



# ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS & AQUARIUMS

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THE **AZA** APE TAG CONSERVATION INITIATIVE:  
*Helping zoos to help wild apes.*





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WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IS ONE OF THE CENTRAL MISSIONS OF MODERN ZOOS. WITH MORE THAN 156 MILLION VISITORS ANNUALLY TO NORTH AMERICAN ZOOS, AND ALMOST 600 MILLION TO ZOOS WORLDWIDE (10% OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION), THE POTENTIAL FOR ZOOS TO INFORM PEOPLE ABOUT CONSERVATION AND MOTIVATE THEM TO ACTION IS TRULY AMAZING.

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#### ZOO AND APES

One of most celebrated and compelling groups of zoo animals is the apes: bonobos, chimpanzees, gibbons, gorillas, orangutans and siamangs. The popularity of apes for zoo visitors is a result of the obvious connections we share. Like us, apes protect their young and build lifelong friendships. Like us, apes engage in political struggles and form alliances. And like us, they enjoy a good meal and an afternoon nap. People recognize and are drawn to these connections, as reflected in spontaneous comments from zoo visitors like:

“They are just like us, I can’t get over how they are just like us.”

“I could stay here all day and watch them.”

“When you look into their eyes you can tell how smart they are.”



Because of this connection, apes are wonderful institution builders for zoos. Ape exhibits are among the most popular zoo attractions. They boost attendance, increase revenue and enhance overall visitor satisfaction.

- Louisville Zoo saw a sustained 15% increase in attendance after opening their Gorilla Forest exhibit.
- Since 1999, 2.6 million Bronx Zoo visitors have paid \$3 to see the Congo Gorilla Forest exhibit, providing over \$8 million for conservation with more than 40% directly supporting gorilla field conservation.
- The Sedgwick County Zoo saw a 20% attendance increase with the opening of their Downing Gorilla Forest Exhibit.



Apes clearly contribute significantly to zoos, increasing visitor numbers and creating positive experiences that make people feel closer to nature. Today, AZA accredited zoos are moving to increase their contribution to apes through the Ape TAG Conservation Initiative.

**According to AZA's Report on Conservation and Science, over the last decade:**

- Almost 50% of institutions housing apes contributed directly to ape conservation.
- Half of the institutions gave continuing support to ape conservation.
- 60% of the projects supported received funds more than once.

But AZA institutions want to do more to protect the future of apes. Working together through the AZA Ape TAG Conservation Initiative, zoos will be able to provide even greater levels of support to the wild populations of apes that so desperately need it.



### APES IN THE WILD

Apes need our help. “Catastrophic decline, precipitous loss, decimation”— these are the words used to describe the current situation for apes in the wild. Illegal hunting, habitat loss to mining, logging and agricultural conversion, disease and the pet trade all threaten the fragile existence of apes and their habitats. It is estimated that some species of apes will be extinct in as little as one human generation (20 years).

#### Some staggering and sobering statistics:

- Two of the six species and four of the 11 subspecies of great apes are considered Critically Endangered, the highest level of conservation threat assigned by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- Chimpanzee numbers have declined by roughly 60% in the last 25 years.
- There are only 700 remaining mountain gorillas — that is one mountain gorilla for every eight million people on Earth.
- In Borneo, 25% of orangutan habitat was converted to palm oil plantations between 1983 and 2003.
- Fewer than 100 eastern black crested gibbons remain in the wild, making them the world’s most endangered ape.

With every day that passes, we are losing options for saving wild populations of apes. A number of key activities are crucial for the long-term survival of apes in the wild: anti-poaching patrols and law enforcement, the presence of long-term field sites and researchers, effective protected area management, and community involvement. More information, such as data on ape densities and distributions, is also essential to develop sustainable conservation programs. To be successful we must act now.





### THE AZA APE TAG CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

In accordance with the World Zoo and Aquarium's Conservation Strategy, the Ape TAG's goal is to help secure long-term populations of apes in their natural habitats wherever possible. Our aim is to create a unique program that will allow zoos to contribute to and support ongoing ape conservation initiatives.

#### Specific goals of the program include:

1. Providing long-term support (up to three-year awards) for projects based in priority sites for ape conservation, for example, as outlined in IUCN/SSC Action Plans;
2. Increasing the number of zoos contributing to the *in situ* conservation of apes;
3. Increasing the presence of zoos in the international conservation community;
4. Encouraging law enforcement and *in situ* educational initiatives through the support of sanctuaries;
5. Providing zoos with resources to convey their conservation messages to their visitors and demonstrate their commitment to the preservation of apes in the wild.

By working together and leveraging our considerable expertise, influence and resources, zoos can become one of the most important agents of ape conservation. But we need immediate and decisive support for these critical conservation efforts if we are to save wild populations of apes.

#### How does the initiative work?

First, the Ape TAG will send out a request for proposals. Any project working on the *in situ* conservation of apes is eligible to apply and will be allowed to request up to three years of support. A review committee, consisting of members of the Ape TAG, other AZA committees, and outside ape experts (such as members of the IUCN Primate Specialist Group), will select projects for support using a process similar to that used by AZA's Conservation Endowment Fund. Initially, the Ape TAG Conservation Initiative plans to support eight projects (one for each of the six great ape species and two for gibbons/siamangs); the number of projects will increase as the program grows.

Second, zoos housing apes are asked to commit to *continuing* support. Why commit to multiple years? Building conservation programs requires sustained funding. For example, it is difficult to hire and train new field staff with only a year's salary in hand. By providing projects with multiple years of funding, we can help them grow their conservation activities. Of course, receiving funding beyond the first year will be contingent on satisfactory progress.

Zoos can join at three membership levels. Dues are paid yearly, and 100% of these monies will be distributed among the selected projects. As membership benefits, zoos will receive reports two to three times annually on the projects they are supporting, complete with photographs, staff biographies, and updates on exciting events from the field. Reports will be publication ready and geared toward a general audience and thus excellent for educating staff, board members and guests. Zoos will also receive a yearly financial report from the TAG.





**Membership Levels:**

**Silver: \$1,000 per year**

- Each zoo may select one project from the list as the project they are supporting and will receive biannual reporting information.

**Gold: \$5,000 per year**

- Zoos may select three projects from the list as ones they are supporting and will receive biannual reporting on all three.
- Zoos can also list support for the care of confiscated apes living in sanctuaries; 5% of funds received at the Gold membership level will go to support reputable ape sanctuaries in Africa and Asia.

**Platinum: \$10,000 per year and up**

- Zoos may list all projects as ones they are supporting plus the sanctuary support listed in the Gold membership level.
- Zoos will receive a visit from a representative from one of the projects during the three-year contribution period.\*

It is our hope that zoos with large ape collections or housing multiple species of apes will join us at the Gold or Platinum membership level.

\* Does not include costs associated with field representative's travel to institution; those costs are to be covered by the zoo.

Working together, we can make a significant contribution to the conservation of wild apes. Some figures:

We will raise \$178,00 per year

With 50% of institutions housing apes contributing to the Initiative:  
30% as Silver Members | 15% as Gold Members | 5% as Platinum Members

We will raise \$275,000 per year

With 65% of institutions housing apes contributing to the Initiative:  
35% as Silver Members | 20% as Gold Members | 10% as Platinum Members

We will raise \$365,000 per year

With 80% of institutions housing apes contributing to the Initiative:  
35% as Silver Members | 30% as Gold Members | 15% as Platinum Members