

			
Southeast Asian Zoos and Aquarium (SEAZA) Animal & Visitor Interaction Guidelines			
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SEAZA Guidelines for Animal & Visitor Interaction (AVI)

1. Definition of AVI

Animal & Visitor Interaction (AVI) refers to all activities within zoo institutions that involve interactions between animals and visitors, including touch, feeding, photography, educational presentations, and keeper talks. These activities aim to enhance educational and conservation awareness while ensuring positive animal welfare state is in the utmost priorities.

2. Declarations

- These guidelines serve as recommendations and standards for SEAZA members. Members should implement AVI activities in accordance with SEAZA AVI Guidelines as well as local laws and regulations.
- Zoos must ensure that all AVI activities are scientifically grounded and undergo regular reviews and assessments to maintain positive welfare states for the animals involved.
- All AVI activities must comply with the SEAZA Guidelines for Animal Visitor Interaction and animal welfare standards set forth by the SEAZA Code of Ethics & Welfare and the SEAZA Standards on Animal Welfare.
- Ensuring animal welfare should be the core consideration in all interaction activities, avoiding any actions that may negatively impact the animals' physical and psychological well-being.

3. Fundamental Principles

3.1. Educational Significance

AVI activities should convey accurate knowledge about animal behavior, ecology, and conservation. The educational message must avoid imparting misleading information. For instance, while informing visitors that wild animals should not be kept as pets, the activities should avoid actions such as allowing “pet-like touching”, which might send contradictory signals.

3.2. Staff Training

Personnel involved in AVI activities, including trainers and caretakers, must possess professional knowledge of animal behavior and welfare. Zoos should offer regular staff trainings and development programs to ensure that personnel stay updated on the latest standards and practices.

3.3. Animal Training

Animal training must be based on positive reinforcement techniques, respecting the natural behavior and autonomy of each animal. Training sessions should be documented, ensuring that animals have the freedom to choose whether to participate in interactions.

3.4. Interaction Safety Protocols

3.4.1. Clear safety protocols must be established for all AVI activities, including emergency reporting systems and evacuation measures. All staff should be familiar with emergency procedures to ensure the safety of both visitors and animals.

3.4.2. Preventive hygiene measures, such as hand sanitization, should be required for visitors prior to any interaction, especially when interacting with reptiles and amphibians to prevent disease transmission.

4. Animal Selection and Housing

4.1. Animal Selection

4.1.1. Species Suitability: Different species have varying levels of

tolerance for human interaction. Zoos should select species known to have lower stress levels and higher adaptability to human interactions, such as certain small mammals, birds, or reptiles. Large predators or highly sensitive species may not be suitable for AVI activities.

- 4.1.2. Individual Suitability: Even within the same species, individual animals may have different temperaments and adaptability. Zoos should carefully assess each animal's temperament, health, age, and past interaction experience when selecting individuals for AVI activities.
- 4.1.3. Age and Health Considerations: Juvenile, elderly, or animals with compromised health should not participate in frequent interactions. Juvenile animals, for example, have weaker immune systems, while elderly or infirm animals may struggle to cope with the stress of interactions.
- 4.1.4. Behavioral Characteristics: Only animals with stable, non-aggressive behaviors and those that can adapt to new environments should participate in AVI activities. Animals displaying signs of anxiety, fear, or aggression should be immediately withdrawn from the interaction and receive appropriate behavioral intervention.

4.2. Animal Housing

- 4.2.1. Living Environment: Animals involved in AVI activities must be housed in environments that meet optimal animal welfare standards, providing ample space, enrichment, and social opportunities. Housing should simulate the animals' natural habitats, allowing them to perform behaviors such as foraging and exercising.
- 4.2.2. Holding Space Design: Zoos should provide safe transitional spaces for animals to move between their housing and exhibition areas, minimizing contact with visitors and reducing stress. After activities, animals should quickly return to their familiar and comfortable living environment.
- 4.2.3. Refuge Areas: AVI activity areas must include refuge zones where animals can retreat if they feel stressed or fatigued. These areas

should offer sufficient concealment to allow animals to avoid interaction whenever necessary. Animals must have the freedom to withdraw from activities if they choose.

- 4.2.4. Social Dynamics: For social species, the impact of AVI activities on the group's dynamics should be carefully considered. Removing or reintroducing individuals from group settings can cause stress, and such changes should be monitored closely.

