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Zoo Karlsruhe
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Dear Prof. Reinschmidt,

On behalf of the EAZA ex-situ program (EEP) for Polar Bears (Coordinator: Marina Galeshchuk, Vice-Coordinator: Dr. Florian Sicks), I as the Strategic, Communications and Husbandry advisor to the EAZA Polar Bear EEP want to provide you with an assessment based on my knowledge of your zoo's history with the species, particularly in recent years, and your polar bear facility, which your staff provided detailed information on for the 2020 survey that was sent out by the EEP.

I believe that there are two main issues that need to be satisfied and I will address each one in turn.

1) Is Karlsruhe's continued participation in the Polar Bear EEP of value to the programme?

Karlsruhe Zoo has a long and successful history with the management of polar bears and they have played a not inconsiderable role as an example of good practice and have been a valued partner to the EEP where they have acted for the good of the programme and not necessarily what may have been best for Karlsruhe Zoo. Their long history of successfully breeding and rearing what has historically been a difficult species relates to the former, and their more recent unselfish action of loaning their genetically valuable male to Hamburg Zoo is a testament to the latter.

There is much in the way of ill-informed criticism of the conservation value of a cooperatively managed captive population of polar bears, which is what the EEP is. There are many examples where the captive population of a species has played a decisive role in conservation planning and resulted in the species being returned to the wild, or more recently been used to augment a dwindling and fragmented wild population: European bison, Arabian oryx, Rothschild's mynah and Partula snails are well known examples of species whose captive population played THE decisive role in saving the species from extinction in the wild. Will captive polar bears ever be needed to make such a contribution? The simple answer is that we do not know, but without a genetically and demographically healthy population, we

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will not have that option should we need it. Andrew Derocher, the former chair of the IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group, has stated that such a captive population may be required at some point in the future to help conserve the species.

In recent years we have seen a marked improvement in our ability to manage this complex species and we are continually striving to improve our understanding and the quality of life for our bears. This laudable aim requires the long term commitment of zoos like Karlsruhe since without them, the future potential of the programme will never be realised. Those of us that are responsible for the coordination and management of the various species programmes under the EEP umbrella need informed, experienced and forward thinking institutions like Karlsruhe Zoo if we are to stand any chance of playing a role in saving this key-stone Arctic species.

2) Is Karlsruhe Zoo's polar bear facility suitable for a pair of bears?

The Karlsruhe Zoo polar bear facility is a divisible, complex environment of three enclosures totalling 1,851 m² for this demanding species. In recent years there have been a number of improvements and expansions that have mirrored our more informed understanding of the needs of these animals and the available space exceeds the requirements as given in the 2nd Edition of the EEP Bear Husbandry Guidelines of 300 m² per bear and one enclosure per adult bear. With three interconnecting enclosures and three times the required minimum space for two adult bears as recommended in the Guidelines, the Karlsruhe facility significantly surpasses the requirements. The flexible nature of the available enclosures, means that compatible bears of the same or different sex can be managed with access to the whole facility, or if required due to behavioural, seasonal or programme needs, the bears could be adequately managed separately. Even when housed together, it is of course still crucial that appropriate social distances can be maintained when required by the bears, as there also seems to be something of a seasonal element to the intensity and frequency of their interactions. The space, varying terrain and substrates and assorted visual barriers at the Karlsruhe facility ensures a suitable level of privacy for the individual when required.

At the moment there is no need to breed from their current female, but we do know that males and younger females are far more social than was formerly believed and the provision of a companion is probably crucial from the individual welfare and continued social development perspective. As we have increased our understanding of the species, we have discovered that the species' preferred social grouping can be rather more plastic and variable and the variety of social units that are being managed within the EEP population is testament to this.

As stated above, breeding at Karlsruhe is not currently required by the EEP, but it is very likely that at some point in the future we will need the Zoo to go back into a breeding situation with the bears they will be recommended to hold now or with different individuals in the future. We know that the Zoo has the experience and expertise to breed and rear this species and we are certainly happy that they have a suitable facility that will facilitate the necessary separate management of the adult bears; adult male polar bears, be it in captivity or the wild, tend to view their offspring as snacks. As with our more flexible view of social groupings detailed above, the EEP has also looked at different holding scenarios within a zoo



with a female with offspring. We know that the movement of males can be quite stimulating for them and once a male has successfully mated a female at a particular zoo, it may be prudent for a range of reasons to move him to a new location for social or further reproductive reasons.

I hope I have clarified both the current and potential future situation for the species at Karlsruhe, but please feel free to contact me again if anything is not clear or you have any further questions. Please be assured that I and my colleagues and advisors that manage the Polar Bear EEP are completely satisfied with the situation and have no welfare concerns for the continued management of the species and participation of Karlsruhe Zoo in the Polar Bear EEP.

Sincerely,

Douglas M Richardson
Strategic, Communications and Husbandry Advisor to the Polar Bear EEP

Marina Galeshchuk
Polar Bear EEP Coordinator

Dr. Florian Sicks
Polar Bear EEP Vice Coordinator