



Investigation into the conditions in zoos in the Spanish Region of Valencia

BACKGROUND:

InfoZoos is a coalition of three non-government organisations dedicated to the welfare and conservation of wild animals. Members of the coalition include ANDA (Madrid, Spain), Attentio-DEPANA (Barcelona, Spain) and the Born Free Foundation (UK). InfoZoos was established in 2006 to assess the level of compliance in Spanish zoos with the requirements of the national zoo law (31/2003), and seek to uphold high standards in animal welfare, public safety and animal care.

Since April 2004, it has been mandatory for all 17 Autonomous Communities of Spain to implement and enforce Law 31/2003, established by the Spanish Ministry for the Environment to regulate zoos and ensure they meet their obligations under European law to conserve biodiversity. The Law requires all zoos (as defined¹) to be licensed and annually inspected to meet minimum requirements in conservation, education and animal care, including the establishment of environmental enrichment programmes. The Law states that failure to comply with these requirements should result in zoo closure.

The reality, however, was very different. In 2006, two years after the implementation deadline, the Spanish Autonomous Communities had, in general, paid little attention to these legal requirements and had failed to implement and enforce the Law.

In 2006, InfoZoos carried out a pilot study of 8 zoos in 6 Autonomous Communities on the Spanish mainland and the Balearic Islands, which involved the assessment of their status and performance in relation to the requirements of the Law and further European zoo guidance. The results of this study, and additional enforcement information, resulted in legal intervention by the European Commission, which prompted action by some Spanish Autonomous Communities to transpose the Law into regional regulation. However, continued failure by some Autonomous Communities to recognise their obligations has led to further investigations by InfoZoos, which has included the assessment of zoos in the Canary Islands, published in 2008. The results of this investigation influenced the decision by the regional authorities to close of a number of zoos on the Islands and the implementation of a Regional Decree.

INTRODUCTION:

In the Autonomous Community of Valencia, which is believed to have one of the largest number of zoos out of all the Spanish Autonomous Communities (a total of 9 known zoos), the law was transposed into the Regional Decree in 2007 (83/2007) and all zoos were reportedly licensed and inspected. InfoZoos is keen to ensure that licensed zoos meet their legal requirements, therefore our investigation into the *Conditions in Zoos in Valencia*, unlike those previously undertaken, aims to assess the quality of zoo inspection and the degree of compliance by zoos in Valencia with the Law 31/2003.

¹ A 'zoo' is "a permanent establishment, public or private, that displays wild animals. Act 31/2003

Safari Park Vergel Oceanográfico de Valencia Río Safari Elche Jardín del Papagayo Bioparc Valencia	Fauna Ibérica Mini-Zoo Devesa Gardens Safari Aitana Mundomar Benidorm
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Figure 1, zoos visited and assessed as part of the InfoZoos investigation into the status and performance of zoos in the Region of Valencia.

METHOD:

During the summer of 2008, experts from InfoZoos visited 9 known zoos in the Autonomous Community of Valencia and assessed their status and performance against the requirements of Law 31/2003 and Standards established by EAZA (European Association of Zoos and Aquaria) and AIZA (Iberian Association of Zoos and Aquaria). Particular focus was placed on their performance in conservation, education, exchange of information, the environmental quality of animal enclosures and safety. In each zoo, 30 enclosures were selected at random and assessed for their environmental quality, using the criteria indicated and described below.

RESULTS:

The following provides a collective overview of status and performance of the 9 zoos visited and assessed in the Region of Valencia in relation to the requirements of Law 31/2003. This information should be regarded as a summary of the findings across the zoos and not specific to any one of the zoos assessed. The individual reports on each assessed zoo have been presented to the Valencian Government together with this summary document.

Please note: in order to best interpret the figures used in this summary document, be aware that 100% represents compliance with the minimum requirements established by Law 31/2003. It does not reflect the optimum conditions. Therefore, should a criterion assessed reach a score of 95%, it should be perceived as close to achieving the minimum requirement for that criterion. However, should the criterion score 30%, the conditions are far from meeting the minimum legal requirement.