4.3. Rehousing and Retirement

- 4.3.1. Rehousing Plans: When animals are no longer suitable for AVI activities, zoos should have proper rehousing plans in place, ensuring that the animals can continue living in appropriate environments without the demands of interaction.
- 4.3.2. Retirement Management: Animals retired from AVI programs due to age or health reasons should receive specialized care and welfare attention. Regular monitoring of their health and well-being is essential to ensure a high quality of life.

5. Evaluation of Animal Welfare in Presentations

SEAZA member institutions should review and carefully consider the welfare status of all animals involved in AVI activities. The welfare of animals participating in AVI activities, particularly in educational presentations and presentations, must be assessed through scientific methods to ensure that these interactions do not compromise the animals' well-being. The impact of presentations on animals can be evaluated using various welfare indicators, including behavioral observations, physiological stress markers, and health assessments.

5.1. Behavioral Monitoring

- 5.1.1. Natural vs. Unnatural Behaviors: It is essential to observe whether the animals display natural behaviors during and after presentations. Signs of stress, such as repetitive behaviors (stereotypies), withdrawal, or aggression, may indicate that the animal is experiencing discomfort or anxiety. Behavioral studies can help differentiate between positive engagement and negative stress responses in animals.
- 5.1.2. Choice and Control: Providing animals with the choice to

participate or withdraw from presentations is critical. Animals should have control over their environment and interactions, which has been shown to reduce stress levels. Scientific studies emphasize the importance of autonomy for animals in enhancing welfare outcomes.

5.2. Animal Health Management

- 5.2.1. Health Assessments: Animals involved in AVI activities must undergo regular health checks to ensure they are fit for interaction. Any sick or injured animals should be immediately withdrawn from activities and receive appropriate medical care.
- 5.2.2. Physical Health: Regular veterinary check-ups should assess the physical health of animals involved in presentations, looking for signs of stress-related health issues such as weight loss, poor coat condition, or compromised immune function.
- 5.2.3. Stress Management: Regular assessments of stress indicators—such as behavioral changes, loss of appetite, or immune suppression—should be conducted. If signs of stress are observed, participation should be reduced or ceased, allowing time for recovery.
- 5.2.4. Behavior Monitoring: Long-term monitoring of animals participating in AVI activities should be conducted, tracking behavioral responses to ensure their psychological well-being is not compromised.

5.3. Physiological Stress Marker

- 5.3.1. Heart Rate and Body Temperature: Monitoring changes in heart rate and body temperature can provide real-time insights into the animals' stress levels during presentations. These physiological indicators are important for evaluating immediate responses to stimuli during interactions with visitors.

5.4. Importance of Regular Evaluation

- 5.4.1. Continuous Assessment: Welfare assessments should be conducted regularly, not only during presentations but also in the periods leading up to and following the events. This ensures that any potential negative effects are identified and mitigated promptly.

- 5.4.2. Long-term Welfare Monitoring: Longitudinal studies can help track the overall health and well-being of animals over time, determining whether prolonged participation in presentations leads to cumulative stress or other negative health outcomes.
- 5.4.3. Data-Driven Adjustments: Based on scientific findings, zoos should make necessary adjustments to the frequency, duration, and nature of the presentations. This could include modifying training techniques, providing longer rest periods, or even withdrawing certain animals from participation if welfare concerns arise.

5.5. Role of Research in Improving Practices

- 5.5.1. Evidence-Based Practices: Ongoing research into the welfare of animals in performance settings is essential for developing best practices. By leveraging scientific data, zoos can create environments and interaction programs that maximize animal welfare while fulfilling educational and conservation goals.
- 5.5.2. Collaboration with Experts: Collaboration with animal behaviorists, veterinarians, and welfare scientists is crucial for conducting thorough welfare assessments. Their expertise helps ensure that zoos remain at the forefront of welfare science and continue to improve the conditions under which animals interact with visitors.

6. AVI Activity Guidelines

No animals should be harmed or subjected to negative feelings or negative welfare during any AVI activity. The use of electric devices, whips, or any tools that could possibly expose animals to harm, pain, discomfort, stress, or fear should be strictly prohibited. Animals should have the freedom to participate or leave AVI activities on their own will and should not be restricted by chains or collars. Only activities that demonstrate natural and species-specific behaviors and abilities may be demonstrated.

