

Interview with Gerald Dick, *NEW* Executive Director, WAZA **Sally Walker**

Introduction :

Gerald Dick comes from Austria and brings a wealth of experience and achievements in the overall field of environment, wildlife and management, as impressive for its diversity as for its richness.

He is 50 years old and is married with two children. He is currently working at the Bern office of WAZA during the week and commuting back home for weekends. German is mother tongue but he is very fluent in English. His education was done in Vienna with a Ph.D. at the University of Vienna (1996), a Master of Advanced Studies in Environmental Management and Diploma of WWF College on Conservation Leadership.

He worked 12 years in WWF, Austria in a global thematic programme and with this experience he built up skills in team leading, network, communication and lobbying skills, all useful for WAZA. He has extensive experience in management, strategic planning, policy development and lobbying, all of which will be useful to WAZA initiatives. He has already scheduled a Strategic planning meeting in UAE for all the Regional Association heads. We look forward to another great five years with another great Director for WAZA.

We appreciate Gerald and Peter taking time out of their busy schedules to reply to an email interview. We thought the inclusion of outgoing and incoming WAZA Executive Directors made a nice combination.

Many congratulations & good wishes to both Peter and Gerald in their new jobs!



Dr. Gerald Dick, Executive Director, WAZA, October 2008 at the Ramsar Conference venue, Korea, with (safe) white tigers.

Question: Gerald, will you tell me about your interest in zoos and the reasons you were interest enough to apply for the position of Director of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (You can go back to infancy if you like!)

Reply: My passion for animals dates back to my childhood when I preferred staying out in the riverine forests near Vienna, the rural areas and also the zoo to hectic city life. As a child I had all the animals you could think of in a household: fish, snails, hamster, canary, dogs etc. When it came to the question which profession would best fit my expectations, it was very clear to me that biology is the only option and at the career counseling the adviser was quite helpless in order to find any alternative to this. In my professional life later on I was working for the environment administration of the Austrian Ministry and for NGOs in the field of development cooperation as well as nature conservation. In my last job I was responsible for the WWF Species Programme in Europe/Middle East and experienced networking, programme development accompanied by communication work. I produced several reports on species conservation on various topics, like monitoring, species and the programme of work on protected areas under CBD, status report of *Caretta caretta* in the Mediterranean a.o. During my work for WWF in Austria, whose president was the director of the Zoo in Vienna, I had close contact with the zoo and also assisted in the communication after a keeper was killed in an accident by a jaguar.

Question : You have had at least a year, I think, to get acquainted with the scope and complexities of running the premier zoo association. Were there surprises for you about what is involved in WAZA and its many projects, and what did you make of those?

Reply: Well, I had the chance to get acquainted with the international world of zoos during the last few months. It was not a big surprise to find the zoo community as a network but amidst a very complex structure of

institutions, national and regional associations and other entities. The complexity is certainly a challenge when thinking of decision making, rapid response communication and joint marketing. The global presence of institutions on the other hand and the involvement in conservation together with communication opportunities (including training and education) seems to be a unique chance in order to play an important role internationally.

Question : New leaders always want some change and, indeed, their public expects it. Can you tell us any of the changes or additional projects you have in mind?

Reply: The first big project is the development of a WAZA future strategy. I have prepared a first draft set of strategic directions and operational goals for WAZA Council. This paper will be further worked on with Council in a workshop in January 2009 and afterwards discussed with the regions in a special workshop. For me it is important to develop a visionary path for the organization. For that purpose the regions will be especially involved and this hopefully will assure the best possible and strongest implementation. My personal vision is to evolve WAZA into a strong and internationally visible representation of the international zooworld.

Question : Are you satisfied with the current "partners" of WAZA, such as IZE, CBSG, ISIS, etc. Do you have other global organizations in mind that you would like to involve in WAZA?

Reply: WAZA is host of IZE and holds formal partnerships with IUCN and CMS and is working together with CITES, RAMSAR and conservation NGOs like WWF. I strongly believe that the era of marching alone is over and regrettably the status of the world's biodiversity underline that neither politicians nor individual NGOs can achieve an overall change of negative trends. The only chance we have is working in partnerships where every entity can deliver its specific contribution. Therefore the role of zoos and aquaria must be clearly communicated and the contribution to conservation identified. In future WAZA will be actively engaged in partnerships, a good example is the focus on gorillas in 2009, a joint venture with UNEP /CMS and UNEP/GRASP. A new agreement with IUCN is underway and there are plans to intensify work with RAMSAR and CBD as well as the NGO community.

Question: What do you see as the major problems of zoos today ? and, getting ahead of your reply, do you have any ideas or project which might address any of the problems?

Reply: There are always fields of improvement which can be identified, and possibly there are many. Amongst the main issues, I see two important ones. First of all the internal question of conservation delivery and the question of genetic diversity and number of animals in zoos/aquaria. This involves the engagement

of institutions in *in situ* conservation and the fulfillment of conservation breeding targets. This may also be connected to decisions about what species you want to have in your exhibits. Secondly, it is necessary to show to the outside world what is going on in the institutions, communicate about projects, get involved in the political conservation discussion and position WAZA as a major player. For this, an improved internal communication system and joint measures for marketing are necessary, every institution should show what they are proud of: being part of an international community!

Question : It is my observation that the zoos in the countries with highest biodiversity and most dramatic declines in species populations are least equipped to carry out systematic, scientific breeding programmes. Do you see that as a problem to be addressed in WAZA ?

Reply: This is a classical issue which should be addressed by an international organization. At the moment there are WAZA training grants in place in order to help initiatives in the developing world to get off the ground. I would dream of a special and well equipped budget line in order to increase these efforts. Furthermore I will propose a twinning scheme between well established zoos and zoos in development in order to exchange information and to provide training.

Question : As Director, will you try and visit the different regional association meetings and, if so, what will be your priority achievement in making this contact ?

Reply: It is my plan to visit all the regions and as far as possible to take part in the relevant meetings. As there is a lot of work ahead, this may take some time. As for priorities, this is related to the future strategic focus, which is still under development. Special attention will be necessary for membership increase in Basket 1 and 3.



**World Association of
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