



COMMITTED TO CONSERVATION? An Overview of the Consortium of Charitable Zoos' *In Situ* Conservation Dividend

A paper by the Born Free Foundation, May 2007

The EC Directive on zoos (Council Directive 1999/22/EC) entered into force in April 1999, requiring Member States to ensure that zoos are licensed and inspected, and to implement a framework for their participation in education and conservation. It was given force of law by the countries of the UK in 2003.

This legal framework provides a legal underpinning to the recent shift in the stated aims of many zoos which have refocused their aims to include active conservation. The ways in which zoos can participate in species conservation are outlined in numerous guidelines and “aspirational” documents including the Secretary of State’s Standards for Modern Zoo Practice (DEFRA 2004), Zoos Forum Handbook (Zoos Forum undated), and the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (WAZA 2005). Zoos may undertake conservation both *in situ* (in a species’ habitat and range) and *ex situ* (outside a species’ habitat and range). This report will focus on zoos’ commitment to *in situ* conservation.

Consortium of Charitable Zoos

Nine British zoological societies, generally representing the UK’s largest zoos in financial terms, commissioned a report entitled “The Manifesto for Zoos”, which attempted “*to establish the overall value and true “public good”, actual and potential, available to British Society through the progressive UK zoos*” (Regan 2005, p. 5). This group of zoological societies represent a total of 13 zoos, and has adopted the name of the Consortium of Charitable Zoos (see Appendix B).

Methods and Results

Financial information:

The annual returns and reports (2005) of the 13 Consortium Zoos were obtained from the Charity Commission and reviewed. The available financial information for several key activities was extracted and is presented in Appendix A. This information was used in an attempt to assess the degree of financial commitment to conservation in the wild.

However, in some cases, annual returns and reports do not give sufficient detail on income and expenditure to allow full details for each zoo activity to be determined. For example, Mace *et al.* (in press) acknowledge the problems associated with auditing zoos’

spending on conservation: “while one zoo director might choose to include expenditure on animals in the collection that are the focus of conservation breeding programmes as conservation spend, another might only report on unrestricted resources spent on field conservation.” Consequently, information is only included where reasonable evidence is available. Without access to the zoos’ full accounts, it is impossible to verify the situation with total accuracy, and therefore the results presented here should be assumed to be an estimate, based on the best information available.

The results indicate that in 2005, the Consortium Zoos:

- Had a combined turnover of over £89.6 million (n=13 zoos)
- Spent nearly £29 million (n=12 zoos) on animals in their collections
- Spent £0.6 million (n=4 zoos) on their gardens
- Spent £2.1 million (n=9 zoos) on education

From those returns for which it could be determined (n=11), the Consortium Zoos spent a total of £3.4 million on conservation *outside the zoos’ collection*. This represents about 4% of their annual turnover. Regan (2005) states that in 2003, the Consortium Zoos spent more than £6 million on *in situ* conservation. Assuming a similar turnover in 2003, this represents about 6.7% of their total income being spent on *in situ* conservation. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume a range of around 4 - 6.7%.

Public opinion:

An opinion poll* was commissioned by the Born Free Foundation to assess current public beliefs about the conservation activities of zoos (see Appendix C). Respondents (not necessarily zoo visitors) were asked the following question: “*What percentage of UK zoos’ annual income do you think is spent on conservation of threatened species in the wild?*”

The results show that:

- 19% of people think that UK zoos spend 1-10% of their income on conservation in the wild.
- 24% of people think that UK zoos spend more than 40% of their annual income on conservation in the wild.
- On average, people think that UK zoos spend nearly 25% of their income on conservation in the wild.

* ICM Research interviewed a random sample of 1004 adults aged 18+ by telephone between 22-23 May 2007. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Further information at www.icmresearch.co.uk

Conclusions

The Consortium Zoos appear to spend relatively little on conservation in the wild (probably within the range 4 - 6.7% of their annual income). While it could be argued that *in situ* conservation forms only part of their publicly-stated and now legally-required commitment to conservation, other evidence (Born Free Foundation 2007) indicates that their commitment to *ex situ* conservation is also less than might be expected – for example, less than one quarter of species kept these zoos are classed as threatened in the wild. Serious consideration should therefore be given to whether Consortium Zoos are fulfilling their conservation requirements. Furthermore it is likely that many other UK zoos are failing to even match the conservation performance of these large charitable zoos.