CONSERVATION:

“Zoos are required to draw up, develop and implement *ex situ* conservation programmes for wild animals, which, since they are removed from their natural habitat, must be aimed at helping to conserve biodiversity”. Act 31/2003

Conservation includes *in situ* conservation, activities undertaken to protect the species in their natural habitat, and *ex situ*, the captive breeding of the species outside their natural habitats.

Results of the study:

► Conservation commitment: it is apparent that the majority of zoos recognise that their commitment to conservation is their involvement in *ex situ*, captive breeding. However, overall only 18.5% of the species evaluated in the 9 zoos are listed in the IUCN Red List of Threatened species. In 1 zoo, despite the fact that an official European-wide co-operative breeding programme exists for 90% of the species displayed, only 10.8% of these species in the zoo appeared to be *actively* involved in the official breeding programme.

► Only 55.5% (5 of the 9 zoos investigated) participate in species programmes that were part of the official European co-operative captive breeding programme - EEP (European Endangered Species Breeding Program) or ESB (European Stud Book) implemented by EAZA (European

Association of Zoos and Aquaria). 5 of the 9 zoos investigated did not belong to EAZA or AIZA (Iberian Association of Zoos and Aquaria).

Despite all the zoos in the Region of Valencia being licensed and inspected, and therefore expected to comply with the Law 31/2003, it would appear that the zoos' commitment to the conservation of biodiversity and in particular, their participation in *ex situ* captive breeding programmes, is very limited.

INFORMATIVE SIGNAGE:

“Information must be provided about the species on display, their natural habitats and particularly their conservation status”. Act 31/2003

The public information available at the zoos was assessed using the following criteria (Figure 2, Y axis): 1. Is there information available describing all species? 2. Is it kept in good condition? 3. Do the scientific and common names appear? 4. Is biological information provided? 5. Is information about the species' natural habitat provided? 6. Is there any mention of their geographical area of distribution? 7. Is there any mention of their conservation status? 8. Does the signage indicate if the animal species is included in an EEP or ESB programme?

Results of the study:

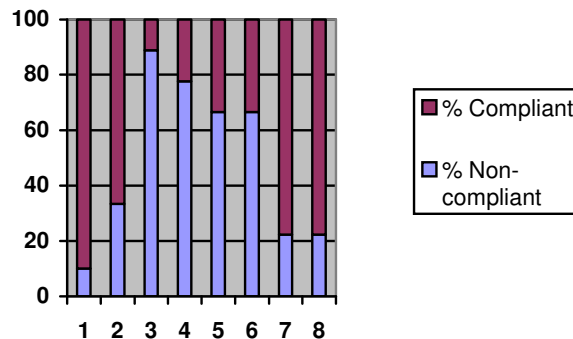


Figure 2, analysis of the signage at all 9 zoos, where each number on the Y axis is related to the criteria above. 100% (X axis) is equivalent to the minimum standard, therefore values below 100% demonstrate the degree of failure.

- ▶ Only 1 of the 9 zoos visited had information signage for all the animals exhibited. Only 40% of the zoos had signage in good condition (i.e. that was legible and understandable).
- ▶ 7 of the 9 zoos investigated did not have any kind of information about the conservation status of the animals they keep, and whether or not they were included in a captive breeding programme.
- ▶ In 3 of the 9 zoos, no information was provided about any of the animal species' geographical area of distribution, biological information and natural habitat.

Analysis of the available information about the animals held in the assessed enclosures revealed that only in a few instances was all the information legally required presented including the conservation status of the animal species; biological data; and the natural habitat of the species. Furthermore, very few signs provided information about participation in official captive breeding programmes.

The provision of such information is vital and should form an integral part of a zoo's education programme. Failure to provide such basic information at each enclosure, for each animal species, would appear to fail to comply with the law.

EDUCATION:

“Zoos are required to draft, develop and implement education programmes aimed at making the public aware of the need for conserving biodiversity”. Act 31/2003

Results of the study:

- ▶ 7 of the 9 zoos assessed did not provide details on their information signage about the biological characteristics of the animal species kept. Furthermore, 2 of the 9 zoos appeared not to have an education programme at all.
- ▶ Only 5 of the 9 zoos offered guided tours and of those, only 2 zoos provided guided tours to student groups. Only 4 of zoos offered further opportunities to learn such as education lectures or workshops.
- ▶ Only 4 of the 9 zoos had classroom facilities.

