

Welfare considerations and resources for avian ambassador species

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speaker notes in italics

AASAG

The mission of the Ambassador Animal Scientific Advisory Group (AASAG) is to develop cooperative relationships between the education, research, and animal welfare interests of the zoo and aquarium community around the topic of ambassador animals (a.k.a. program animals).

AASAG

The primary functions of the AASAG are:

- To emphasize the importance of ambassador animals in zoo/aquarium education.
- To support professional standards in the management and handling of ambassador animals.
- To provide a forum for those involved in ambassador animal research to share their findings.
- To establish a resource for new AZA members to get information about ambassador animals.
- To ensure that the topic of ambassador animals is continually addressed at AZA meetings.

Conservation Education Committee - but have standing positions that liaise with RTC, AWC, WCMC, and the PPAM course.

Initiative #1: Best Practices

- Objective: Establish and disseminate best practices for care, management, and welfare of Ambassador Animals as well as for the unique educational experiences that Ambassador Animals provide.

Initiative #2: Sustainable Collections

- Objective: Facilitate collaboration with AZA animal programs (SSPs, TAGs & Studbooks) to enhance sustainability of populations for both breeding and educational program use.

Initiative #3: Support Research

- Objective: Support research around ambassador animal related topics, including welfare and the impact of ambassador animal messaging. Assist in communicating the results of this research within the AZA community

Initiative #4: Professional Development

- Objective: Provide support for Ambassador Animal professionals at all levels and career stages.

Initiative #5: Communications

- Objective: Provide multiple channels for dissemination of the work of the AASAG, opportunities for members of the ambassador animal community to communicate with each other and with the AASAG.

Welfare, care and handling are important to examine, evaluate and disseminate. Serve as advisors, share information on AASAG related activities and initiatives on the Network, Ambassador Animal Guidelines

Working with collections to maximize sustainability means we are cognizant of the roles that Ambassador species play outside of the ambassador field, and that everything we do, from collection planning, to rearing, to use, to roles affects some populations' ability to be considered viable.

Research, working closely with both AWC and RTC, support and promote studies.

Welfare Assessment

We recommend the same assessment tools and parameters to be used for all avian species, regardless of their role in your collection. E.g.:

Physiological health

Expression of a range natural behavior

- Breeding and social interactions
- Locomotion and foraging
- Successful interaction with the environment and habitat

Expression of a desirable behavioral repertoire

- Cognitive and social behaviors
- Resilience and ability to respond to changes in their environment
- Caretaker relationships



If welfare goals are the same, what should we have in mind for ambassadors?

Though some of these measures may stand out as being more important or pressing to address when working with ambassador species. Conversely, there may be advantages that exist when trying to optimize certain welfare aspects when working with ambassadors. Diet consumption and ability to manipulate diet, more hands-on close inspection, more relationships mean easier detection of subtle changes in behavior. If breeding and sustainability are issues for a species, we have an obligation in the ambassador world to understand how we can contribute to those goals.

Common Considerations / Inputs



Social Behavior and Housing:

Often seen housed solitarily for ease of use / collection make-up, rearing history, etc.

Special attention should be paid to that effect on their overall welfare.

- What opportunities for social interactions do they have?
- If not with conspecifics...
- Considerations for collection planning and acquisitions

What about breeding?

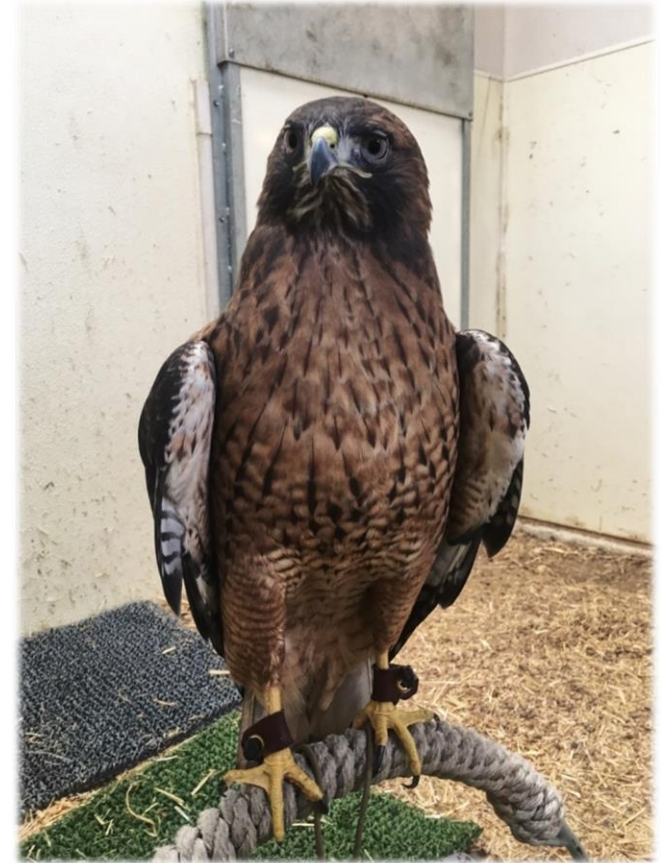
Social species that don't live with conspecifics: house them within sight of conspecifics or, wherever possible, trying to make the shift to acquiring multiple individuals when it comes to social species (at least pairs) so they are not housed solitary - even if it's only pairs.

