



EAZA Statement on the proposed sale of Pont-Scorff Zoo, France

Amsterdam, 19 December 2019: The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) has learned with surprise and concern that an Animal Rights consortium calling itself “Rewild” is in the process of buying Pont-Scorff Zoo in France. This coalition has published statements regarding its plans to reintroduce all of the animals currently housed at the zoo to countries where the species can be found in the wild. They have further stated that they intend to use the facility as a rescue centre for the housing of animals confiscated by French authorities prior to these animals also being reintroduced to the wild. EAZA is in contact with the Association Française des Parcs Zoologiques (AFdPZ) to understand more about the situation, and we understand that the sale of the zoo has not yet been finalized; however, in the face of public calls from the Rewild coalition for funding for their project, EAZA feels obliged to issue a statement to outline our grave concerns.

Pont-Scorff is a zoo licensed under the EU Zoos Directive and a Full Member of EAZA. As part of a cyclical programme, the zoo is due to be inspected by an EAZA accreditation team in 2020 to ensure that it meets our high Standards of animal care and welfare, conservation contribution, conservation education and scientific research. Zoos meeting these Standards contribute strongly to biodiversity protection through an evidence-based approach to species conservation and are recognized by international conservation bodies as important part of the conservation community. EAZA collectively manages over 200 population management programmes (EAZA Ex Situ Programmes, or EEP) aimed at maximising the conservation effectiveness of sustainable populations of each species across all of our 350 or so zoos and aquariums. Many of the animals at Pont-Scorff are part of the EEP programmes, and decisions about where these animals can be housed or transferred should always be made collectively by specialist panels based on genetic, demographic and individual animal need.

Reintroduction is undoubtedly an important part of conservation, and EAZA has significant expertise in this area. Decades of experience have taught us that reintroductions must be carried out holistically, aimed at what is right for the species populations as a whole, and must involve stakeholders including conservationists, political actors and local communities in range states. These are complex operations that should not be carried out lightly, and certainly not for the purposes of ideology or public relations.

For reintroduction projects, EAZA follows closely the Guidelines for Reintroductions and Conservation Translocations published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the world’s largest and most effective conservation organisation. These guidelines make clear:

1. Reintroduction projects must be undertaken with the understanding that success will take decades and mortality rates of reintroduced animals will be unavoidably high (up to 70% in some cases even with good protection and supervision).
2. Sites for reintroduction must be chosen carefully, so as not to introduce new animals into an ecosystem that cannot support them or which will be damaged by their introduction. Wrongly placed animals can destroy whole populations of native wildlife species and irreversibly damage their ecosystem.

3. Animals chosen for reintroduction should bring a demonstrable conservation benefit by improving the genetic or demographic profile of the population they will join.

The Rewild consortium's plan shows no understanding of these principles, and no intention of engaging with experts in the field or conservation NGOs on the ground. Let us be clear about the consequences of this action:

1. Animals going to areas which have already reached the maximum capacity for the species (due to habitat loss, poaching or other human factors) face a very high risk of starving to death, being killed by predators or competitors, or being killed by humans.
2. Animals going to areas under the management of conservation NGOs will upset the detailed plans of these projects and ultimately put their success in jeopardy. Rescue centres in range states are usually overburdened and this project will probably only add to the pressure they face.
3. The investment required to reintroduce every animal at Pont-Scorff would run to millions of euros, to be spent on animal training, animal transport and monitoring of the animals over decades to ensure the success of the project. Unless there are clear needs for the conservation of the species, this money will therefore not be available for meaningful conservation projects which are often in serious need of resources to support their work.

The consortium informs the public that the site will become "the only rescue centre for confiscated animals in France". This claim is manifestly untrue. EAZA Members, including French zoos, have supported authorities with rescue work by offering expertise and housing confiscated animals. Indeed, CITES research has demonstrated that the vast majority of animals confiscated are housed temporarily or permanently at zoos. This work is highly specialized, and often deals with animals that are psychologically disturbed or in poor physical health; again, the consortium shows no understanding of this fact.

EAZA therefore urges the public to consider if they really want to contribute money to what is a misguided scheme. €600,000 would make an enormous difference to conservation groups, and we would therefore ask people to consider donating to professionally administered and scientifically based conservation projects rather than to the ideologically driven pipe dreams of amateurs. Animal species are in serious trouble; we need serious solutions if we are to ensure any kind of future for them, and Rewild's plans do not represent any form of progressive thinking in conservation.