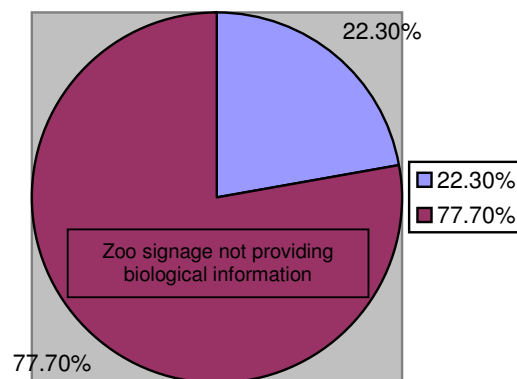


Figure 3, the percentage of zoos visited that did not have biological information about the species kept

Animal Shows

- ▶ 4 of the 9 zoos in the Region of Valencia offer entertainment shows involving wild animals.
- ▶ The shows consisted of the animals performing 'stunts' and circus-style tricks that with their natural behaviour and furthermore, provided limited educational value about the animal species concerned. The shows were usually accompanied by loud music.
- ▶ When information was provided regarding the biology and ecology of the species, it was sometimes inaccurate.

Although not qualitatively assessed in this study, all shows were viewed and recorded, and observations noted about the content of the shows and the behaviour of the animals.

- ▶ 4 of the 9 zoos assessed had animal shows which included the public handling of wild animals (i.e. dolphins, exotic birds, reptiles, etc.).

Few shows included information about the biology of the species. No information was provided on the conservation status of the animal species or how the animals were trained for the show in any show observed.

The educational value of the animal shows was assessed by noting the show content, including: whether additional information was provided about the animal(s) (e.g. biological data, conservation significance, etc.); and whether the animal performed natural or abnormal behaviour.

All the shows recorded during the zoo visits were entertainment-based, and whilst some provided additional information about the animal(s) involved, the animal(s) performed 'stunts' and abnormal behaviours that were often accompanied by loud music. This could cause the animal(s) distress, possibly exacerbated by the applause and exclamations of the public.

A further observation was that the facilities where the shows were performed often lacked sufficient space and environmental enrichment to enable the animal(s) to sufficiently exercise and express natural behaviour. It was questionable whether such facilities meet with the housing requirements laid down by Spanish law, and indeed, the basic biological needs of the animals.

Direct contact between the animals and the public was often encouraged by the zoo personnel. Such contact raises the possibility of risk from injury and transmission of disease from the animal to the public and from the public to the animal. In many cases, dangerous animals (as indicated by EAZA's hazardous animals categorisation) came into direct contact with the visiting public (i.e. sea lions, birds of prey, etc.).

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY:

"Zoos are required (...) to keep animals in conditions which satisfy their biological and conservational needs". Act 31/2003

The Five Freedoms:

To define an acceptable level of animal welfare, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (UK-1992) developed the concept of the "Five Freedoms" which has become internationally recognised as principle that underpin captive animal welfare:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst.
2. Freedom from discomfort.
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease.
4. Freedom to express natural behaviour.
5. Freedom from fear and distress.

To assess the environmental quality of each selected enclosure, in relation to the requirement of the law and the species held, the following criteria were used:

1. Is clean water available?
2. Are the temperature/humidity, ventilation and lighting levels adequate to guarantee comfort?
3. Does the animal have the appropriate environment, space, structures and material to allow it to exercise?
4. Does the animal have the appropriate environment, space, structures and material to allow it to rest?
5. Is the composition of the group appropriate for the species?
6. Could the animals housed in adjacent or nearby installations provoke an excessively stressing situation?
7. Could the presence or actions of the public provoke an excessively stressing situation?
8. Does the enclosure design prevent the public from having physical contact with the

animals? 9. Do the conditions in which the animal is kept pose a risk to the animals' health and/or well-being? 10. Does the enclosure deliver adequate hygienic conditions?

