

Supporting research and applications in small population biology to ensure cooperative, scientific management and to create sustainable, healthy zoo populations.

In their management of captive animals, zoos and aquaria focus on the long-term maintenance of healthy captive populations in conjunction with education and conservation goals for each species. Cooperative, scientific population management is critical to the long-term sustainability of most zoo and some aquarium animal collections. Population management ensures that zoo and aquarium collections are maintained at the sizes necessary to meet the conservation and education missions of each species yet that populations will not grow beyond the zoo and aquarium community's ability to care for them.

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Species Survival Plan[®] (SSP) programs have been very successful in ensuring that selected zoo populations are managed responsibly. As the success of AZA's cooperative population management initiatives has grown, so has the need for additional technical assistance. The population management needs of the Association are growing at a rapid rate. Although SSP programs receive expert assistance from members of AZA's Small Population Management Advisory Group (SPMAG), the number of programs that require assistance currently exceeds the SPMAG's abilities to provide assistance. Thus, AZA has created the Population Management Center in Chicago to conduct genetic and demographic analyses and to develop and distribute management plans.

The Population Management Center (PMC) is housed at Lincoln Park Zoo and supported jointly by Lincoln Park Zoo and AZA. The PMC employs five full-time staff: Director Sarah Long leads daily operations and supervises Studbook Analyst Kaitlyn Perisin and Population Biologists Kristine Schad and Cara Groome-Bryan. Steven Thompson, Vice President for Conservation Programs and Emily and John Alexander Chair of Conservation and Science at Lincoln Park Zoo, provides administrative and financial oversight for the center. PMC staffs also draw on the expertise and experience of population biologists Joanne Earnhardt, Ph.D. and Lisa Faust, Ph.D., from the zoo's Alexander Center for Applied Population Biology. Former PMC staffer Colleen Lynch serves as consulting population biologist.

The center staff assists zoo professionals with every step of a population management plan, beginning with checking that data for the managed species are clean and accurate. These data are then analyzed using software developed and tested by the center staff. The current status of the population is determined, and predictions about its future status are made. Based on these results, recommendations are made instructing how many births are necessary as well as which individuals to breed and which not to breed. Finally, the center sends a report of analyses and recommendations to all institutions participating in the management plan. As an additional service, the two population biologists and studbook analyst are available to provide "help line" type assistance, via e-mail or telephone, to studbook keepers, species coordinators and population managers.

To begin working with the PMC, contact Kaitlyn Perisin at (312) 742-7682 or kperisin@lpzoo.org.