Common Considerations / Inputs

Flight restriction (e.g. clipping, tethering, other):

Clipping: semi-permanently restricts flight

Tethering: can be a temporary management strategy, or permanent through it's application.



Common Considerations / Inputs

Clipping: The companion parrot world is coming forward with support to allow parrots full flight capabilities starting at fledging.

Benefits of allowing flight:

- Holistic sensory development
- Physical Development / conditioning
- Improved Vision
- Physical safety
- Better social function
- Psychological benefits (autonomy and control)



<https://blogpamelaclarkonline.com/2019/03/27/part-two-the-benefits-to-them/?fbclid=IwAR0H8HUb1k1DocCmb1djEqyGROCGWSbZn3dgY54M-LhF1YDuMC66mRr4cwY>

Steve Hartman of The Parrot University writes: “Babies learn best when multiple senses are stimulated simultaneously (i.e.; sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell). The best opportunity for a parrot to learn is when a combination of senses are experienced at the same time. The senses of sight, sound and touch take on a very different nature during flight. When a particular skill is being developed or experienced by different senses at the same time a different neuropathway is reinforced for each sense creating a much stronger neurocircuitry for that skill or knowledge being learned.”

Look at position statement, IAATE SUPPORTS USE OF JESSES AS A SAFETY MEASURE, NOT A TRAINING TOOL, DOES NOT SUPPORT TETHERING OF NON-RAPTOR SPECIES. (Mention of possible partnering with ASAG.) Examples of birds not tethered.

Common Considerations / Inputs

Tethering: can be a temporary management strategy, or permanent through it's application.

- Species?
- Use and purpose?
- Training?
- IAATE position statement (under revision)



Common Considerations / Inputs

Caretaker relationships & handler training:

Because of the increased interaction between ambassador birds and their handlers, this is highly important.



If it is a situation of skilled handlers, adept at reading and responding to body language, and giving full choice/control to the bird - this kind of relationship can add to increased welfare. It can provide some social elements for social species, more opportunities for choice/control, opportunities for free-flight and all the enriching qualities therein.

However, the absolute reverse is true in situations where unskilled or lower skilled individuals are permitted to handle birds. In these cases, the increased interaction levels can be detrimental to welfare because the animals are more likely to be "abused" through coercion and force, control removed, learned helplessness... yada yada.

So... skill level of individuals working with birds is absolutely critical to welfare, in my opinion.

“Positive attitudes towards the animals, good subject knowledge and familiarity with the species are linked to positive behavioural responses in a range of exotic species” (Ward & Melfi, 2015).



“It is vital to recognize that animal keepers are a central element of each zoo animal’s environment and that the quality of a given keeper-animal relationship may influence an individual’s well-being” (Whitham & Wielebnowski, 2013).

Research shows that caretaker skills, attitude and even job satisfaction correlate with welfare measures.

Common Considerations / Inputs

Training Related Goals:

Usual husbandry – scales, crating, nail trims, and even more advanced behaviors

Additional: desensitization to stimuli on programming (people, new environments, travel, etc), multiple handlers

Demonstration related:

(Non flighted behaviors and flight)

When evaluating their ability to successfully cope in their environment / resilience, etc.

Flight requires a number of skills, can add things like telemetry, recalls,



Common Considerations / Inputs

Usage parameters (time and type of usage): Not a "one size fits all"

Know your animals, have welfare measures designed to pick up important behavior indicators that allows you to set usage limits as needed, if needed.