Results of the study:

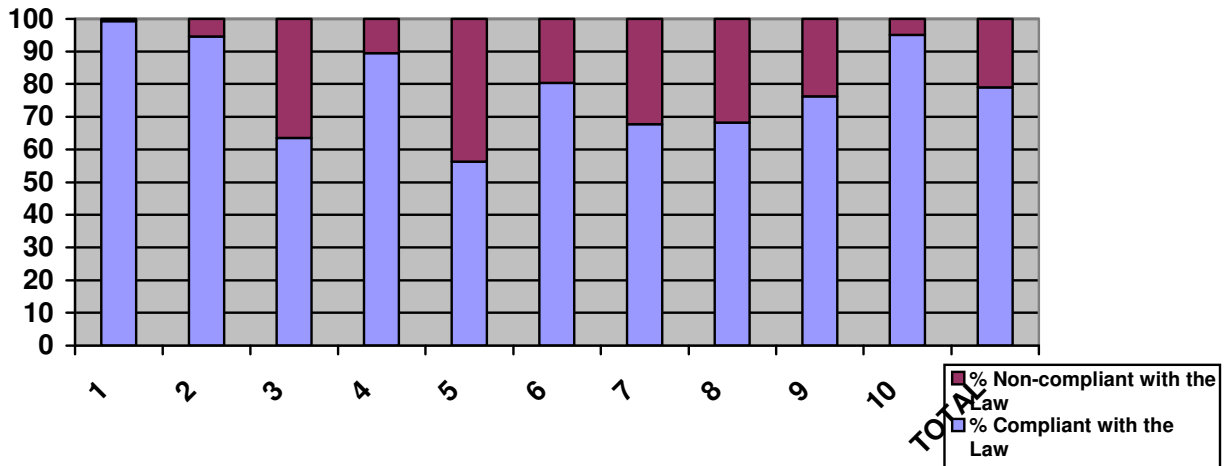


Figure 4, demonstrating an overview of the 'quality' of the enclosures selected as part of this study. Numbers 1 to 10 represent the quality criteria listed above. 100% (X axis) is equivalent to the minimum standard, therefore values below 100% demonstrate the degree of failure to comply with maximum requirements.

- ▶ The average environmental quality of all the enclosures assessed is 79%. This is 21% below the minimum required (signified by 100%).
- ▶ Group composition of the animals appears to have the lowest value. This includes situations where social animals may be kept alone, solitary animals in groups, or where species from different geographical origins are kept together in the same enclosure.
- ▶ 36% of the enclosures assessed appeared not to have a suitable living environment.

Results from the environmental quality assessment of the enclosures in all 9 zoos appear not to provide their animals with an environment that meets their basic biological needs (Five Freedoms/Principals). A significant number of the enclosures assessed lacked sufficient or suitable environmental enrichment. Without such stimulation, animals can develop abnormal behaviours, obesity and other mental or physical health problems that are generally not seen within wild populations.

Considering that these zoos have all been inspected by government-appointed experts in 2008, the fact that not one of the criteria against which the animal enclosures were assessed meets the minimum requirement is of serious concern. Limited living space, insufficient environmental enrichment, unnatural group composition and the failure to prevent the public from having direct contact with the animals, are all factors that appear not to have been properly addressed.

SAFETY:

“Zoos are obligated to (...) prevent the transmission of epidemics and parasites from the outside to the animals in the zoo, and from those to the species existing outside it”. Law

31/2003. “(...) prevent the escape from the zoo, specially of those species considered potential invaders, so as to avoid possible threats and genetic alterations to the species, subspecies and indigenous populations as well as habitats and ecosystems”. Law 31/2003.

Health and safety provisions must take into account both the risk of physical injury (i.e. direct contact with a dangerous animal) and the potential for disease transmission from the animal to the human, as well as human to the animal.

Observations from outside of the enclosures

1. Is there any signage warning of the physical danger these animals could reprisal? 2. Is there the opportunity for the public to have direct contact with the animals? 3. Is there potential for the animals to escape?