6.1. Touch Interaction

- 6.1.1. Appropriate Animal Selection: Only well-trained animals with calm temperaments and those that are accustomed to human interaction should participate. Avoid species or individuals that are

highly sensitive or prone to stress.

- 6.1.2. Visitor Behavior Control: Clear guidelines should be provided to visitors regarding appropriate behaviors, with strict limitations on where, how, and for how long they can touch the animals. This ensures both animal welfare and visitors' safety. This signage or information should be visible and easily identified by visitors.
- 6.1.3. Supervision and Safety: A trained professional must supervise the entire interaction, watching for any signs of stress in the animals. Refuge areas must be available for animals to retreat when needed.
- 6.1.4. Educational Focus: During touch activities, it is essential to communicate that wild animals are not pets, ensuring that the message aligns with conservation goals.

6.2. Feeding Interaction

- 6.2.1. Feeding Protocols: Feeding activities should use appropriate food that aligns with the animals' natural diet. It must be part of their regular feeding regimen, not unhealthy treats used to encourage participation.
- 6.2.2. Feeding Frequency Control: The frequency and amount of feeding should be scientifically managed to avoid overfeeding or reliance on interaction-based feeding.
- 6.2.3. Visitor Guidance: Visitors must follow strict feeding instructions, with supervision from trained staff to prevent inappropriate or harmful feeding behaviors.
- 6.2.4. Educational Focus: Feeding interactions should be coupled with educational messages about the animals' natural diets and how to care for wildlife appropriately.

6.3. Educational Presentations

- 6.3.1. Demonstration Content: The focus should be on highlighting the animals' natural behaviors, such as foraging, exercise, and social interactions. Avoid using excessive training or behaviors that do not reflect the animals' natural tendencies.
- 6.3.2. Demonstration Frequency and Timing: Presentations should be carefully scheduled to avoid overworking the animals, with adequate rest periods provided.
- 6.3.3. Props and Environments: Any props used must align with the

animals' natural behaviors and habitats, ensuring that the demonstration is all about safety, educational and respectful of the animals.

- 6.3.4. Educational Focus: Presentations should focus on the animals' role in their ecosystems and emphasize conservation efforts, avoiding portrayals of animals as performers. And also, educational messages that invite visitors to actively participate in the protection and conservation of the environment and wildlife.

6.4. Animal Photography

- 6.4.1. Safety Distance and Supervision: Clear boundaries must be established to ensure a safe distance between visitors and animals during photography sessions, preventing stressful proximity.
- 6.4.2. Animal Welfare Considerations: Photography sessions should not interfere with the animals' daily routines, and rest areas should be provided to allow the animals to recuperate during long sessions.
- 6.4.3. Equipment Control: Flash photography and noisy equipment should be restricted to avoid causing stress to the animals.
- 6.4.4. Educational Focus: The photography sessions should reinforce the message that wild animals are not pets, focusing on conservation and the animals' role in the wild.

6.5. Keeper Talks

- 6.5.1. Displaying Natural Behaviors: Keepers should focus on highlighting the animals' natural behaviors, avoiding excessive training or forceful manipulation. Ample rest periods must be provided after each session.
- 6.5.2. Interaction Safety Management: Keepers must supervise all interactions to ensure that visitors do not engage in unsafe behaviors around the animals.
- 6.5.3. Educational Focus: Keeper talks should highlight the animals' natural behaviors, their conservation needs, and welfare requirements. The focus should be on education rather than entertainment.
- 6.5.4. Training Documentation: Keepers should maintain thorough records of all training activities, ensuring that positive reinforcement techniques are followed, and the animals'

autonomy is respected.

Conclusion

This guideline serves as a framework for SEAZA member institutions to ensure that all AVI activities prioritize animal welfare, education, and conservation. By implementing scientifically backed practices, regularly reviewing animal welfare, and maintaining transparency with the public, zoos can create enriching and meaningful interactions between visitors and animals while safeguarding the well-being of all species involved.

SEAZA institutions must remain committed to continuous improvement by adapting to the latest scientific findings and welfare standards. The ethical responsibility toward animals under human care is an evolving journey, and through collaboration, research, and dedication, we can ensure that the balance between conservation education and animal welfare is always maintained.

Together, we strive for a future where zoos serve as models of excellence in animal care and conservation advocacy.