

# EAZA Position Statement on Bears in Commercial Entertainment



- The EAZA Bear Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) members are recognised experts on the husbandry and welfare of bears that are held under human care.
- EAZA members abide by codes and standards, most notably the 'EAZA Code of Ethics' and the 'EAZA Minimum Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria'. Additionally, for the housing and care of bear species EAZA members follow the EAZA Husbandry Guidelines for bears.
- EAZA and its Bear TAG do not support any use of bears for reasons of purely commercial entertainment, especially when such use involves the manipulation or removal of the bear from its normal social group or enclosure.

The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) represents 340 members from 41 countries, of which more than 280 are located in the European Union. EAZA collections house more than 250,000 animals, excluding fish and invertebrates. Under the umbrella of the EAZA Bear TAG, EAZA runs conservation breeding programmes for six bear species, namely: European brown bear, polar bear, Asiatic black bear, sloth bear, Malayan sun bear and spectacled bear. In this context we wish to present our position on the use of bears purely for commercial entertainment.

Bears held under human care in zoological gardens fulfil an ambassadorial role for their wild living conspecifics as well as highlighting the plight of bears that are illegally traded and used, and often misused, for purely commercial entertainment purposes. Bears held in EAZA zoos are of importance for getting a (bear) conservation education message across to the general public. As such these individual bears are flagships for their own species as well as for other species sharing the same natural habitats. However, bears can only fulfil these roles if they are held and treated in a sympathetic way that allows them to take advantage of as wide a range of their natural behavioural repertoire as possible.

In order to provide appropriate physical and social environments, so that bears held under human care in zoos do contribute to conservation education, the EAZA Bear TAG has developed guidelines covering all aspects of bear husbandry in human care. One of the key tenets is that undisturbed natural rearing is crucial for the development of normal species-specific behaviour. Therefore cubs should stay with their mother until an age that is comparable with when a wild bear would disperse from its mother, *i.e.* at 1.5 to 3 years of age. The circumstances that dictate when dispersal occurs can vary due to the species of bear, the level of dependency on the dam, or negative shifts in the tolerance levels of the dam towards the growing cubs. Removing bear cubs prematurely from their parent is both highly stressful to the mother and young concerned, and it can negatively impact upon the long term psychological wellbeing and diminish the range of required social skills of the cub. This must never be considered for purely commercial entertainment purposes like filming for the

entertainment industry, production of an advertisement, or any other venture whose main purpose is commercial entertainment.

Additionally, large cubs and adult bears are powerful animals, which cannot be easily handled or manipulated as is generally necessary for shooting a film for the entertainment industry. Commercials or entertainment films often present animals in ways designed to fit human attitudes and expectations which can be contrary to the respect bears of any species deserve. The EAZA Minimum Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria (2008), which all EAZA members abide by, excludes any bear from any EAZA member institution being taken out of its enclosure for any purpose other than veterinary treatment or the transport of an individual from one zoo to another at an appropriate age.

Therefore the EAZA Bear TAG, as well as the parent professional organisation that is EAZA, are against the use of bears for purely commercial entertainment purposes, especially when it results in the premature removal of offspring from the environment they are being reared in.

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#### **About EAZA:**

- The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) represents 340 members from 41 countries, 300 of which maintain public collections of animals. More than 280 institutions of the total EAZA membership are located within the European Union.
- EAZA member institutions receive approximately 140 million visitors a year and house more than 250,000 animals, excluding fish and invertebrates.
- EAZA member institutions employ 20,000 staff members, 5,000 of which are seasonal;
- EAZA has a significant social role in educating European citizens about animals, their conservation, and overarching threat processes such as climate change, habitat loss and how consumer behaviour interacts with these global challenges;
- EAZA has adopted the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (2005) which articulates the modern role of zoos and aquariums and their commitment to conservation;
- EAZA institutions in the European Union comply with Council Directive 1999/22/EC which relates specifically to the keeping of wild animals in zoos and aquaria;
- EAZA encourages its member institutions to apply for approval under article 13 (2) of Council Directive 92/65/EEC as this legislation enhances a collection's animal health status;
- For more information about our association, please visit: [www.eaza.net](http://www.eaza.net)