

## AZA Accreditation Standards and Animal Wellbeing

### Inspector Resource Guide (updated 10-21-24)

#### Wellbeing Considerations

**From Animal Welfare, Care & Management Section Preamble:** AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums operate based on three core principles: animal wellbeing, safety, and visitor engagement. Excellence in animal wellbeing is the underlying foundation on which all standards and practices are premised and developed. All reasonable concerns regarding the wellbeing of individual animals or groups must be thoroughly assessed and corrected. Institutions should incorporate commonly accepted animal care and management guidelines and follow a documented process for assessing animal wellbeing that is rooted in animal welfare science. Failure to comply with the wellbeing and welfare-based standards present in all sections of this document will result in the loss of AZA accreditation.

**From Veterinary Care Section Preamble:** AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums must assure the health of all animals in their care. In addition to a strong foundation of professional animal care staff, the utilization of a highly qualified veterinarian and veterinary staff, and the access to modern veterinary facilities is required. All concerns regarding the health of animals must be assessed, treated, and corrected as a priority utilizing the expertise and resources of the veterinary team and as also available through AZA and AAZV.

**From Conservation Section Preamble:** Conservation ethics, practices, messaging, and funding helps enhance the wellbeing of animals in the wild and their counterparts in human care. Animal wellbeing should be considered as a component of field conservation projects supported by AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums.

**From Education and Interpretation Section Preamble:** AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums must be innovative and dynamic conveyers of their science-based mission and goals. Knowledge creates awareness that leads to change, and impacts animal wellbeing in both AZA-accredited institutions and in the wild. Educated populations are overwhelmingly more supportive of actions and practices that promote the care, wellbeing, and conservation of wildlife.

**From Scientific Advancement Section Preamble:** Studies performed or supported by AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums advance knowledge and understanding of animals and the individual needs of each species. Through knowledge gained, AZA-accredited institutions help to improve the wellbeing of both animals in human care and their counterparts in the wild.

**From Governing Authority Section Preamble:** It is critical that an AZA-accredited zoo or aquarium's governing authority provide the institution with attentive and consistent support to assure the institution's ability to continuously promote and enhance animal wellbeing. Consistent and strong leadership and support by a governing authority may help avoid or mitigate shortfalls and other conditions that could potentially affect the quality of animal wellbeing within the institution.

**From Staff Section Preamble:** It is critical that an AZA-accredited zoo or aquarium's governing authority provide the institution with attentive and consistent support to assure the institution's ability to continuously promote and enhance animal wellbeing. Consistent and strong leadership and support by a governing authority may help avoid or mitigate shortfalls and other conditions that could potentially affect the quality of animal wellbeing within the institution.

**From Support Organization Section Preamble:** It is important for an AZA-accredited zoo or aquarium's support organization to recognize and understand the importance of animal wellbeing and the components of animal welfare and to support the institution in areas that will enhance its ability to continuously promote enhanced wellbeing for the animals in its care (for example, funding staff training and development, etc.). Support organizations that are primarily focused on individual institution memberships should support animal wellbeing through communications with the membership about the care provided daily by the institution to assure that the animals in its care thrive.

<b>From Finance Section Preamble:</b> A healthy, stable financial condition is critical to assuring the institution's ability to continuously promote and enhance animal wellbeing. An inadequate financial position and/or contingency plan can have a direct and negative affect on the quality of animal lives and continued modernization of the institution.	
<b>From Physical Facilities Section Preamble:</b> The condition, size, appropriateness, and functionality of animal areas have a direct impact on animal wellbeing. AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums must consider these factors when assessing welfare inputs for each individual animal or group of animals in their care. Institutions should incorporate commonly accepted care and management guidelines and follow a documented process for assessing animal welfare, especially the spaces in which they live. All facilities within an institution reflect the organization's commitment to quality and modernization.	
<b>From Safety/Security Section Preamble:</b> One of the three core principles upon which AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums operate is safety. Facilities must be properly maintained, infrastructure sound, proper practices in place, staff aware and trained, and a culture of safety inherent throughout the institution. All reasonable concerns regarding the wellbeing of individual animals or groups, guests, and staff must be thoroughly assessed and corrected.	
<b>From Guest Services Section Preamble:</b> Guest perception drives success. AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums must continually strive to provide diverse, high quality experiences for all guests. Leadership in animal care and management requires building and maintaining living environments that present well to the guest and support healthy animals engaged in natural behaviors. This is among the top things guests cite as leading to a positive impression of the institution and an overall inspiring experience.	
<b>From Master &amp; Strategic Planning Section Preamble:</b> As a science-based institution focused on excellence in animal care and management, animal wellbeing, conservation, and the continued advancement of guest and community engagement, a strong commitment to master and strategic planning for continuous change and evaluation is the foundation of adhering to "modern zoological practices and philosophies." Strategically assessing all aspects of operations and routinely renovating and/or replacing old exhibits with new modern habitats that are designed with animal wellbeing in mind, is something that is expected of all AZA-accredited institutions. In addition, continuous and careful planning for new and innovative education programs and guest experiences reflects commitment to professionally recognized best practices and modern philosophies.	
Select Accreditation Standards	
Input	Output
<b>1.5.0</b> The institution must have a process for assessing animal wellbeing via welfare assessments.	Review animal wellbeing program documents in advance of the inspection. While onsite, ask for some random assessments, including significant life assessments. Ask to see the results of assessments and action plans to address any animal wellbeing compromise.
<b>1.5.1</b> All animals must be well cared for and presented in a manner reflecting modern zoological practices in exhibit design, balancing animals' wellbeing requirements with aesthetic and educational considerations.	Observe the animals and their exhibits. Do enclosures provide for the physical and behavioral wellbeing of the animals? How are animals using their space? Are the animals expressing natural behaviors?
<b>1.5.2</b> All animals must be housed in enclosures which are safe for the animals and meet their physical and psychological needs.	Observe the animals and their exhibits. Do enclosures provide for the physical and behavioral wellbeing of the animals? How are animals using their space? Are the animals expressing natural behaviors?
<b>1.5.2.1</b> All animals must be kept in appropriate groupings which promote wellbeing and meet their social needs.	Observe the animals. Do animals appear to be compatible with and engaging positively with enclosure mates? Are any animals displaying incompatibility with enclosure mates, avoidance, or significant aggression? Are there social animals that are being housed alone? If so, that should be further explored.

