

Amphibian Ark : Keeping threatened amphibian species afloat.

Note to Zoo Directors and other conservationists from Robert Lacy, Chair, IUCN SSC CBSG

We can help respond to the amphibian extinction crisis. CBSG and WAZA have set up a website at www.amphibianark.org from which you can download the presentations made at a recent American Zoo meeting in Tampa, as well as presentations that were made at the CBSG and WAZA meetings. Feel free to cut and paste from these files to create your own presentations for staff, donors, or others, or contact us if you would like us to prepare a tailored presentation for you to present to a group you want to educate about the amphibian crisis.

We are delighted and thankful for all that so many of our zoos are so interested in amphibians and in conserving them in the wild. In addition, many zoos have already made commitments either through the CBSG or WAZA to support the global organization of the "Amphibian Ark". While the central coordinating work of the AArk is small compared to what zoos will be doing to implement amphibian conservation programs in their individual institutions or in the field, the global AArk coordination will provide zoos with essential Training, Communication, and Taxon Program services to help you do your jobs effectively. We are hoping that every zoo can help support this common effort. We will need support for about 5-10 years, by which time amphibian conservation programs will be well established in almost every zoo and aquarium, coordination will likely be managed by associations and inter-association collaborations, and the CBSG will have moved on to new challenges.

As you can see, we have many ideas about how you can help save an amphibian species or two (or twenty). If you don't yet have an amphibian conservation plan for your institution, we would be glad to give you some more ideas!

Bob

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- One third to one half of all amphibian species are threatened with extinction, with more than 100 already gone in recent years.
- The IUCN Global Amphibian Assessment has alerted us to the fact that hundreds of species face threats that cannot be mitigated in the wild, i.e., they require zoos to save them in the short term until adequate conservation measures to secure wild populations can be developed.
- CBSG, WAZA, and the IUCN/SSC Amphibian Specialist Group (ASG) have formed an Amphibian Ark (A-Ark) to help the zoo community save as many species as possible by providing global coordination, technical guidance, training, necessary linkages to other IUCN groups, etc.

- We ask that each zoo help save at least 1 species; smaller zoos might do less while larger zoos will do more.
- In 2007, zoos must immediately ramp up their own programs, support efforts by their regional associations, and commit to continue these activities as long as the need remains.
- In 2008, A-Ark will lead zoos in a globally coordinated public awareness campaign "2008: The Year of the Frog."
- The publicity campaign will help leverage a simultaneous worldwide capital campaign managed at the level of the individual institutions. We ask that every zoo independently target their normal donor base (public, local corporations, etc.) and *more* to raise money for amphibians. Most of this money will stay with the zoo that raised it to fund their amphibian programs; a *one-time* small portion (~\$10,000-20,000) per zoo will need to go to support A-Ark global coordination from 2008 through perhaps a decade of focused activity. Again, smaller zoos might do less while larger zoos will do more.
- While individual institutions are campaigning to their normal donor base, regional/national associations will engage in a simultaneous program targeting regional/national corporations at a higher level. This money will help fund regional initiatives such as workshops, rescues, cooperatively managed centers, and coordination of activities within each region.
- *The outcome of AArk will be that we will have saved 100s of species from extinction, developed capacity both within our institutions and globally to continue to provide amphibian species with care and protection when needed, formed a true partnership between ex situ and in situ components of conservation, established a model framework for responding to future species conservation crises, and demonstrated to the world that zoos and aquariums are essential conservation organizations.*

Amphibian Ark: Keeping threatened amphibian species afloat. What is A-Ark?

- The A-Ark is a joint effort of WAZA, CBSG, and ASG formed to address the *ex situ* components of the ACAP.
- The A-Ark mission is to ensure long-term survival in nature utilizing short-term *ex situ* management of amphibian taxa for which adequate protection in the wild is not currently possible.
- The A-Ark will coordinate *ex situ* programs implemented by partners around the world, with the first emphasis on programs within the range countries of the species, and with a constant attention to our obligation to couple *ex situ* conservation measures with necessary efforts to protect or restore species in their natural habitats.
- The remit is to encourage, facilitate and help fund practical delivery of *ex situ* programs through partnerships involving A-Ark members, national governments, and regulatory authorities.

