

Should you build a rescue centre?

*Practical advice for governments considering
a Positive List to regulate the sale and keeping
of exotic animals as pets*



EUROPEAN ALLIANCE OF RESCUE CENTRES
AND SANCTUARIES

About EARS

Registered as non-profit foundation in the Netherlands, EARS is a unique collaboration of wild animal rescue centres and sanctuaries across Europe. We currently have fifteen partner organisations across twelve countries working together to achieve mutual animal welfare and conservation goals. Our network of Partner facilities specialise in a wide range of animals species including bears, monkeys, apes, big cats, small mammals, reptiles, birds and amphibians.

To find out more about EARS please visit our website at www.ears.org.



Introduction

An increasing number of governments in Europe have now either implemented or are considering implementing a 'Positive List' for the keeping of exotic animals as pets. A Positive List has been recognized by the European Court of Justice as an accurate solution to regulate the trade and keeping of exotic pets. The legislation is concise and enforceable, providing a better protection of the animals' welfare and new species being brought into trade along with less onerous management for authorities. It has proven to be an effective, proactive and evidence-based method of managing the exotic pet trade that is far more practical and straightforward than existing systems of regulation. For more information about the Positive List regulation [click here](#).

It is important to realize that the implementation and enforcement of a Positive List lead to a certain amount of already-owned exotic pets that will no longer be allowed as pets in private households.

One option often considered to overcome this is to create facilities that can house these animals, either on a permanent basis or with a view to relocating the animal to a permanent home later on. But this is not the only alternative available and, although this sounds like an obvious and simple solution, the creation of such facilities is a huge commitment and deserves serious consideration.

In this document EARS draws on the experience of its partners to provide a *broad overview* of what is required in setting up a wild animal rescue centre or sanctuary and, perhaps most importantly, what is required to ensure its long term sustainability. **It is not intended as a comprehensive guide nor is it meant to replace the bespoke advice that would be required when actually building and running such a facility.**

Are there alternatives to building a rescue centre?

Before considering the various aspects of setting up and running a rescue centre or sanctuary it is important first to consider what alternative options there might be for ensuring the care and welfare of the wild animals in question. As noted later in this document, the costs involved in creating and running a wild animal facility are considerable so it is sensible to first consider alternatives:

'Grandfathering'

In cases where the animals in question are already under private ownership it may be appropriate to provide special dispensation for the animals to stay in-situ if the owner is able to provide adequate care for the animal. Ownership of new animals and breeding would not be permitted and so the existing population of owned exotic pets would steadily reduce through natural decline. If such an approach was adopted it is important that the 'grandfathered' animals are registered and individually identified using a technique such as micro-chipping.

Support existing facilities

There may be rescue centres or sanctuaries already in operation in your country. Providing funding and other support to these facilities may prove more cost-effective than creating a new facility.

Outplace animals directly

Most rescue centres do not provide lifetime care for their animals. Instead, they provide temporary care and then look to outplace the animal in an appropriate lifetime facility. Such facilities include zoos or existing rescue centres and sanctuaries. Depending on the situation in the given country it may be possible to place animals with such facilities directly.

Practicalities to consider before you proceed

If you decide to set up a rescue centre or sanctuary, you are taking on the responsibility for the health and welfare of thousands of animals. Ensuring you can meet this responsibility should be the key focus of everything you do and there are many practical and ethical considerations. The information contained here is not exhaustive and aims to raise the questions that should be considered – rather than answering them comprehensively:

Location

It is important to ensure that you choose the right location for your facility. Are you able to find a location with the following attributes?:

- Quiet location with no significant air pollution/odour - to reduce stress in animals and prevent sounds and smells of animals disturbing neighbouring residents.
- Good transport links.
- Space available for expansion in the future.
- Ensure the land is owned outright or has a very long lease.

