedures, and use of live feeder animals.
 - Human-animal interactions of all forms must be guided by the [WAZA Guidelines for Animal-Visitor Interactions](#) (WAZA, 2020) and must provide opportunities to promote positive animal welfare outcomes and deliver sound conservation messaging.
 - Animal welfare must be a component of population planning and end of life decisions.
 - If animals are part of research of any kind, animal welfare impacts must be assessed. Where possible, an ethics committee should review and approve research involving animals.

WAZA Members Act Ethically Towards All People

Many activities in which WAZA members are involved are aimed at changing or understanding human behaviour. These practices include general zoo and aquarium visitors, educational programmes, *in situ* conservation work with local communities, outreach to specific audiences, human behaviour research, social media positions, learning outcomes, and more.

When WAZA members work or interact with people, they must always be aware of the groups they are working with and make every consideration to treat all persons with dignity, respect, and privacy, including all cultural and ethical considerations. WAZA's conservation education and sustainability strategies, describe numerous mission-related activities in which zoos and aquariums work with diverse groups of people.

WAZA members must at all times act ethically and respectfully toward all colleagues in the zoo and aquarium community.

WAZA Members use Ethical Decision Making in Conservation and Research Practices

Many WAZA members conduct conservation and research activities that take place at the zoo or aquarium, in the field or in the laboratory.

Because WAZA members hold wildlife conservation as a core component of their missions, much of this applied conservation and research activity involves working with live animals, habitats, and ecosystems.

Therefore, WAZA members must:

- To the extent possible, align with WAZA's Conservation Strategy: Committing to Conservation for orientation and incorporating ethical considerations for *ex situ* activities, animal welfare, and educational programmes.
- Consider animal welfare in all aspects of work, including the ethical disposition of animals when research is completed.
- To the extent possible, publish and disseminate their findings in relevant journals and other scientific communication channels.
- Demonstrate that their conservation and research activities have been performed by qualified personnel and within legal and ethical guidelines.
- Ensure the responsible use of biological and genetic materials is compliant with international protocols (e.g., CITES and the Nagoya Protocol).

Legal Compliance

WAZA members must:

- Act in accordance with all local, state, national and international laws, conventions, treaties, and regulations,
- Conduct their work with the appropriate permits and licenses.

WAZA Ethics Concern and Inquiry process

Approved by the WAZA Council in January 2024

When WAZA receives an ethics concern, we follow the process summarised here and described in an attached flowchart. Concerns will be treated as confidential but may not be anonymous. Only concerns provided by an identified complainant will be considered.

Throughout the Ethics concern and inquiry process described below, all involved parties shall, at all times, maintain strict confidentiality regarding the case.

1. WAZA receives a written concern (e.g., from visitors, media, another WAZA member). The WAZA Executive Office formally acknowledges the concern and ascertains if the concern is about a WAZA member within ten (10) days of receipt. If the concern is not about a WAZA member, the Executive Office notifies the relevant Regional and/or National Association as appropriate and WAZA's handling of the case is closed. This outcome will be communicated to the complainant.
2. The concern should explicitly outline the specific violation of the WAZA Code of Ethics that is alleged. If there is no clear articulation of a violation, the complainant will be given an opportunity to provide one.
3. If the concern is about a WAZA member, the WAZA Executive Office notifies the Ethics Subcommittee.
4. The Ethics Subcommittee initiates an inquiry process and solicits additional information from all relevant parties. Initially, the relevant Regional or National Association is provided with the concern and offered a fifteen (15) day period for the submission of any additional relevant information. If no information is provided within this timeframe or more information is required to understand the circumstances of the concern, direct contact will be made with the WAZA Member, who will be given a fifteen (15) day period to provide the relevant information.
5. Within 30 days, the Ethics Subcommittee shall consider the information provided by the Regional or National Association and/or the WAZA member and, during a meeting or conference call and by simple majority, decide on a recommendation for action to be taken by the WAZA Executive Committee. The recommendation should clearly outline the alleged violations of the WAZA Code of Ethics and recommended action.
6. If the Ethics Subcommittee determines that there was no violation of the WAZA Code of Ethics, it notifies all parties involved in the process and closes the case.
7. If the Ethics Subcommittee concludes that a violation of the WAZA Code of Ethics has occurred, the Ethics Subcommittee Chair will present a recommendation to the WAZA Executive Committee regarding suitable disciplinary actions. These may encompass reprimand or expulsion, as outlined in Article 9 of the WAZA Bylaws (Buenos Aires, 2019).
8. The WAZA Executive Committee shall consider the Ethics Subcommittee's recommendation and all relevant information and deliberate on recommended suitable disciplinary actions to be undertaken within fifteen (15) days of receiving the report from the Ethics Subcommittee Chair. If the recommendation from the WAZA Executive Committee is to pursue disciplinary actions, as per the WAZA Bylaws, this recommendation must be taken up by the WAZA Council for decision. The WAZA Council shall make a final decision within fifteen (15) days of

receiving a recommendation from the Executive Committee. The WAZA Executive Committee will reach a decision on its recommendation by a simple majority vote. The WAZA Council decision must be approved by two-thirds (2/3) of the members of the Council. A letter, including the substance of the findings as well as the disciplinary actions taken, will be sent to the WAZA Member and all parties involved in the process. This communication serves as provisional outcome pending any appeal.

9. An appeal may be made in writing to the WAZA Executive Office within sixty (60) days following receipt of notification of the WAZA Council's decision to the WAZA Member and may include a request to appear before the Council, as per the WAZA Bylaws (2019). The WAZA Executive Office must determine whether the appeal qualifies for full Council consideration within fifteen (15) days of its receipt and communicate the decision to the appellant. Appeals may be presented to the WAZA Council if the WAZA Executive Office concludes that the WAZA Member appealing the WAZA Council's decision has demonstrated that:
 - a. there are new facts, not known at the time of the Ethics Subcommittee investigation, which the Executive Office believes may have changed the outcome; or
 - b. the Ethics Subcommittee, Executive Committee or Council did not follow relevant WAZA procedures; or
 - c. the sanctions recommended by the Ethics Subcommittee or WAZA Executive Committee and/or imposed by Council was excessive under the circumstances.

The WAZA Council will serve as the appellate body. If a vote is required, it will be carried by a two-thirds (2/3) majority. The member shall be classified as "suspended" during any process of appeal. The Council must act upon the appeal prior to the next General Assembly. The appellate decision of the WAZA Council shall be final and cannot be appealed.

In the absence of an appeal, all final disciplinary actions will be communicated to all Parties and actors involved, marking the closure of the case. If the process of appeal changes the initial outcome, all Parties involved in the process will be notified.

10. When the outcome of the process involves case dismissal or reprimand, all proceedings and documentation of the inquiry process will be kept confidential. The WAZA Executive Committee may, at its discretion, make available partial or full reports of the inquiry process to regional or national zoo and aquarium associations or to relevant government wildlife, conservation, and law enforcement authorities.
11. In the event that the WAZA Ethics Concern and Inquiry process leads to the provisional and/or final termination of the WAZA Member, WAZA reserves the right to communicate the decision to the audiences deemed appropriate in the suitable manner. This communication will be overseen by the WAZA Executive Office and the WAZA Executive Committee, and will be limited to a concise explanation of the facts, outlining the WAZA Ethics Concern and Inquiry process and announcing the outcome.

NOTE: See attached diagram for the WAZA Ethics Concern and Inquiry Process

