



# Ambassador Animal Policy

Originally approved by the AZA Board of Directors – 2003  
Updated and approved by the Board – July 2008 & June 2011  
*Modified from "Program Animal" to "Ambassador Animal" to avoid confusion with "Animal Programs"; approved by the CEC; no change to meaning of these terms - January 2015*

The Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) recognizes many benefits for public education and, ultimately, for conservation in ambassador animal presentations. AZA's Conservation Education Committee's Ambassador Animal Position Statement summarizes the value of ambassador animal presentations (see pages 42-44).

For the purpose of this policy, an Ambassador Animal is defined as "an animal whose role includes handling and/or training by staff or volunteers for interaction with the public and in support of institutional education and conservation goals". Some animals are designated as Ambassador Animals on a full-time basis, while others are designated as such only occasionally. Ambassador Animal-related Accreditation Standards are applicable to all animals during the times that they are designated as Ambassador Animals.

There are three main categories of Ambassador Animal interactions:

## **1. On Grounds with the Ambassador Animal Inside the Exhibit/Enclosure:**

1. Public access outside the exhibit/enclosure. Public may interact with animals from outside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., giraffe feeding, touch tanks).
2. Public access inside the exhibit/enclosure. Public may interact with animals from inside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., lorikeet feedings, 'swim with' programs, camel/pony rides).

## **2. On Grounds with the Ambassador Animal Outside the Exhibit/Enclosure:**

1. Minimal handling and training techniques are used to present Ambassador Animals to the public. Public has minimal or no opportunity to directly interact with Ambassador Animals when they are outside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., raptors on the glove, reptiles held "presentation style").
2. Moderate handling and training techniques are used to present Ambassador Animals to the public. Public may be in close proximity to, or

have direct contact with, Ambassador Animals when they're outside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., media, fund raising, photo, and/or touch opportunities).

3. Significant handling and training techniques are used to present Ambassador Animals to the public. Public may have direct contact with Ambassador Animals or simply observe the in-depth presentations when they're outside the exhibit/enclosure (e.g., wildlife education shows).

### **3. Off Grounds:**

1. Handling and training techniques are used to present Ambassador Animals to the public outside of the zoo/aquarium grounds. Public may have minimal contact or be in close proximity to and have direct contact with Ambassador Animals (e.g., animals transported to schools, media, fund raising events).

These categories assist staff and accreditation inspectors in determining when animals are designated as Ambassador Animals and the periods during which the Ambassador Animal-related Accreditation Standards are applicable. In addition, these Ambassador Animal categories establish a framework for understanding increasing degrees of an animal's involvement in Ambassador Animal activities.

Ambassador animal presentations bring a host of responsibilities, including the safety and welfare of the animals involved, the safety of the animal handler and public, and accountability for the take-home, educational messages received by the audience. Therefore, AZA requires all accredited institutions that make ambassador animal presentations to develop an institutional program animal policy that clearly identifies and justifies those species and individuals approved as program animals and details their long-term management plan and educational program objectives.

AZA's accreditation standards require that education and conservation messages must be an integral component of all ambassador animal presentations. In addition, the accreditation standards require that the conditions and treatment of animals in education programs must meet standards set for the remainder of the animal collection, including species-appropriate shelter, exercise, appropriate environmental enrichment, access to veterinary care, nutrition, and other related standards. In addition, providing ambassador animals with options to choose among a variety of conditions within their environment is essential to ensuring effective care, welfare, and management. Some of these requirements can be met outside of the primary exhibit enclosure while the animal is involved in a program or is being transported. For example, free-flight birds may receive appropriate exercise during regular programs, reducing the need for additional exercise. However, the institution must ensure that in such cases, the animals participate in programs on a basis sufficient to meet these needs or provide for their needs in their home enclosures; upon return to the facility the animal should be returned to its species-appropriate housing as described above.