

The British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) Report



General

During 2012 BIAZA has continued to operate with the Aichi Targets as a guiding mantra for Association and member zoo operations. Whereas Target 12 encapsulates our conservation mission, Target 1 (*“make people aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably”*) is now recognised as a key area of zoo operation and of growing import in day to day operations.

Staff

The BIAZA office has remained steady with 3.2 staff positions although there have been changes in personnel. The end of 2012 / beginning of 2013 saw the retirement of Miranda Stevenson, whose efforts on behalf of BIAZA and zoos is to be applauded. I have big shoes to fill. Zara Gaspar continues as Communications Manager and Andrea Marlowe as Management Accountant. Matt Hartley covered the position of Zoo Biologist for six months, and that position is currently held by Nicky Needham on secondment from ZSL whilst job roles are being evaluated. We have also been joined by Fatemah Abidi, replacing Serena Cowdy, as General Assistant.

Membership and Communication

BIAZA's membership stands at 107 (July 2013) with 100 full and 7 provisional members. Our corporate membership currently stands at 44 members.

The Annual Conference was hosted this year by the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth. This year's theme was *BIAZA's 50 Shades of Green*, looking at aspects of sustainable practice, and coincided with the launch of BIAZA's Sustainability Handbook. This conference was very exciting as it focussed on an aspect of BIAZA's work that hasn't so far received much attention but may have dramatic impact in how we utilise the world's resources. Presentations were given on the current problems, including reviewing the evidence for human impacts on climate systems and the potential impacts on biodiversity, and the ways we may address them, including examples of water awareness projects, green energy solutions and green travel for visitors. Inspirational talks were given by Professor Lazlo Pinter (International Institute for Sustainable Development) and Alan Slater (Sustainability Director at Business in the Community), exhorting members to look at our specialisms and utilise them to engage with our 22.4 million visitors.

Every year the BIAZA Research Committee hosts their Research Symposium encouraging new zoo researchers to present their findings to peers and other zoo personnel. This year the Research Committee joined with the Native Species Working Group and the focus was on research with native species. The symposium was hosted by Wildwood in Kent, a collection that concentrates on British native species of the past and present. A feature of the symposium was not just work with the species but, again, how we can engage with the public and encourage them to think in positive ways about the wildlife around them. Earlier this year a consortium of NGO's (including BIAZA members) produced a report for the British government highlighting that over 60% of British species are suffering

major declines. This illustrates the timely nature of the work by BIAZA zoos and highlights the need for continuing collaboration with relevant NGOs.

We continued to hold smaller regional meetings and the Irish meetings, this year hosted by Tayto Park in May. A key feature of these meetings was strategy workshops. BIAZA's strategy is due for renewal and these meetings were an ideal opportunity to communicate with members about their impressions of the achievements of BIAZA to date, and the needs of BIAZA and the membership in the future. It is important that we deal with the special needs of the smaller collections especially as over 50% of members are technically 'small'.

BIAZA has again coordinated a series of events geared to building engagement with the visitors to our zoos and aquariums. These have included Love your Zoo week, BIAZA's Big Bug Bonanza and BIAZA's BioBlitz. The BioBlitz in particular has been a great success this year with 25 zoos signed up to the 24 hr assessment of as many native species within the zoo grounds as possible. This is an ideal opportunity to engage with the public, with school groups and with volunteers from local universities and nature groups. In addition it has thrown up some interesting species results for our sites, some of the data of which is still being collated.

Influencing Decision Makers

Our All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) is still very active in Westminster. Towards the end of 2012 we hosted a parliamentary lunch in the Palace of Westminster, one of the best attended APPG lunches, allowing BIAZA members to sit down and discuss issues with MPs and Lords. On the back of this questions were raised within the Commons and the Lords concerning increased support from Parliament for zoos. This outcome has significantly raised our profile with British Parliament. In 2103 we have held meetings in Westminster on: 'conservation and zoos in Gibraltar' and 'the work of zoos in China' with more planned for the rest of the year. We, again, held our annual parliamentary reception in June, during which I gave an address focussing on the work of BIAZA members with native species. Again, coming on the heels of the NGO report mentioned earlier, this was a timely introduction for the MPs and Lords to the work and achievements of BIAZA members with native species. Currently we are arranging meetings, along with our members, with MEPs to aid EAZA in promoting the good work of zoos to the European Parliament.

This year, for the first time, we are investigating the possibility of establishing a parallel to the APPG with the Irish government. Using the contacts of the chair of the British APPG we have identified a member of the Irish Parliament willing to work with us to establish the remit of this group. This will not only benefit our Irish members in their work, but will also give another route into the European Parliament to support the work of EAZA.

A significant amount of time is still being spent on elephants. BIAZA continues to facilitate the Elephant Welfare Group for Government and the group has now begun to implement some of the research necessary to produce evidence-based husbandry guidelines.

Field Conservation Support

This year for the first time BIAZA has offered a £5,000 research grant to member projects. We have had 12 members submit projects and are in the final stages of the selection process. This is a wonderful step for BIAZA in continuing to support and encourage our members to engage in conservation work. We hope to be able to continue this initiative on a yearly basis.

We continued promoting phase two of the BIAZA Reserve Project, which focused on ongoing management and protection costs at the reserve. Thanks to member donations, we are now funding two rangers in the Guapi Assu Reserve in south-east Brazil. The support will cover both rangers' salaries for a year and we hope to continue with this support into the future whilst also providing crucial resources — from digital cameras, uniforms and camera-traps, to young ranger's packs for schoolchildren who volunteer at REGUA. We are continuing with World Land Trust Keepers of the Wild project. This project aims to support rangers—strengthening the protection of the nature reserves that WLT has helped create across the world. BIAZA member zoos and aquariums will now have the opportunity to focus fundraising efforts not only on Brazil, but also Borneo, Armenia, Mexico and Zambia.

Over seven hundred field conservation projects were supported by BIAZA members in 2012 to a value of over 11 million GBP. Last year we had an exciting promotion of the Top Ten Species Most Reliant on Zoos, selected from our BIAZA members. This generated a lot of interest in the conservation work of zoos with significant press coverage. This year we are repeating the promotion, focusing on the Top Ten Mammal Species Reliant on Zoos, and we hope to achieve a similar result with press coverage.

Looking Forward

This year is the last of BIAZA's current strategy and so we are in the exciting time of generating strategy for the coming period. We will continue to work to be the professional standard for zoos and aquariums within the British and Irish region, further developing their education, research and conservation activities. In addition we will be focussing strongly on the sustainability and public engagement aspect of our members work. We will continue to push forward our political agenda, especially with MEPs.

Kirsten Pullen,
CEO BIAZA

BIAZA
Regent's Park
London
NW1 4RY

Tel: 020-7449 6351
Fax: 020-7449 6359
E-mail: director@biaza.org.uk
Website: www.biaza.org.uk