Type of program may determine how much this is needed. Type of programming. Type of animal and what they are trained for.



Ambassador Animal Guidelines (AAGs)

AZA Ambassador Animal Guidelines (AAG) provide a compilation of knowledge provided by recognized animal and education experts based on the current science, practice, and technology of ambassador animal management and presentation.

Each AAG assembles basic requirements, best practices, and animal care recommendations to maximize capacity for excellence in animal care and welfare of ambassador species.

*New resource. First species was the tawny frogmouth, other species in the works:
Penguin, Eurasian Eagle Owl & Milky Owl, Kookaburra, Kea, Flamingo*

AAGs recommendations

- Are considered a work in progress since practices continue to evolve through advances in scientific knowledge.
- Should be used in accordance with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations concerning the care of animals; the AAGs are not all-inclusive.
- Are not meant to be exclusive approaches, and may require adaptation in each institution.

Yes: The AAG will be incorporated into the ACM development process or integrated as appropriate at the next scheduled revision.

No: The AAG would continue through the development and revision process outlined by AZA.

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tawny frogmouth, eagle owl,

2.5 Messaging

AZA's policy on the presentation of animals is as follows: AZA is dedicated to excellence in animal care and welfare, conservation, education, research, and the presentation of animals in ways that inspire respect for wildlife and nature. Education and conservation messaging must be an integral component of any ambassador animal demonstration (AZA Accreditation Standard 1.5.3).

- Identify TAG-recommended conservation education messages that can be considered during animal programs with this species.
- Recommend methods to measure the impact of the programs education and conservation messaging on visitor knowledge, attitudes, and/or behavior (pre-post surveys, delayed surveys, etc.).

3. HANDLING AND STAFF TRAINING

3.1 Handling limits

Consideration should be given as to appropriate times for handling ambassador animals during presentations, and rest breaks scheduled accordingly. Program handlers should maintain the animal's basic husbandry needs and a medical protocol should be in place in case concerns arise.

- Identify time limitations (including animal rotation and rest periods, as appropriate, duration of time each animal can participate, and restrictions on travel distances).
- Address how the natural history of this species (i.e. nocturnal, seasonal behavior changes, social needs) may impact handling and presentation limits

3.2 Handlers and Handler Training

Animal care and education staff should be trained in ambassador animal-specific handling protocols, conservation, and education messaging techniques, and public interaction procedures. Paid and/or unpaid staff assigned to handle animals during demonstrations or educational programs must be trained in accordance with the institution's written animal handling protocols. Such training must take place before handling may occur (Accreditation Standard 1.5.12). These staff members should be competent in recognizing stress or discomfort behaviors exhibited by the ambassador animals and be able to address any safety issues that arise. Additionally, when in operation, animal contact areas must be supervised by trained paid and/or unpaid staff (AZA Accreditation Standard 1.5.13).

- Identify skills and training needed by animal care staff, education staff, and other zoo personnel (e.g., volunteers, docents) involved in the use of ambassador animals of this species.
- Identify ways in which accountability can be maintained (incident reports, violation reports, etc.).
- Provide sample procedures for reporting injuries to the animals, handling personnel or the public.

3.3 Handler Certification

Each institution should create an ambassador animal handling policy that conforms to AZA guidelines as well as any local legislation. The program, including species/individual animals, program types/messaging, and all handlers, should be reviewed regularly. Handler competency should be evaluated, and concerns with training performance should be addressed.

- Recommend the frequency of required re-training sessions for animal care staff.
- Provide examples of ramifications protocols for violation of policies (retraining, revocation of handling privileges, etc.).

The Conservation Education Committee recommends that facilities design educational experiences with ambassador animals with one or more the following outcomes in mind:

1. Species information: Understanding of the species natural history, role in the ecosystem, and/or status in the wild.
2. Animals in human care: Understanding of the commitment of AZA facilities to excellence in animal care and conservation and appropriate pet choices, where applicable.
3. Empathy development: Foster a sense of empathy and wonder by connecting visitors and audiences to the individual animal.
4. Conservation action: Empower audiences and visitors to take action to protect the species and wildlife in general.

This part was developed by the CEC for the Tawny Frogmouth AAG, and we encourage the use of this framework for all AAGs.

- Recommend housing or shelter ideas for ambassador animals of your species that address zoonotic concerns.

