Population Management During the COVID-19 Crisis
April 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide Animal Program participants (e.g., AZA Program Leaders, Program participating facilities) with general information and guidance regarding AZA’s Animal Programs, and to reassure the community that flexibility is warranted during this time. As events during this global health crisis continue to unfold, this document may be updated.

Animal Program Accountability

Many Program Leaders and Animal Program participants and staff are working with reduced staffing at their facilities and have less time or resources to devote to Animal Programs. The AZA Animal Population Management (APM) Committee, Population Management Center (PMC) staff, and Adjunct Population Biologists will be flexible to accommodate new schedules and are shifting all upcoming in-person planning meetings to virtual meetings. Given our uncertain schedules and availability, rescheduling planning meetings may be challenging. The APM Committee will be flexible and accommodating regarding deadline extensions for documents and other Program Leader requirements. All accountability deadlines prior to June are extended to June 30. This extension includes studbook publications and Species Survival Plan® (SSP) Breeding and Transfer Plans. ZIMS for Studbooks migration deadlines are also extended (see ‘ZIMS for Studbooks Migration’ section below). For deadlines beyond June 1, please communicate early with your Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) Chair, Population Biologist, PMC (pmc@lpzoo.org), and the AZA office (conservation@aza.org) if you have obstacles or restrictions preventing you from completing the work and you need an extension.

Many zoo and aquarium staff are furloughed or have lost their employment. If a Program Leader or Officer has been furloughed or lost employment, they may still maintain their role(s). Recognizing the present uncertain job market in our professional community, we are doubling the grace period for Program Leaders who experience loss of employment. Program Leaders may now retain their roles for up to one year before gaining employment at an AZA member facility. Please consult with your facility about the legality of working on your Animal Program(s) during a furlough.

The APM Committee will continue to review and approve TAG Regional Collection Plans (RCPs) and Sustainability Partner applications during this time. The Committee is also continuing to hold monthly conference calls to assure that all of our hard work and strategic planning initiatives are moving forward.

Population Management

SSP Breeding and Transfer Plans typically make recommendations and strategies for two to three years. Therefore, this disruption may only be a short-term issue within the population’s long-term plan. Everyone is doing the best that they can given their current situations. Strategies and recommendations may change due to facilities making the best decisions for their animals based on their available resources and changing priorities.

Some facilities do not currently have the room or resources to continue breeding, and other facilities are encouraging breeding of their animals to continue. SSPs are discouraged from issuing breeding moratoriums. Rather, strategies and recommendations may need to be adjusted or extended. Program
Leaders are encouraged to reach out to facilities to check in and better understand their needs and priorities in order to be adaptive and get the best outcomes for the animals and facilities involved. If a facility determines that it needs to place SSP animals, it should contact the SSP Coordinator to discuss options. If a facility needs to place non-SSP animals, it should consult the AZA Policy on Responsible Population Management (https://www.aza.org/board-approved-policies-and-position-statements) and its acquisition/transfer/management policies for all transfer decisions during this time.

As a reminder, draft SSP Breeding and Transfer Plans are sent out for a 30-day IR review, and the IR should provide feedback and address any questions/concerns about the recommendations with the SSP Coordinator. The IR is expected to communicate any recommendations affecting their facility’s population to their Institutional Liaison (IL) and Director. If a Director has any questions regarding an SSP Breeding and Transfer Plan or related communications, we encourage them to speak with their IRs or have their IRs reach out to the SSP Coordinator. See pages 38-39 of the SSP Handbook (https://www.aza.org/animal-program-handbooks) for more details.

Animal Transfers and Transports

While the transportation of animals is crucial to the success of our Animal Programs, domestic and international options, especially by air, are extremely limited at the moment. It is possible that even as businesses normalize, transport by air will be significantly limited, and it will likely be at least several months before traditional routes are re-established. It is almost certain that animal transport via commercial air carriers and air cargo shippers will be close to non-existent in the near future as airlines struggle to re-establish their routes and passenger relationships, implement social distancing protocols, etc.

It appears that over-the-road transports are still functional and may be the most viable alternative over the next few months. Additional animal testing and permitting protocols at the state, national, and international levels, which could significantly impact all animal transports, may be initiated in the longer term. Quarantine space, food/staples supplies, and facility staffing may also be limited once animal transfers begin again and could impact facility readiness to send or receive animals.

