

EARS non-breeding and rehoming policy

To join EARS criteria include “Appropriate measures must be taken to prevent propagation and to have species appropriate contraceptive programmes in place”. All sanctuaries and rescue centres should aim to achieve a zero birth rate for all animals housed at their facilities. It is acknowledged that: (a) there is limited technical knowledge of contraception for some species; (b) when separation is the only preventative option, this method can be compromised when animals arrive in large numbers; (c) in the case of confiscation and whilst the government maintains ownership of the animal the Partner is obliged to follow the decision of the responsible governmental body and may not be allowed to implement permanent sterilisation; (d) some countries will not allow wildlife to be permanently sterilised; and (e) when part of recognised programmes, breeding may contribute to endangered species conservation.

EARS criteria also include “Work to ensure intake and outplacement helps to reduce the reasons that cause animals to need rescue, rehabilitation and sanctuary, and not increase it”. Rescue centres by their very nature provide short-term accommodation with the aim to release back into the wild or find longer-term and permanent solutions for the animals they rescue. Finding suitable rehoming options with good animal welfare standards is imperative for rescue centres to make space and continue to rescue other animals in need. Opting to permanently sterilise animals can limit the rehoming options when the receiving facilities prefer species/animals that have not been sterilised. At the same time however EARS Partners must not contribute to the problem of animal surplus if animals are allowed to breed once they leave their facility. Surplus animals may end up in illegal and sub-standard facilities, or enter the pet and entertainment trade, and thus increase the number of animals that will eventually require rescue. Rescue centres also need to consider how the re-homed animals may be presented to the public and how that can impact on the welfare of the individual as well as the public perception of the animal.

In accepting the basic principle of trying to prevent breeding and using permanent sterilisation whenever possible, EARS rescue centre Partners are required to:

- Work with rehoming facilities to encourage them to accept animals permanently sterilised, or where permanent sterilisation methods are not available for the species or prohibited, prevent breeding by other means, unless they are to be part of a recognised conservation breeding programme.
- Conduct on-going evaluation as to the implications of offering non-breeding animals to rehoming facilities. If this is not already part of rescue centre practice, they will be asked to initiate this policy as part of the review to be allowed to join EARS and maintain Partner status.
- Annually summarise decision-making when animals are rehomed without permanent sterilisation. When large numbers of animals are involved, the decision can be communicated for the species (indicating numbers involved) rather than individual animals. Again this will be an obligation for rescue centres to join EARS and maintain Partner status.

At the same time EARS will:

- Explore collaborating with EAZA and other relevant stakeholders regarding a mutual policy to prevent breeding of non European Endangered species Programme (EEP) and European StudBook (ESB) species.
- Assess the possibility of liaising with the EAZA Group on Zoo Animal Contraception (EGZAC) <http://www.egzac.org/> to access technical advice for species that is currently lacking. EARS Partners will need to provide a list of species where knowledge is lacking and expert support needed.
- Explore funding options to help Partners when finance is the issue to implement birth control for large numbers of animals.