<b>1.5.2.2</b> All animals should be provided the opportunity to choose among a variety of conditions within their environment.	Are animals engaged with their environment? Are they making full use of the enclosure space, fixtures, and furnishings?
<b>1.5.4</b> Animals in ambassador programs must be maintained and cared for by paid and/or unpaid trained staff, and housing conditions in their primary enclosures must meet AZA Standards. While outside their primary enclosure, although the conditions may be different, animal safety and wellbeing must be assured at all times.	Inspect animal facilities to confirm housing and care are consistent with that provided other collection animals. Observe animals in holding and during programs. Are animal safety and wellbeing primary considerations during programming? Do any animals appear to be stressed?
<b>1.5.7</b> Within the animal's habitat, there should be particular emphasis on species-appropriate physical environments including weather, temperature, sound, vibration, light, and air and water quality.	Are protection and accommodation provided to animals in the event of such conditions? Are animals using these measures? Have there been any instances of compromise to an animal's wellbeing due to weather, temperature, or other environmental conditions?
<b>1.5.8</b> The institution must develop and implement a clear and transparent process for identifying, communicating, and addressing animal wellbeing concerns from paid or unpaid staff within the institution in a timely manner, and without retribution.	Review submitted documents outlining the institution's animal wellbeing concern process. While onsite, ask random staff members if they understand and trust the process for submitting animal wellbeing concerns. Has the institution dealt with a wellbeing concern in the past five years? If so, how was that concern resolved from the perspective of the animal?
<b>1.5.9</b> The institution must have a regular program of monitoring water quality for fish, marine mammals, and other aquatic animals. A written record must be maintained to document long-term water quality results and chemical additions.	Review water quality monitoring data. Ask if there have been any instances of animal wellbeing concerns related to inappropriate water quality parameters.
<b>1.5.10</b> Temporary, seasonal and traveling live animal exhibits, programs, or presentations (regardless of ownership or contractual arrangements) must be presented and maintained at the same level of care as the institution's permanent resident animals, with foremost attention to animal wellbeing considerations, both onsite and at the location where the animals are permanently housed.	Observe live animals used for temporary, seasonal, or traveling exhibits for overall health and behavior. Are animals being cared for up to Accreditation and institutional standards? Do animals appear to be in good health and body condition? Are any animals displaying abnormal behaviors or signs of stress?
<b>1.5.11</b> Animal transportation must be conducted in a manner that is safe, well-planned, and coordinated, and minimizes risk to the animal(s), employees, and general public. All applicable laws and/or regulations must be adhered to.	Ask if there have been instances of animal injury, escape, death, or other compromise in wellbeing as a result of transport?
<b>1.5.14</b> If animals are housed either long-term or permanently in indoor facilities, the appropriate UV spectrum for the species (based on the knowledge available to date) should be provided in these enclosures.	For animals housed indoors, ask if there have been instances or ongoing issues with lighting.

