

## Global Elephant Management Program

Harald M. Schwammer

*Vienna Zoo, Tiergarten Schönbrunn, Vienna, Austria*

The Planning meeting for a global elephant management group took place from 23. - 25. August 2007 in Tiergarten Schönbrunn, Vienna, Austria. This article informs about development, structure, global approach and vision dealing with elephants under human care.

### Participants

Peter Dollinger

WAZA

*waza.director@bluewin.ch*

Ton Dorresteyn

Rotterdam Zoo

EAZA Elephant TAG Chair

EAZA Asian Elephant Co-Studbook Keeper

*directie@rotterdamzoo.nl*

Mike Keele

Portland Zoo

AZA Elephant TAG/SSP Chair

AZA Asian Elephant Studbook Keeper

*mike.keele@oregonzoo.org*

William Meikle

Taronga Zoo

ARAZPA

*wmeikle@nzoo.nsw.gov.au*

Debbie Olson

Indianapolis Zoo

AZA African Elephant Studbook Keeper

*dolson@indyzoo.com*

Kumar Pillai

Singapore Zoo

SEAZA

*kumar@zoo.com.sg*

Harald Schwammer

Vienna Zoo

EAZA Co-Chair Elephant EEP

*h.schwammer@zoovienna.at*

Brandie Smith

AZA

*bsmith@aza.org*

Amelia Terkel

Zoo Ramat Gan

EAZA Co-Chair Elephant EEP

EAZA African Elephant Studbook Keeper

*Amelia@safari.co.il*

Martin Van Wees

Rotterdam Zoo

EAZA Asian Elephant Co-Studbook Keeper

*m.van.wees@rotterdamzoo.nl*

### Introduction

A group of zoo professionals within the IUCN Conservation Breeding Specialist Group met in 2004 and expressed their concern that none of the regional elephant populations appeared to be sustainable. This group also determined that zoos play an important role in elephant conservation through fundraising and their education programming. The group met again in Syracuse, New York in 2005 and examined the benefits of a global approach to managing regional elephant programs. They identified a list of global challenges, which could hinder zoos from keeping elephants in the future. Challenges were categorized by communication, reproduction, management, cooperation, finances, research and conservation. The group recommended that the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) set up a global group consisting of TAG chairs and studbook keepers from the regional zoological associations. This group, with their experience and expertise in elephant care, management, and conservation, would be responsible for developing a plan to ensure the continuation of *ex situ* elephant populations and enhance their impact on conservation. WAZA's Committee on

Inter-Regional Conservation Cooperation (CIRCC) agreed, at their mid-year meeting in April 2007, that there was a need for an inter-regional group of elephant experts.

Concurrently, Regional Program coordinators were reaching similar conclusions. A group that included representatives from the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), Australasian Regional Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria (ARAZPA), Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), and South East Asian Zoos Association (SEAZA) agreed that global management and collaboration would be necessary to maximize the management and reproductive goals for ex situ elephant populations. As a result, they agreed to convene and begin examine the need and feasibility of an inter-regional elephant program.

From 23. – 25. July 2007 elephant experts from ARAZPA, AZA, EAZA, SEAZA attended a meeting hosted by the Vienna Zoo to discuss a global strategy for managing zoo elephants.

## **Global Elephant Management Program structure**

There will be a single program covering all species/subspecies of elephants.

### *Chair*

Harald Schwammer (unanimously elected as Chair by meeting participants)

### *Members*

Comprised of elephant program leaders from each of the regional zoological associations. Associations, which have already agreed to participate, include EAZA, ARAZPA, SEAZA, and AZA.

Recently the members of the board are:

Ton Dorresteyn, Rotterdam Zoo, EAZA Elephant TAG Chair, EAZA Asian Elephant Co-Studbook Keeper ([directie@rotterdamzoo.nl](mailto:directie@rotterdamzoo.nl))

Mike Keele, Portland Zoo, AZA Elephant TAG/SSP Chair, AZA Asian Elephant Studbook Keeper ([mike.kele@oregonzoo.org](mailto:mike.kele@oregonzoo.org))



William Meikle, Taronga Zoo, ARAZPA  
(wmeikle@nzoo.nsw.gov.au)

Debbie Olson, Indianapolis Zoo, AZA African  
Elephant Studbook Keeper  
(dolson@indyzoo.com)

Kumar Pillai, Singapore Zoo, SEAZA  
(kumar@zoo.com.sg)

Harald Schwammer, Vienna Zoo, EAZA Co-  
Chair Elephant EEP (h.schwammer@  
zoovienna.at)

Amelia Terkel, Zoo Ramat Gan, EAZA Co-Chair  
Elephant EEP, EAZA African Elephant  
Studbook Keeper (Amelia@safari.co.il)

GEMP has been approved by WASA in August  
2007.