- Members of the A-Ark will be WAZA members and WAZA affiliates, members of regional or national zoo associations, A-Ark approved private partners and A-Ark approved museums, universities and wildlife agencies.
- An A-Ark Steering Committee, with a Co-Chair from each of the 3 umbrella organizations, will provide strategic guidance on the activities of the A-Ark and ensure excellent communication with all stakeholders.
- Advisory Committees will be formed to consult with Taxon Management Groups on species-specific issues related to reintroduction, gene banking, and veterinary, legal, and ethical concerns.
- Four fulltime dedicated positions will: coordinate all aspects of implementation within the A-Ark initiative; assist A-Ark partners in identifying priority taxa and regions for *ex situ* conservation work; lead development and implementation of training programs for building capacity of individuals and institutions; and develop communications strategies, messages, and materials to promote understanding and action on behalf of amphibian conservation.
- The A-Ark coordinators will make it much easier for all A-Ark partners to contribute effectively to the global effort.

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The crisis

- Addressing the amphibian extinction crisis represents the greatest species conservation challenge in the history of humanity.
- A third of the world's 6,000 amphibian species are threatened with extinction.
- The status of many more is unknown but believed to be imperiled, bringing the percentage of threatened species potentially as high as 50%.
- This is significantly more than any other group of organisms: by comparison, 12% of bird species and 23% of mammal species are threatened.
- Recent amphibian extinctions exceed 120 species and one entire family is already lost.
- The IUCN has urged that "All Critically Endangered and Extinct in the Wild taxa should be subject to *ex situ* management to ensure recovery of wild populations." (IUCN, 2002).
- Comparable calls to action are included in the Global Amphibian Assessment and other IUCN documents.
- Without immediate captive management as a stopgap component of an integrated conservation effort, hundreds of species will become extinct.
- This conservation challenge is one that we, the *ex situ* community, are uniquely capable of addressing.
- Never before has the conservation community at large charged zoos and aquariums with a task of this magnitude.
- This is an opportunity for every zoo and aquarium, regardless of size, to make a vital conservation contribution, and for our community to be broadly acknowledged as a credible conservation partner.
- Supporting this call to action is clearly within the financial capacity of all zoos and aquariums, and engages the diverse expertise found within all institutions.

- Our goal is 100% participation of WAZA zoos and aquariums and the regional associations.
- If we do not respond immediately and on an unprecedented scale, much of an entire vertebrate class will be lost, and we will have failed in our most basic conservation mission as defined in the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy.
- Through the A-Ark initiative, we will respond appropriately, we will save many species that would otherwise be lost forever, and we will demonstrate to the world that the zoos and aquariums are essential contributors to nature conservation.

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What your zoo can do

- Each institution member of WAZA or its associations should commit to saving at least one species, with a rescue center either onsite or in an area in need of capacity building, and preferably both. These efforts should cover at least one 'species equivalent' – that is, each center should have capacity for at least 500 animals in a managed program (the target per species), but will not necessarily hold all representatives of any given species. The number one priority for all centers should be native species, or stated another way, centers should be built where the species is in need.
- Expand and support capacity building (facilities and expertise), at home institutions and in range countries. Assess, upgrade and expand amphibian facilities, and send staff to participate in training courses or internships at institutions with existing capacity, or sponsor someone in need.
- Immediately support and expand existing efforts, such as rescue programs, field surveys, regional programs (e.g. SSP, EEP, ASMP, APP), and local amphibian conservation projects.
- Participate in the global public awareness campaign through your website, zoo graphics, education materials, and media releases. Do your visitors know that we are experiencing the greatest species conservation challenge in the history of humanity?
- Participate in the global capital campaign to support your own programs and the global coordination through A-Ark.