1.2 Diet

A formal nutrition program is recommended to meet the nutritional and behavioral needs of any species (AZA Accreditation Standard 2.6.2). Diets should be developed using the recommendations of nutritionists, including the Nutrition Scientific Advisory Group (NAG) feeding guidelines: (http://www.nagonline.net/Feeding%20Guidelines/feeding_guidelines.htm), and veterinarians as well as AZA Taxon Advisory Groups (TAGs), and Species Survival Plan® (SSP) Programs. Diet formulation criteria should address the animal's nutritional needs, feeding ecology, as well as individual and natural histories to ensure that species-specific feeding patterns and behaviors are stimulated.

- Recommend diet types and amounts for ambassador animals of this species that address health and behavior management concerns.
- Describe how the dietary needs of ambassador animals of this species can be met while meeting training and presentation goals
- If weight management is used as a training tool for this species, identify health trends and impacts such as typical weight ranges for the species, seasonal diet/weight fluctuations, signs and effects of unhealthy body condition, etc.

1.3 Enrichment

- Describe appropriate natural behaviors for this species and give options for how they can be encouraged through the use of enrichment, including any safety considerations specific to this species.

1.4 Animal Training

- Identify reinforcing conditioning procedures used to train animals of your species.
- List specific husbandry behaviors that have been successfully trained using reinforcing conditioning techniques with your species (stationing for physical exams, gating, blood and urine sampling, weights, etc.).
- List specific research behaviors that have been successfully trained using reinforcing conditioning techniques with your species (e.g., match to sample, discrimination, sensory recognition, cognition, etc.).
- List specific presentation and/or handling behaviors that have been successfully trained using reinforcing conditioning techniques with your species (e.g., stepping up on hand, accepting touch, vocalizing on cue, etc.).
- List any recalls that have been successfully used with your species.

1.5 Social grouping

- Describe how the individual ambassador animals of this species can be consistently maintained in a manner that meets their social needs.
- Identify characteristics of rearing (i.e. hand reared, parent reared) that might contribute to the success of this species as ambassador animals

1.6 Signs of stress

- Identify signs of stress, stress factors, and discomfort behaviors that are common for this species and protocols for dealing with them once they are evident.

2. PROGRAMS

2.1 Program types

Ambassador animals are utilized in many ways and many settings to engage, educate and create connections with zoo visitors. Please identify why this species has been identified as appropriate for the role of ambassador animal, and the types of programs with which the species have been successful.

- Recommend types of programs, including location (on or off grounds), setting (indoors or outside) and appropriate audiences for displaying this species

2.2 Temperature guidelines

- Identify limitations/restrictions regarding ambient temperatures/weather conditions.
- Recommend options of maintaining an appropriate environment for the animal when out of its enclosure.

2.3 Transport

Consideration needs to be given to the means in which an animal will be transported both within the Institution's grounds, and to/from an off-grounds program. Animal transportation must be conducted in a manner that is lawful, safe, well planned, and coordinated, and minimizes risk to the animal(s), employees, and general public (AZA Accreditation Standard 1.5.11).

- Describe the best ways to remove and return the ambassador animals of this species from its enclosure.
- Recommend the best ways to crate and transport ambassador animals of this species.
- Identify guidelines for disinfecting surfaces, transport carriers, enclosures, etc.
- Identify any federal advance reporting requirements for animals taken away from the zoo overnight, e.g. per USDA regulations, that apply to this species.

2.4 Display options

Careful consideration should be given to the presentation of ambassador animals, including safety of the animal, handler and public, as well as the messages associated with the visual display of the animal.

- Recommend appropriate methods of display, including options for training animals in voluntary participation and ensuring animal and human safety.
- Describe situation-specific handling protocols and safety guidelines on how handlers and public should interact with and/or handle ambassador animals of your species (e.g., whether or not an animal is allowed to be touched by the public and how it is handled in such situations).
- Recommend visitor management guidelines (e.g., ensuring visitors' interact appropriately with animals, don't eat or drink around the animal, etc.).

Ambassador animals that are taken off zoo or aquarium grounds for any purpose have the potential to be exposed to infectious agents that could spread to the rest of the institution's healthy population. AZA-accredited institutions must have adequate protocols in place to avoid this (AZA Accreditation Standard 1.5.5).

- Identify potential disease issues with the use of animals for this species as ambassador animals.
- Address approaches to minimize disease transfer based on appropriate facilities, animal handling, and staff procedures and protocols (proper hygiene and hand washing requirements, etc.).

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