<b>1.5.16</b> When sunlight is likely to cause overheating or discomfort to the animals, sufficient shade (in addition to shelter structures) must be provided by natural or artificial means to allow all animals kept outdoors to protect themselves from direct sunlight.	Observe the animals for signs of overheating or discomfort. If shade or shelter is provided, are the animals utilizing those features? Are there sufficient areas of shade or shelter to accommodate all animals at the same time if so desired?
<b>1.6.1</b> The institution must follow a formal written enrichment program that promotes species-appropriate behavioral opportunities.	If present, review enrichment records. Do they indicate progress towards behavioral goals? Observe animals with provided enrichment. Do animals appear to be engaged with exploring/manipulating enclosure furnishings and enrichment items? Are they interacting with enrichment in a manner that is appropriate for the species? Does enrichment elicit the desired behaviors?
<b>1.6.4</b> The institution should follow a formal written animal training program that facilitates husbandry, science, and veterinary procedures and enhances the overall health and wellbeing of the animals.	Observe multiple training sessions while onsite. Do written records and personal observations of training sessions indicate consistent progress towards husbandry and veterinary goals? Do animals consistently participate in training sessions? Are they attentive and engaged?
<b>2.0.2</b> The veterinary care program must emphasize disease prevention and promote positive animal wellbeing.	Ask if there have been any wellbeing concerns associated with a lack of appropriate healthcare. Are programs in place to provide continuous preventive, routine, clinical, and emergency care for the animals? Do animals appear to be in good health?
<b>2.0.6</b> Paid and unpaid animal care staff should be trained to assess wellbeing and recognize abnormal behavior and clinical signs of illness and have knowledge of the diets, husbandry, and restraint procedures required for the animals under their care.	When meeting with staff, ask if they feel they have received appropriate job skills training related to the husbandry and management of the animals under their care. Have there been any instances where a lack of husbandry knowledge has negatively impacted an animal's wellbeing?
<b>2.0.7</b> Trends in the overall health and mortality of the animals should be monitored and evaluated over time to strengthen the preventive medicine program.	Does the institutions have methods of monitoring trends in animal health and mortality? Is this information being used to inform management decisions? How is this information being used to improve the lives of the animals?
<b>2.6.2</b> The institution must follow a written nutrition program that meets the behavioral and nutritional needs of all species, individuals, and colonies/groups in the institution. Animal diets must be of a quality and quantity suitable for each animal's nutritional and psychological needs.	Do animals appear to be well-nourished and in good body condition? Are animals engaged in foraging and/or other means of acquiring food items relevant to their natural history? Have there been any health issues related to poor or inappropriate nutrition?
<b>2.6.3</b> If the institution uses browse plants as part of the diet or as enrichment items for its animals, the items must be identified and reviewed for safety prior to use.	Does the institution have methods of determining which browse species are safe to feed and to which species? Have the parts of the plants that are safe to feed been identified? Is a list of approved browse plants per animal species maintained? Have there been any instances of animal illness due to exposure to or ingestion of toxic plant material?
<b>2.8.1</b> Pest control management programs must be administered in such a manner that the animals, paid and unpaid staff, the public, and wildlife are not threatened by the pests, contamination from pests, or the control methods used.	Ask staff if there have been any instances of animal or human illness, injury, or death associated with pest species.

<b>6.3</b> The CEO/Director must be responsible for day-to-day management of the institution, including animal acquisition, transfer, wellbeing, euthanasia, and reintroduction, paid and unpaid staff, and programs.	While onsite, confirm the director's understanding of his/her responsibility for the wellbeing of all collection specimens.
<b>7.3</b> There must be an adequate number of trained paid and unpaid staff to care for the animals and to manage the institution's diverse programs.	When meeting with staff, ask if they feel the staffing level is adequate to support the wellbeing of collection animals. Are there examples where limited staffing has resulted in negative impacts to the wellbeing of animals?
<b>10.2.1</b> Critical life-support systems for the animals, including but not limited to plumbing, heating, cooling, aeration, and filtration, must be equipped with a warning mechanism, and emergency backup systems must be available. Warning mechanisms and emergency backup systems must be tested periodically.	Have there been any failures of critical life support systems for animals? If so, ask if any failures were associated with wellbeing concerns for the animals?
<b>10.3.2</b> Ventilation must be sufficient in all indoor facilities, including animal holding.	Ventilation should be sufficient to provide enough fresh air to meet the respiration needs of animals. Are there observable signs of animal discomfort or health issues with the animals due to poor ventilation? Ask if there have been any respiratory issues with the animals that could be related to inadequate ventilation.
<b>11.3.1</b> All animal exhibits and holding areas must be secured to prevent animal escape.	Have there been any animal escapes? If so, were escaped animals recovered? Were any animals adversely affected? Were there any human or animal injuries?
<b>13.4</b> Animal welfare (including requirements under standard 1.5.0) must be considered during the design and development of all new and/or renovated animal facilities (including exhibit space <i>and</i> holding areas).	Ask if animal wellbeing has a seat at the table when planning new and/or renovated animal facilities? Is animal wellbeing a primary consideration in the design, development, and construction processes? Are the habitat features designed to support the desired outcomes for the animals? Are there examples from the animal's perspective where new or redesigned habitats have had positive or negative impacts on the wellbeing of the animals?