

Considerations For Ethical Acquisition And Treatment Of Feeder Animals In Zoos.

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Zoos, as a rule, have stringent standards for acquisition and care of the animals in their collection. Following this philosophy, it also is important to heed similar considerations for “feeder” animals. Feeder animals are those utilized to feed carnivorous and omnivorous collection animals that consume prey items as all, or part, of their diet. The purpose of this discussion is to highlight issues, address controversies, and show additional published literature that can be used as guidance when establishing such a policy.

Key words: live animal prey; humane treatment; euthanasia

A policy on the ethical acquisition of feeder animals seeks to address and limit the impact on the environment of acquiring animals by a zoo for the sole purpose of feeding a living collection. This policy would seek a balance of the effect on the environment as a whole weighed against the zoo’s responsibility to the living collection. Additionally, this type of policy is intended to establish a framework to ensure the ethical treatment of such “feeder” animals during collection through feeding.

Typically, zoos should: 1) Ensure that any non-domestic wild caught animal used as feeder animals are collected and held in an ethical manner; 2) Ensure consideration for the sustainable population when deciding to acquire wild-caught non-domestic feeder animals; 3) Ensure that any domestic or non-domestic captive bred feeder animals are raised and held in an ethical manner by the supplier/breeder; and 4) Ensure that any animal used as feeder animals are held in an ethical manner during their housing at a zoo. This includes any potential feeder animals actually produced at the zoo as a feeder colony or as part of a different program.

When considering a potential food item, these five definitions should be considered:

- 1) Ethical conservation measures: the take of animals from the wild is limited to amounts/levels that allow for a sustainable population in the environment.

- 2) Ethical capture methods: the method of capturing animals from the wild or farmed animals limits stress and risk of injury to the captured animal and also limits impact on surrounding wildlife and habitat.
- 3) Ethical euthanasia practices: the manner of death for the animal meets appropriate standards for the intended species. An appropriate standard of euthanasia for all animals is that approved by the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia, 2000 and/or more stringent guidelines outlined by the institution's Animal Care and Use Committee. Chemical agents used in euthanasia of animals intended for animal food must not result in tissue residue. The only chemical agent currently used for feeder animals is carbon dioxide [AVMA, 2000]. According to the AVMA panel on euthanasia, the only physical method for animals intended for animal food is cervical dislocation. Manual cervical dislocation is a humane technique for euthanasia of poultry, other small birds, mice, rats < 200 g, and rabbits < 1 kg when performed by individuals with a demonstrated high degree of technical proficiency.
- 4) Ethical housing and husbandry practices: method or practices of housing and husbandry that limits or reduces stress and allows the most humane treatment [Smelser, 1985; AALAS, 1991; NRC, 1996; SCAW, 1992].
- 5) Ethical transport of live animals to zoo: method of transport to the zoo that is appropriate for that species thereby reducing stress providing the most humane circumstances [IATA, 2000; USDA, 1998].

Anytime a new potential feeder species or a new supplier is being considered, the points outlined above should be applied. In addition, the institution may have an animal vendor form or list of questions that can be used to evaluate the vendor. Employing policy presented should provide for the ethical acquisition and care of feeder animals that is in line with the standards applied to other captive animals in zoos.

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