There is a clear difference between what the public believe zoos spend on *in situ* conservation and what is actually being spent. At least 69% of the public believe that zoos are spending more on conservation in the wild than they actually are. This may be due in part to a general underestimate by the public of the costs of running a zoo. However, the high profile that zoos appear to give to their conservation activities (for example, Regan (2005) states that Consortium Zoos are “*intent on effectively profiling*” their conservation activities “*before the huge attendant educational audience to maximise synergies*” (p.22)) may be causing the public to overestimate the resources spent. Large investments in zoo enclosures and infrastructure attract considerable publicity, but the benefit to real conservation is not always clear or quantifiable.

In summary, the claims that the “*Progressive zoos are leaders in conservation, not followers*” (Regan 2005) is not supported by the evidence, if commitment of resources to *in situ* field conservation is the criteria used.

References

- Born Free Foundation (2007). Is the Ark Afloat? – Captivity and *Ex Situ* Conservation in UK Zoos. Born Free Foundation
- DEFRA (2004). Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- ICM Research / Born Free Foundation (2007). Is the Ark Afloat? Captivity and *Ex situ* conservation in UK zoos. BFF
- Mace GM, Balmford A, Leader-Williams N, Manica A, Walter O, West C & Zimmermann A (in press). Measuring conservation success: assessing zoos' contribution in: Zimmermann A, Hatchwell M, Dickie L & West C (eds.), Zoos in the 21st Century: Catalysts for Conservation?
- Regan J (2005). The Manifesto for Zoos. John Regan Associates Ltd.
- WAZA (2005). Building a Future for Wildlife – The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy. World Association of Zoos and Aquariums
- Zoos Forum (undated). Zoos Forum Handbook. Available online via DEFRA website, www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/qwd/zoosforum/handbook/index.htm

Conservation Commitment in UK Zoos – the Costs

Appendix A:

Summary of financial information for Consortium Zoos from Annual Returns to the Charity Commission (2005)

	Attendance	Incoming			Outgoing					
		Gate receipts	Total Visitor-related	TOTAL	Animals	Gardens	Conservation ¹	Education	Charitable expenditure	TOTAL
Bristol Zoo	391322	3284000	4256000	7203000	1812000	410000	108000	324000	5102000	6763000
London Zoo	813455	-	-	31276000	18074000	-	1539000	-	23790000	27755000
Whipsnade	474723	-	-			-				
Chester Zoo	-	10233000	-	18981000	4328000		476000	612000	10869000	16549000
Paignton Zoo	451809	2845967	-	6677111	1165051	233523	754759	293485	-	6610179
Newquay Zoo	175708	878575	-		246817	-		82915	-	
Living Coasts	145384	534586	-	797009	147323	703	-	87037	-	941242
Edinburgh Zoo	-	2886096	-	8741986	1294676	-	149660	313520	5284159	8129359
Highland Wildlife Park	-	384146	-		258139	-	0	0		
Welsh Mountain Zoo	-	661784	-	878505	653666	9903	0	-	746209	910252
Twycross Zoo	-	-	415725	6068096	329698	-	34000	-	3491146	4856773
Marwell Zoo	453092	-	-	6585774	-	-	357090	363086	3605958	5040336
Dudley Zoo	-	909784	1123881	2373940	604852	-	-	71741	1613625	2192159

“-“ indicates figure could not be confirmed

¹ In the wild

Conservation Commitment in UK Zoos – the Costs

Appendix B:

Consortium of Charitable Zoos - Zoological Societies and their zoos

- The Zoological Society of London (Regent's Park Zoo & Whipsnade Wild Animal Park)
- The North of England Zoological Society (Chester Zoo)
- The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (Edinburgh Zoo & Highland Wildlife Park)
- The Bristol and Clifton Zoological Society (Bristol Zoo)
- The Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust (Paignton & Newquay Zoos and Living Coasts)
- Marwell Preservation Trust (Marwell Zoo)
- Twycross Zoo East Midlands Zoological Society
- Dudley Zoological Society
- Zoological Society of Wales (Welsh Mountain Zoo).

Appendix C:

ICM Research interviewed a random sample of 1004 adults aged 18+ by telephone between 22-23 May 2007. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Further information at www.icmresearch.co.uk

Respondents were asked the following question:

“What percentage of UK zoos annual income do you think is spent on conservation of threatened species in the wild?”

Results:

0% / None	1-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	>50%	Don't know
34 3%	191 19%	185 18%	180 18%	98 10%	106 11%	131 13%	79 8%

Mean: 25.96
Standard deviation: 17.50
Standard error: 0.58