Results of the study:

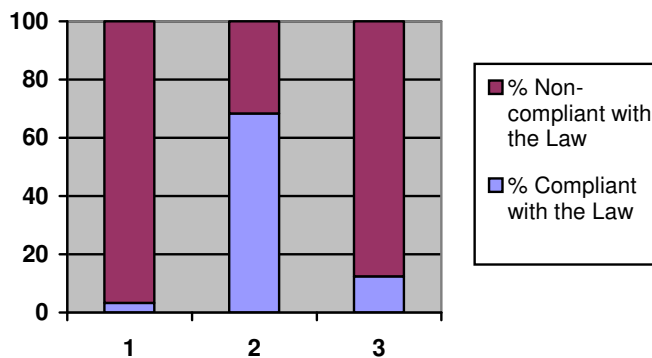


Figure 5, demonstrates the significant risk to both the public and the animals in relation to health and safety provisions. Numbers 1 to 3 represent the criteria listed above. 100% (X axis) is equivalent to the minimum standard, therefore values below 100% demonstrate the degree of failure to comply with requirements.

► 29.6% of the animals housed in the selected enclosures are considered ‘hazardous’ animal species (potential to cause severe harm). However, only 3.3% of these enclosures displayed visible warnings about the animals they contained.

► 31% of the enclosures assessed permitted physical contact between the public and the animals.

► Results revealed that in 87% of the enclosures assessed, poor maintenance of the enclosure fencing was observed, which could allow animals within the enclosure to escape and, furthermore, the potential for animals from outside the enclosure (i.e. indigenous species – rats, mice, etc.), to enter.

Security and preventative measures to protect the visiting public from harm were found to be lacking in all the 9 zoos visited. Not only can the public have direct contact with the animals, which has both injury and disease transmission implications, but also no warning is given regarding dangerous species. This would appear to represent a serious breach of the health and safety obligations by the authorities.

CONCLUSIONS:

“The world around us has changed immeasurably in the last ten years and therefore zoos and aquaria, and their personnel, must change too. If they want to continue their operations, these centres must become conservationists, educators, scientists and powerful scientific tools for policy change. To obtain it they have two options: create a new identity and a new purpose, or place themselves outside of the conservation movement”. World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy, World Association of Zoos and Aquaria (WAZA).

Zoos in the Region of Valencia, despite being recently licensed and inspected by Regional Government-appointed inspectors, are failing in their obligations to meet the minimum requirements of the Regional Decree 83/2007 and Spanish Law 31/2003. Overall the nine known zoos in the Region are failing to meet the minimum requirements in conservation, education, enclosure environmental quality and visitor & animal safety.

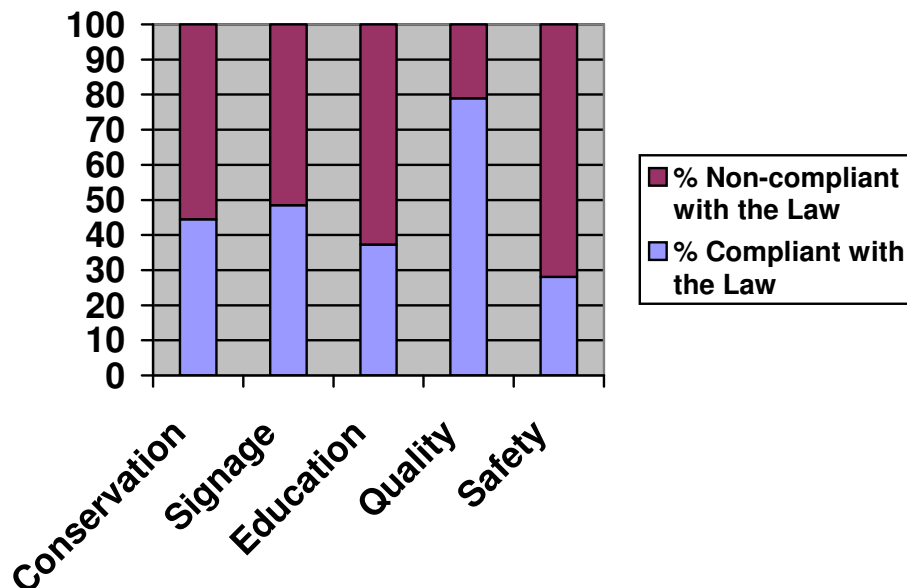


Figure 6, the degree of compliance by zoos in the Autonomous Community of Valencia with the key aspects of the Law 31/2003. 100% (X axis) is equivalent to the minimum standard, therefore values below 100% demonstrate the degree of failure to comply with requirements.

