

CONSERVATION OF WILD ANIMALS IN ZOOS: INTERNATIONAL LAWS ARE REQUIRED

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Abstract. Wild animals are an intrinsic part of ecosystems and should live in their natural environment in consonance with ecological laws and ethics (intrinsic rights). However, considering multiple risk factors such as poaching, habitat damage, and climate change, the captivity of wild animals in zoos may be unavoidable for the effective protection of endangered wildlife. Although living conditions in zoos are crucial for the survival/conservation of wildlife, captive animals, nevertheless, live in various accommodation conditions worldwide. Therefore, this Opinion proposes that international laws and standards are required to provide sufficient quality conditions for wild animals in zoos worldwide.

Main points:

- 1) Zoos should play an important role for the conservation of wildlife.
- 2) Living conditions in zoos are crucial for the survival of wildlife.
- 3) International standards are required for assuring minimum quality living conditions for captive animals.

According to ecological laws and human ethics, all wild animals should live in their natural environment and be protected from human induced cruelty. But currently, despite many organizations working for the protection of wildlife (e.g. PETA 2019; IFAV 2019), the captivity of wild animals in inappropriate conditions (e.g. small cages and insufficient food) in zoos, aquariums and circuses is still widespread globally due to insufficient local and international regulations.

Therefore, international laws/conventions protecting wild animals from human cruelty must be initiated, developed, and implemented worldwide by the United Nations organizations. For instance, all wild animals (and especially large mammals with high cognitive and emotional abilities) must be protected from exploitation/use in circuses (e.g. lions, tigers, bears, elephants) and aquariums (e.g. whales, dolphins, seals, etc.) due to the ethical basis and very small (inadequate and cruel) enclosures. Particular attention should be given to zoos. Obviously, all wild animals are truly significant beings and a natural part of the global ecosystem and must live in their natural environment (e.g. wildlife sanctuary/conservancy areas) in consonance with ecological laws and ethics (intrinsic rights). However, presently there are many adverse factors for wild animals living in natural habitats, due to, among others, poaching (Beale et al. 2018), deforestation, and climate change (IPCC 2019). Therefore, the captivity of wild animals in artificial en-

vironments (zoos) may be unavoidable for the effective protection of endangered wildlife.

According to the international conservation organizations, all zoos should contribute to the conservation goal, but substandard zoos may instead lead to extinction (IUCN 2019). Even well funded large public zoological gardens and parks (with relatively good living conditions) may have very different effects on the survival of captive animals (e.g. 16% of 62 analyzed mammal species live longer in the wild than in captivity) (see Table 1) (Tidière et al. 2016). But in small zoos worldwide, the conditions for captive animals are usually much worse and individual longevity is shorter. Therefore, international standards should be developed for zoos and aquariums to provide adequate quality conditions and care (wellbeing) for all wild animals in captivity (enclosures area, natural design, healthy diet/sustenance, and veterinary control). Particularly good quality accommodation conditions are required for wild animals with high cognitive and emotional abilities characterized as sentient beings (e.g. primates, bears, big cats, and elephants). Such standards may be developed and promoted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in cooperation with ecological organizations and World Association for Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and implemented worldwide by a United Nations (UN) resolution/convention.

Table 1. Comparative longevity of animals in zoological parks and wild populations (Tidière et al. 2016).

Animal species	Longevity (years)	
	Zoos populations longevity (male/female)	Wild populations longevity (male/female)
American antelope	9 / 10	11 / 15
Alpine ibex	14 / 15	15 / 20
European roe deer	8 / 10	10 / 14
Fallow deer	11 / 15	15 / 16
Chimpanzee	30 / 37	36 / 44
White faced capuchin	11 / 13	14 / 26
Sandy wallaby	8 / 9	9 / 14

Also, the UN should take a more active stance in the protection of wildlife from human induced cruelty by imposing sanctions on the leaders/rulers of countries (and all other involved policy makers) where wild animals are abused.

Considering the global problem of wild fauna degradation caused by human activity (overhunting/poaching, environmental pollution, and habitat transformation) and climate change (IPCC 2019), internationally regulated/controlled zoological gardens and parks can be a practical solution for the conservation and research of wild animals as well as a valuable instrument for public education and employment improvement.

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