

# POSITION STATEMENT

## Captive Facilities for Wildlife: Zoos and Aquaria

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### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Captive facilities for wildlife often take the form of zoological gardens (zoos) and aquaria, where collections of wild terrestrial and aquatic animals are housed for study, conservation and/or display to the public. Zoos and aquaria have over many years played an important role in the conservation and education of the public about wildlife and their natural habitats. Despite their potential contribution to conservation, when these facilities are not managed in accordance with national standards (SANS 10379:2005<sup>1</sup>) and with the conditions of permits issued by relevant authorities, the welfare of the animals they house and the contribution of the facility to conservation is compromised.

### BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

BirdLife South Africa recognises the important and legitimate role which captive facilities such as zoos and aquaria play in education and awareness and their contributions to the study and conservation of terrestrial and aquatic animals.

BirdLife South Africa is supportive of captive facilities that meet all the required animal husbandry standards for the welfare of captive animals. BirdLife South Africa supports these facilities if they are managed in accordance with the standards set out by Standards South Africa (a division of SABS, SANS 10379:2005<sup>1</sup>) and, where applicable, the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries Norms and Standards relating to the Management of Seabirds in Captivity<sup>2</sup>.

All facilities must have suitable resources and capacity, both financial and physical (i.e. staff and enclosures), to ensure the safety and well-being of all animals in their care. All animals must be kept in humane conditions that cater not only for their physical needs but also provide mental stimulation appropriate to the species in captivity.

Veterinary care should be on hand whenever needed and the safety of the animals, their caregivers and any visitors to the facilities must always be ensured.

BirdLife South Africa is in support of captive facilities which promote the conservation of species through scientifically-based conservation management plans that promote positive benefits for the global population of a species. Captive breeding programmes that are carefully designed and well managed can benefit the long-term survival of threatened species and provide a unique platform for further biological research to improve our understanding of species and inform the development of effective conservation strategies for wild populations. Breeding programmes must take responsibility for all offspring produced. Surplus individuals should not be sent to canned hunting facilities, medical research institutions or sold or auctioned for illegitimate conservation or awareness purposes.

BirdLife South Africa recommends that captive facilities must maintain a strong educational component which encourages members of the public to engage in a safe and respectful manner with their animals and which teaches

them about the threats facing biodiversity and how they can support conservation programmes in the wild to save these species. These captive facilities might, for many individuals, be the first and/or only point of contact with wild animals and their role in education should not be underestimated.

BirdLife South Africa supports captive facilities which provide funding and/or technical expertise to support in situ conservation research and implementation in the natural habitats of their captive species to preserve healthy wild populations.

BirdLife South Africa only supports the removal of wild individuals from their natural habitats if this is carried out in a sustainable, transparent and humane manner with little impact on their natural habitat, and in compliance with all applicable conservation laws and permit conditions. BirdLife South Africa recommends that when wild individuals are removed to captivity, this should be carried out under the supervision of a relevant third party observer/organisation which is able to verify that the process is sustainable and non-detrimental to the individual, its species or the habitat from which it is removed. If wild individuals are caught to supplement a captive breeding programme, this is only supported if it is done within strict and controlled conditions for the purposes of breeding, conservation, education or research. Where possible, these individuals should be returned to the wild as soon as possible. All necessary health and safety protocols that provide the animal with the best possible chance of survival should be followed and careful consideration should be given to the timing of release as well as the location to ensure that the chance of survival is maximised. Facilities must ensure that individual animals destined for reintroduction to the wild are treated in an ethical manner that reduces the chances of habituation to humans and enables animals to maintain their wild instincts as far as possible. Careful consideration of potential disease transmission and spread from reintroduced individuals must be accounted for and prevented as far as possible. All animals should undergo screening for known diseases and be cleared by a qualified veterinarian prior to release.

<sup>1</sup> South African National Standard for Zoo and Aquarium Practice can be downloaded at [www.zoosafrika.com/userDownloads/DOC1332863285.pdf](http://www.zoosafrika.com/userDownloads/DOC1332863285.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Norms and Standards relating to the Management of Seabirds in Captivity [www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/gazetted\\_notices/nemba\\_seabirdsmanagementincaptivity\\_g427759n1329.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/gazetted_notices/nemba_seabirdsmanagementincaptivity_g427759n1329.pdf)