



# THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF AZA ANIMAL WELLBEING CULTURE

## Introduction

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and its members **believe that the wellbeing of the animals in our care is both our moral responsibility and foundational to AZA's mission.**

One of the priorities in **AZA's Strategic Framework for the Wellbeing of Animals** is to “*Cultivate a common culture of commitment to the wellbeing of animals across all member facilities and partners.*” Culture encompasses the shared language, values, beliefs, rules, expectations, behavioral norms, and practices that tie a community together and guide collective actions. In July 2023, the AZA Board of Directors approved twelve guiding principles related to animal wellbeing. These guiding principles elevate and reinforce the shared values and strong ties that unify the entire AZA community around animal wellbeing. The principles and their associated behaviors are tools to foster rich discussions and provide a means of self-assessment by which facilities can review current practices, celebrate successes, and develop aspirational plans. They exist as touchstones to which members can refer when faced with decision-making challenges, guide us toward continual improvement, and display AZA's commitment to hold ourselves to the highest standards.

## AZA's Definition of Animal Wellbeing

**Wellbeing - a state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy; achieved by AZA facilities giving animals lifelong opportunities to thrive.**

This is supported through:

- Leadership, culture, and operations
- Science and innovation
- Expertise and passion
- Collaboration and sharing
- Engagement and communication
- Our approach to the conservation of species and natural spaces





# The Guiding Principles of AZA Animal Wellbeing Culture

**1** Facility senior leadership visibly supports, prioritizes, and promotes a culture of animal wellbeing education and advocacy within the entire staff.



- Directors/leadership regularly and intentionally refer to animal wellbeing as a community core value internally and externally.
- Leaders actively build a culture that assures all staff members feel engaged, informed, and understand how their role is tied to animal wellbeing.
- Leaders inspire passion for animal wellbeing in staff and promote the involvement of staff in wellbeing-focused activities, particularly those that grow their expertise.
- Leaders proactively dedicate resources to advance animal wellbeing.

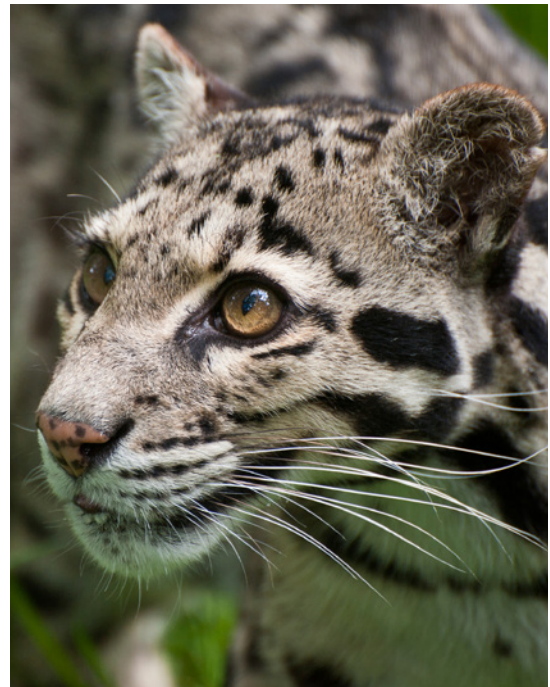
**2** We commit to visibly demonstrating animal wellbeing in a way that encourages our staff, guests, and audiences to respect and protect animal wellbeing in zoos, aquariums, and in the wild.

- We empower all staff and guests at AZA facilities to ask questions about animal wellbeing in a safe, open, and curiosity-driven environment.
- Animal spaces, graphics, communications, interpretive materials, and educational programming are designed to promote positive public perception of and respect for animals.
- We model caring for animals to inspire action by our communities.