Some recent SSP Breeding and Transfer Plans have been adding contingency recommendations with both short-term and long-term strategies and recommendations. Program Leaders are encouraged to work with their Population Biologists and IRs to consider coming up with contingency strategies for your own Animal Program(s) in anticipation of breeding and transfer issues.

Facilities are encouraged to continue processing all necessary paperwork for the transfer of animals so that everything is ready when the transfer and transport of animals are feasible again. Permitting at both the Federal and State levels may be delayed due to significant paperwork backlogs. As the agencies return to full in-office work schedules, a longer lead time may be required for permits. As the country begins to re-open, Programs Leaders must reach out to their facilities to understand what the challenges might be and where they can assist.

ZIMS for Studbooks Migration

In an effort to meet the original deadline for all studbooks to be migrated to ZIMS for Studbooks, the ZIMS for Studbooks Transition Leadership Team has communicated both to the AZA Animal Programs community as well as directly to individual Studbook Keepers and their TAG Chairs on where those individuals are in the process. The team has also extended the interim deadlines of migrating from the Sandbox to Live.

- **August 1st, 2020** – by this date, all those that migrated to the Sandbox by May 1st, 2020, must submit their materials to pmc@lpzoo.org for migration to Live
- **December 31st, 2020** – by this date, all* studbooks must be migrated to Live.
(*The only exception to these deadlines is if your studbook is maintained in software other than SPARKS or PopLink (e.g., Excel, Access). If you are exempt, please notify the PMC (pmc@lpzoo.org) to make sure they are aware of your studbook and its exempt status.)

Remember that there are many resources and training opportunities available to you to ease and support your studbook's transition:

- Online ZIMS for Studbooks Workshops will be scheduled in May and June. Dates and more information will be shared soon on the Network Groups.
- Monthly Coaching Calls. Upcoming dates will be shared soon on the Network Groups.
- Transitioning to ZIMS for Studbooks document, which can be found on the AZA Handbooks page, at the bottom right, under Related Information (https://www.aza.org/animal-program-handbooks)
- Testing Checklists for both PopLink and SPARKS users are also on the AZA Handbooks page (https://www.aza.org/animal-program-handbooks)
- Species360's list of webinars and office hours: https://species360.zoom.us/webinar/register/2715360844654/WN_YiYMbroNRxmPNNm5_q9svw
- If you have specific questions about ZIMS for Studbooks software, reach out to Species360 support staff (support@species360.org).

If you have questions about the migration process, please reach out to Haley Blackwell (pmc@lpzoo.org), PMC Studbook Migration Assistant.

If you believe that you will have difficulty meeting the December 31 deadline due to the COVID-19 pandemic, please contact Joe Barkowski (jcbski@aol.com), APM Committee Vice Chair for SSPs and Studbooks.

AZA Professional Development Courses

The AZA professional development courses for Population Management 1 (PM1) and Population Management 2 (PM2) will remain on schedule for November in Saint Louis, MO. If you need to take the PM1 course and your facility has restricted travel for this year, or if other priorities have shifted and you are unable to attend the course, please contact the AZA office (conservation@aza.org).

AZA Reproductive Management Center (RMC)

The RMC is still operational and responding to reproductive management inquiries and contraceptive orders. The RMC is not encountering any supply issues of contraceptives at this time but will be monitoring the situation in Australia closely as this is where Deslorelin implants are produced. Please contact Monica McDonald (contraception@stlzoo.org), RMC Program Coordinator, with any questions.

More COVID-19 Resources

The Zoo and Aquarium All Hazards Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (ZAHP) Fusion Center works with key players in emergency management across the country. ZAHP connects the managed wildlife community with information on the five critical National Preparedness mission areas: Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery. Information on general considerations of non-domestic species in human care, as well as many other resources for zoos and aquariums, can be found on the ZAHP Fusion Center website (https://zahp.aza.org/covid-19-information-for-zoos-and-aquariums/).

The AZA website (https://www.aza.org/covid-19-resources) has a list of AZA member resources and links to important information, including communications, legislative updates, and federal agency resources.

Join the COVID-19 Resource Group on the AZA Network (https://network.aza.org/home). This community is open to all members and non-members of AZA to encourage the sharing of resources during this crisis.
Contact Information

Please do not hesitate to contact members of the APM Committee, the AZA staff, the PMC staff, Adjunct Population Biologists, or RMC staff with any questions or concerns. We are all here for you, and we are all in this together.

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