

Code of animal welfare and ethics

Zoos Victoria is a just, humane and effective zoo-based conservation organisation committed to securing a future rich in wildlife.

Compassion is embedded in Zoos Victoria's mission. We are committed to caring for animals in the wild and at our zoos, and engaging the community to care for animals and wild places. Central to this mission is a focus on positive animal welfare to ensure that all animals within our care have a life worth living.

Zoos Victoria believes that an ethical zoo is one that can provide robust moral justification for housing animals, demonstrates a commitment to superior animal welfare, is grounded in an empirical operating philosophy and always on a path of continuous improvement. Consequently, Zoos Victoria's decision-making is guided by three key questions;

1. Is it justified?
2. Is it humane?; and
3. Is it effective?

These questions underpin the three guiding principles of Zoos Victoria's *Code of Animal Welfare and Ethics*. Associated with each guiding principle is a set of commitments that inform our daily operations and aspirations.

1. Justification

Zoos Victoria ensures that all activities undertaken across our three zoos are aligned with our conservation mission. These activities can contribute to conservation outputs through:

- Wildlife conservation - Actions that are associated with species recovery programs;
- Community conservation - Actions that are designed to influence and engage the community in our conservation campaigns; and,
- Financial sustainability - Actions that provide financial support for our conservation or animal welfare work.

All activities must demonstrate support of one or more of the roles above, whilst also complying with the Humaneness section of this Code.

2. Humaneness

Zoos Victoria's focus on positive animal welfare requires us to meet the physical, social and psychological needs of individual animals, allowing them to exercise choice, control and agency in their lives. Accordingly, the commitments below inform how our organisation ensures humaneness and achieves its animal welfare goals.

- We provide environments that facilitate thriving in animals. This means:
 - We will only house species and individuals that we are confident can thrive in our care; and,
 - Environmental conditions, including climate and sensory experiences, need to be within a range in which the animal can thrive.



2. Humaneness (cont.)

- We recognise that thriving begins with an understanding of the animal's life in nature and requires an effective simulation of function, focusing on what is important to the animal. This means:
 - Physical housing, social housing and behavioural opportunities offered to animals are based on the species natural history and individual animal needs; and,
 - Husbandry routines for each animal also consider the species biological rhythms and individual animal preferences, inclusive of the provision of choice and agency.
 - We provide choice, control and learning opportunities for animals in their daily lives. This means:
 - Animals are provided with an appropriate intensity and frequency of challenges, variation and stimulation;
 - Any interaction with visitors will be in the control of the animals. Visitor engagement activities are designed to be a positive experience for both the animals and the visitors; and,
 - Animal training programs use the most positive, least intrusive approach and focus only on natural behaviours or behaviours important for proactive health care.
 - We provide proactive and comprehensive health and nutrition programs for animals at all stages of their lives.
 - We commit to whole of life care for animals. This means:
 - We ensure robust life-planning for all individuals, ensuring breeding only occurs if the life-long needs of all offspring can be met;
 - We will follow species management recommendations that align with overall species conservation plans and advocate to maximise positive welfare for individuals (including consideration of social and behavioural consequences);
 - Animal transfers will only occur with others that demonstrate ethical and welfare-centred values consistent with our own;
 - Artificial-rearing will only occur as a last resort if it is in the best interests of the individual animal(s); and,
 - When preparing animals for release to the wild, we will give careful attention to physical and behavioural requirements for a life in the wild.
 - We foster innovation and continuous improvement, including proactive identification of risks and opportunities to enhance animal welfare.
 - Animal welfare is an established component in our conservation activities; we consider the potential welfare implications associated with any management interventions.
- In addition to ensuring good quality of life and high standards of animal welfare, a further consideration of the humaneness dimension for Zoos Victoria is how we portray the animals in our care. As an organisation committed to conservation, we value the role of animals in the wild and their respective natural environments. Our commitments include:
- We ensure that all human interaction with animals demonstrates care, compassion and respect for the species and individual by focussing on natural behaviours and avoiding human dominion;
 - All animal engagement, presentations and keeper talks are aligned with Zoos Victoria's conservation messages that articulate how visitors can take action to help the cause; and,
 - All external messages are communicated in a way that is respectful of animals to showcase our passion for both wildlife within our care and within the natural environment.



3. Effectiveness

Zoos Victoria is dedicated to reaching our vision and mission in accordance with this Code. To achieve this, Zoos Victoria draws upon an empirical operating philosophy (driving evidence-based management) and will provide appropriate funding and resources to drive progress.

As such, our commitments to ensure effectiveness include:

- We engage in evidence-based zoo management and investment in the scientific evaluation of our conservation and animal welfare efforts;
- We ensure that our animal care staff:
 - Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the natural history and the needs of each species/individual including animal behaviour, nutrition, physical and social housing needs and seasonal events relevant for the species/individual;
 - Demonstrate respect towards animals they work for and animals in the wild;
 - Are provided with the time, resources and training to be attentive towards the animals in their care, including observing, monitoring and recording behaviour; and
 - Are provided with opportunities to foster curiousness, critical thinking and ongoing learning;
- We ensure that our staff practice the highest standards of animal care, and have the capacity to manage exceptional circumstances and periods of changed behaviour (e.g. births, introductions, transfers and zoo events);
- We prioritise and urgently respond to any welfare risks identified through Zoos Victoria's processes; and
- We encourage a culture of openness and critical thinking in animal welfare and look to both science and ethics to advance our organisational standpoint.

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