Construction

The construction of the facility is clearly a very important stage in the process and specific advice will be needed to ensure your facility is built in a way that enables excellent animal care as well as easy day-to-day management. Ensuring expert input on the design of the facility at the very beginning, before construction begins, will help you to avoid mistakes that can cause serious problems later down the line that are not easy to solve. In particular, it may be important to design enclosures so that they can house many different species. An important principle when building animal enclosures is that high quality, solid cages are more expensive but far more cost-effective in the long term.

What species?

Many rescue centres and sanctuaries specialise in providing care for a specific group of animals. The knowledge and experience needed to care for wild animals often necessitates this specialisation. Other facilities aim to provide care for a wide range of

species. The approach you take should be determined largely by the 'need' – what species/groups of animals will require care following the introduction of a positive list in your country. For example, if the positive list being introduced in your country deals only with mammals then setting up facilities that can handle reptile rescue may not be appropriate. Networking with other facilities in Europe will be essential for those species that need care but cannot be accommodated by your facility (see below). However, even when a rescue centre makes the decision to specialise, there may be situations where other species need to be cared for so a degree of flexibility needs to be built into your plans.

Open to the public?

While many rescue centres and sanctuaries are closed to the public, many more use the work they do as a way of reaching out to a wider audience. If done correctly these facilities can play a valuable role in educating members of the public about issues such as exotic pet ownership and the use of wild animals in entertainment. However, any public visits need to be carefully managed to ensure that animals are not exposed to undue stress and to ensure visitor safety (physical and from zoonosis).

What policies?

Any rescue centre or sanctuary will need to decide its policy on a range of issues affecting the day-to-day running of the facility and the welfare of the animals housed there. Some of the most important of these are listed here:

Intake policy

What species of animal will you take in? Will you only accept confiscated animals? Will you insist on a payment from private owners who want to give up their animal? Will you only take an animal when you are convinced that it will not be replaced by the owner at a later date?

Breeding policy

Will you allow breeding at your facility? Will you neuter all animals that cannot be released back into the wild? Allowing animals to breed, or relocating them to facilities that will, adds to the overall burden on those providing care for captive wild animals and

results in even more wild animals being kept in captivity for the rest of their lives. All EARS partners have a no breeding policy at their facilities and actively work with outplacement facilities to ensure animals are not bred from unless it is part of a registered captive breeding programme.

Euthanasia policy

What are the circumstances under which you would consider euthanizing an animal? What are the processes you will follow to ensure decisions are applied in a consistent way? Some facilities only euthanize animals when they are physically sick or injured but it is also important to consider the animals psychological state and your ability to provide it with a good life. Simply keeping an animal alive and physically healthy is not good enough and euthanasia may be preferable to a lifetime in captivity where the animal does not have a life worth living.

Outplacement policy

What facilities will you relocate animals to? What standards will you insist on? What are the processes for ensuring these standards are being met?

Staffing

Experienced and committed staff will you be your most important and valuable resource. Unfortunately there is no school or university for wild animal care and the people with the specialist skills needed to work in wild animal rescue centres are rare – even non-existent in some parts of the world. Before you consider building a rescue centre make sure you have identified who will run it for you and that there are enough people with the right skills available to provide all the care needed for the animals housed there. This should be done *before* the decision is made to create new facility. Volunteers can also play an important role in a rescue centre and many go on to become staff in the future. However, it is very important not to become too dependent on volunteers – you must always be able to ensure the care of the animals without relying on them.

Long-term costs

Securing funding to build your rescue centre is clearly essential. However, the long term running costs for your facility will be far higher and often more difficult to fund. Building

a full business plan for your facility with a plan for how you will fund it over the long term is very important – and it should be done alongside your plans for building the facility.

Networking

Even multi-species rescue centres will struggle to provide care for all species of animals that are brought to them. Even where animals can be taken in they will eventually need to be relocated to a lifetime care facility. To deal with such circumstances it is essential that you build relationships with other rescue centres and sanctuaries across Europe and beyond. Not only will this help you to place animals you cannot take in, these facilities will be an invaluable source of information and guidance – no-one knows everything! EARS is well placed to help you in this respect.

**For more information or advice please do not
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