

THE HEALTH OF WILDLIFE – THE ROLE AND NEEDS OF ZOOLOGICAL CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS

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The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) manages 5 zoological parks in the City of New York including the Central Park, Queens and Prospect Park Zoos, the New York Aquarium and the flagship Bronx Zoo. In total there are some 1700 species of animals managed through the curatorial and health care programs. In addition, WCS manages approximately 75 land and seascapes in 60+ countries, many with field health programs that provide veterinary services, capacity building, disease surveillance and health monitoring efforts for free-ranging wild populations. WCS is part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, a regional professional organization that inspects and accredits facilities, implements models for maintaining the genetic diversity of collection populations nationally and internationally and raises the level of health and husbandry care which often exceeds those required by government. There are similar regional groups in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Australasia as well as the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums that strive for many of the same goals.

The programs of modern zoos and aquariums go well beyond the display of wildlife. Today zoological organizations are increasingly involved with the conservation of free-ranging wildlife around the globe. The health care programs have also increased in size and scope and provide state-of-the-art veterinary and allied science services and research in a variety of areas. In order to maintain viable populations of genetically diverse species in zoos or in isolated remnant free-ranging wild populations it is necessary to move animals regionally, nationally and internationally. Increasingly the knowledge gained via the intensive management of zoological collections and animal movement is finding important application for small populations of critically endangered free-ranging species as well as providing valuable information that contributes to food security and protects the health of people and domestic animals.