In light of these results, it is advised that the Valencian Regional Government should consider whether:

1. Their zoo inspectors have undertaken a sufficiently rigorous inspection of the zoos?
2. Their zoo inspectors have had sufficient training to effectively carry out a thorough inspection?
3. Their zoo inspectors are sufficiently knowledgeable of the principals that underpin captive animal welfare?
4. The zoos are fully aware of their obligations under the Regional Decree and the Law?
5. The Provinces have identified all possible establishments that constitute a 'zoo'?



RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Valencian Regional Government is advised to carry out the following actions as a matter of urgency:

► **Conservation.** Require zoos to:

- Apply greater priority to the captive breeding of Endangered indigenous species, as opposed to exotic species.
- Cease the breeding of species that are not listed on the IUCN Red List as Threatened.
- Direct a greater proportion of their resources to *in situ* conservation.

► **Education:** Require zoos to:

- Operate an educational programme incorporating guided tours, information boards and interactive activities that effectively educates the public about the conservation of biodiversity, the threats to wild animal populations, animal biology and natural animal behaviour.
- Ensure all enclosures provide good quality signage positioned next to each enclosure that informs the visitor about the animal species contained, their common and scientific names, their biology, geographical origin and their conservation status.
- Have educational facilities for school / college visits, workshops and lectures.
- Review all animal shows, public feeding of the animals and encouraged direct contact between the public and the animals. These fail to take into account the basic requirements of animals and their natural behaviour, and could potentially pose a significant risk to the public and the animals, these activities must be discouraged.
- End the use of wild animals as photographic props within souvenir or tourist photographs must be discouraged on the grounds that they lack educational value, potentially pose a risk to the health and safety of the public and are likely to have negative consequences for the welfare of the animals concerned.

► **Environmental quality:** Require zoos to:

- Operate an environmental enrichment programme that ensures all enclosures are designed with sufficient space, structure and stimulation to encourage the species contained to express natural behaviour, and exercise, and with the opportunity to seek refuge from other individuals and from public.
- House the animal species in conditions that meet their social requirements. Social animals must be housed in groups that take into account natural group structure and size. Mixed exhibits must only contain compatible animals from a similar geographical origin and offer the species refuge from each other.

► **Safety:** Require zoos to:

- Implement preventative measures to limit contact between animals and humans. If a species poses a risk to the health and safety of the public, then clear signage must provide instruction and warning.
- Construct stand-off barriers around all enclosures to limit contact between humans and animals.
- Ensure that animal enclosures are constructed and maintained in such a way as to hold the animal contained, to prevent their escape and to stop the entry of indigenous animal species from outside the zoo into the enclosure, which may pose disease transmission and other risks.



- Ensure their perimeter fence is well maintained and sufficient to prevent escape and intrusion.

The Valencian Generalitat is advised to revise their current inspection protocol and the training of their inspectorate. It is clear from the results of this study that, in its current form, it fails to ensure zoos in the Region meet the requirements of the Regional Decree and the Law 31/2003. InfoZoos would be happy to help advise and provide technical advice should it be required. It is then recommended in light of these results that the Valencian Generalitat seek to re-inspect all zoos (as defined) in Valencia and where shortfalls are identified, deadlines are given as to when improvements are to be made. Advice on zoo compliance is also provided in the Guide for the Application of the Law 31/2003². If a zoo does not conform to their legal requirements, the facility should close and the animals rehomed to more tolerable conditions.

InfoZoos.org
February 2009

² El parque zoológico, un Nuevo aliado de la biodiversidad, Ministerio de Medio Ambiente (2006)