### 3 We consider the wellbeing of all animals in operational and facilities planning and decision making.

- Organizations articulate and adopt a philosophy of how they meaningfully consider animal wellbeing in planning and decision-making related to events, media operations, construction, research, conservation and education activities, pest management, animals fed to other animals, culinary operations, and the products in their supply chain.
- We prioritize animal wellbeing during the design and development of all new and renovated animal facilities, and regularly reevaluate for opportunities to enhance wellbeing in existing exhibit spaces and holding areas.
- We create opportunities for animals to express highly motivated, biologically driven natural behaviors and incorporate these opportunities into facilities planning and design.
- We support the development of resilience in animals to overcome challenges, problem solve, and successfully interact with their environments.
- Animal wellbeing considerations are prominently positioned in master planning, collection planning, and animal transport plans.



### 4 Animal management decisions incorporate individual animal wellbeing and population health outcomes that support future individual animal wellbeing.



- We consider and value animal wellbeing in the development of breeding and transfer plans.
- We appropriately breed, move, and introduce animals in pursuit of population management goals.
- We value the positive impacts of genetic diversity and healthy populations on individual animal wellbeing.



**5** We will manage the types and frequencies of negative life experiences for animals, recognizing that appropriate risks and challenges have a positive role in life.



- We acknowledge that an entirely stress-free life is not conducive to lifelong wellbeing.
- We identify acceptable stresses and risks.
- We are willing to take informed and managed risks when deemed appropriate.
- Leaders actively engage in staff discussions around appropriate risk/stress in the context of animal care and wellbeing.

**6** We continually invest in evidence-based approaches to learn more about the animals in our care and apply that knowledge to standards and practices in a way that enhances animal wellbeing over each animal's lifetime.

- We fund, participate in, and/or devote resources to research related to the wellbeing of animals.
- We regularly assess and respond to changes in animal wellbeing based on how an animal is responding in its current environment (outputs), in addition to what we provide to an animal (inputs).
- We integrate new scientific findings with professional experience and institutional knowledge to evolve husbandry practices and advance animal care.
- We regularly adapt accreditation standards and animal care manuals as new knowledge becomes available.
- We educate inspectors and facilities to ensure equitable application of standards regarding animal wellbeing.



**7** AZA facilities provide tools, resources, and training for staff to effectively assess and address the wellbeing of animals and grow their expertise in animal welfare science.

- We prioritize the time and funding necessary to support learning and professional development opportunities related to animal wellbeing.
- AZA maintains and continually enhances a platform for evidence-based animal wellbeing resources and training.
- Facilities regularly implement and update their own staff training related to newly available information and resources.
- We collaborate to implement and expand husbandry skills training across taxa to enhance animal wellbeing.



**8** Animal wellbeing is everyone's responsibility across AZA and is made stronger through active collaboration.



- AZA maintains a forum to share professional knowledge and evidence-based experiences across facilities.
- Facilities work together in good faith to advance more scientific research and innovation related to animal wellbeing.
- Husbandry, health, and wellbeing status will be shared when moving animals between AZA facilities, including insights made during the welfare assessment process that may impact the individual animal's wellbeing at its new home.
- AZA and its members respond to issues or disasters that impact animal wellbeing, as appropriate.



9 AZA members communicate about animal wellbeing in consistent, transparent, evidence-based, impactful, and accessible ways.



- We encourage confidence in animal care staff and build trust between animal care and communications teams to advance animal wellbeing storytelling with the public.
- We celebrate and communicate animal wellbeing successes in ways that support public trust-building.
- We commit to better understanding our audiences to refine the delivery of our messages in ways that are inclusive and accessible to all.

10 As leaders in animal wellbeing, we actively seek diverse and well-defined partnerships based on shared goals that contribute to learning, growth, innovation, and sharing of knowledge.



- AZA facilities advance partnerships with organizations that can help us move specific, shared objectives forward, even if they may not perfectly align with all of our values.
- We clearly identify the scope of public partnerships between AZA facilities and external partners and communicate this broadly and early to interested parties (e.g., to facility staff, the public, fellow AZA members, the AZA office).
- We engage in collaborative relationships with other regional zoo and aquarium associations.