### *Studbook*

An international studbook is not recommended  
at this time. Regional coordinators will work  
with each other as needed to share data for  
population management and research.

### *Advisors*

Appointed from each of the regional zoological  
associations (e.g., Public relations advisors will  
be Lisa Keen, ARAZPA, and Steve Feldman,  
AZA)

### **Vision statement of the Global Elephant Management Program**

The Global Elephant Management Program is  
comprised of inter-regional elephant experts  
working cooperatively to initiate conservation,  
education and research programs to ensure that  
elephants continue to exist in our care and in the  
wild.

### **GEMP recommendations for population sustainability**

1. Place all potential breeding bulls in a  
breeding situation.

2. Exchange breeding bulls that have sired an  
adequate number of viable offspring in one  
institution.
3. Place all potential breeding females –  
especially those under 25 years old – in a  
breeding situation. Monitor reproductive  
cycles of all individuals in breeding  
situations.
4. Encourage development of matriarchal  
family units including female offspring, and  
keep these units intact. However, to promote  
additional stable female groups or prevent  
young cows from breeding with their fathers,  
it is acceptable in some cases to move groups  
of sibling or half-sibling females away from  
their matriarchal unit.
5. Facilities without a bull that are temporarily  
sending potential breeding females to be  
inseminated at another zoo should send  
whole female groups, or relevant units of a  
group, to the host zoo.
6. Further development of artificial  
insemination (AI) techniques should be  
encouraged; however it should never replace  
the most important method of reproduction:  
'natural' reproduction. AI must be carried out  
only upon recommendation and approval of  
the regional coordinator, just as with any  
other breeding recommendation.
7. All zoos that rebuild elephant facilities  
should design new enclosures that can hold  
at least one bull and four cows. If a zoo is  
not able to start keeping a bull within a  
reasonable period of time, the zoo will be  
considered a non-breeding facility and  
recommendations for that institution will be  
to only obtain/house non-reproductive  
females.
8. Development of facilities for bachelor herds  
of several adult bulls is urgently needed.  
Bulls should be kept in bachelor herds when  
they are temporarily not in a breeding  
situation or before they reach that stage.  
Bachelor herd facilities should stimulate  
relevant social behaviour between the  
surplus bulls, and serve as a genetic reservoir.
9. While it may be desirable, keeping young  
elephants in their family group until they  
reach puberty is often not practical for  
breeding management. Young elephants  
should preferably not be transferred out of  
their family units before they are four to five

years of age. A young elephant being transferred should be accompanied by at least one other member of the herd in which it was born.

10. When an animal is transferred, it is recommended that an elephant keeper from the receiving institution spend some time working with the animal at the sending institution first. Additionally, a keeper from the sending institution should accompany the animal to the receiving institution for a suitable period of time when possible.
11. New/renovated enclosures should be constructed to provide flexibility for all management styles in such a way that maximises animal welfare and keeper safety.
12. Close cooperation between regional breeding programs, e.g. exchange of bulls, is vital to the sustainability of elephant populations.
13. Disease has an impact on populations (e.g., TB, EEHV) and further research is needed. Veterinary experts should continue

to work on minimizing and managing disease.

14. Dissemination of information (e.g., veterinary, management) is essential for the success of cooperative programmes.
15. All institutions holding elephants should contribute to the conservation of elephants in the wild.

The GEMP started its business, and first action is to establish a global information system for professionals. The first digital package has been sent around with topics like basic information about GEMP, new results of herpes-research and recommended future research programs on elephants.

We are now informing and contacting all national zoo-federations and also establish a veterinarian – expert list from all continents. So the whole program now could be started.

*Author's e-mail: [h.schwammer@zoovienna.at](mailto:h.schwammer@zoovienna.at)*



Captive elephants in Sumatra  
Photo from the VESSWIC archive