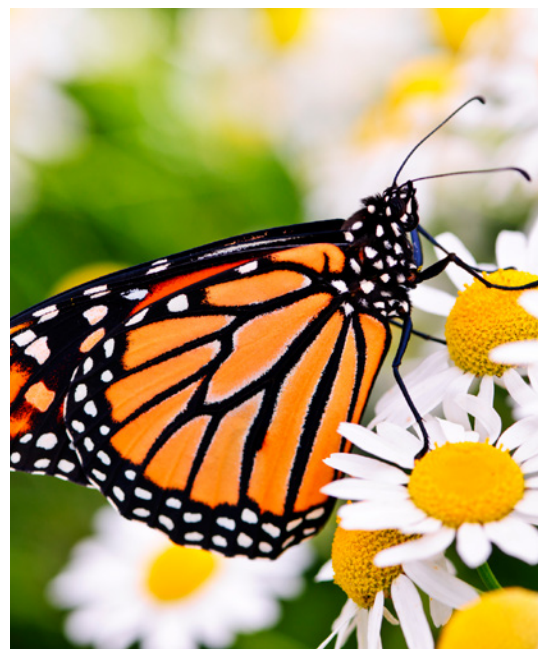
## 11 AZA facilities assert expertise as trusted voices to influence the public discourse on animal wellbeing issues.



- We step in and speak on issues on which we have standing in the community.
- We employ a storytelling strategy that is a mix of proactive and reactive opportunities.
- We inspire our experts to stretch their willingness to share their expertise.
- We support and advocate for better legislation to address animal wellbeing issues.

## 12 We support wildlife conservation and the preservation of natural spaces and consider the wellbeing of animals, both *in situ* and *ex situ*, in the planning and implementation of field conservation and research activities.

- Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees or their equivalents review cases where conservation or research activities have the potential to be physically, emotionally, or mentally impactful for animals, and the value of each project is considered in balance with its impact on animal wellbeing.
- To improve the opportunities for success, we intentionally and thoughtfully condition animals planned for reintroduction to the wild prior to release, and our plans align with IUCN Conservation and Translocation Specialist Group guidelines and relevant government authority regulations.
- We support initiatives and take action to prevent illegal wildlife trade, promote responsible and appropriate pet ownership, and reinforce AZA SAFE program goals.





## AZA Wellbeing Culture and Communication Visioning Team

### FACILITATOR

**Tracy Smith**

Principal and Founder  
Ryden Consulting Group, LLC

### AZA STAFF

**Dan Ashe**

President and Chief Executive Officer

**Candice Dorsey, PhD**

Senior Vice President, Conservation,  
Management, and Welfare Sciences

**Rob Vernon**

Vice President of Communications

**Erika Bauer, PhD**

Director of Animal Wellbeing

**Clara Arndtsen**

Animal Wellbeing Program Assistant

### MEMBERS

**Kelley Anderson, PhD**

Conservation Programs Manager  
Disney's Animals, Science and Environment

**Kyle Burks, PhD**

Executive Vice President and Chief Operating  
Officer  
Audubon Zoo

**Chris Dold, DVM**

Chief Zoological Officer  
SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment

**Johnny Ford**

Senior Director of Public Relations  
John G. Shedd Aquarium

**Sharon Joseph, MBA**

Consultant  
Birmingham Zoo

**Aaron Marshall, PhD**

Chief Operating Officer  
Santa Barbara Zoo

**Lisa New**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
Zoo Knoxville

**David Powell, PhD**

Director of Research  
Saint Louis Zoo

**Adrienne Rowland**

Director  
Shark Reef Aquarium at Mandalay Bay

**Mandi Schook, PhD**

Science Operations Director  
Disney's Animals, Science and Environment

**Scott Terrell, DVM, Dipl ACVP**

Director, Animal and Science Operations  
Disney's Animals, Science and Environment

**Jackie Wallace**

Senior Director of Public Relations and  
Communications  
Houston Zoo

**Jason Watters, PhD**

Adjunct Associate Professor  
University of California - Davis

**Keith Winsten**

Chief Executive Officer  
Brevard Zoo

**ASSOCIATION  
OF ZOOS &  
AQUARIUMS**