

England Species Reintroductions Taskforce (ESRT) BIAZA & zoos Stakeholder Meeting

Date and time: 21 Oct 2024, 11am to 1pm

Location: Cedar Room, Chester Zoo and online

Attendees in person:

Simon Dowell (Chester Zoo), Robert Comley (Chester Zoo), Delphine Pouget (Natural England & ESRT), Helen Donald (NE), Jeremy Sabel (NE & ESRT), Molly Dadswell (NE - minutes), Mark Brayshaw (Chester Zoo), Mike Jordan (Chester Zoo), Gerardo Garcia (Chester Zoo), Andrew Owen (Chester Zoo), Gareth Siddorn (Chester Zoo), Scott Wilson (Chester Zoo), Jo Judge (BIAZA), Laura Gardner (Wildwood), Phillip Riordan (Marwell Zoo), Javier Lopez (Chester Zoo), Andrew Terry (ZSL)

Attendees online:

Andy Clements (Chair of ESRT), Jenny Macpherson (VWT & ESRT), Lucy Groves (Jersey Zoo/Durrell), Brian Zimmerman (Bristol Zoo Project), Jen Nightingale (Bristol Zoo Project), Steve Nash (Wild Planet Trust), Laura Read (Marwell Zoo), Will Justice (Marwell Zoo), Tony Sainsbury (ZSL), Grace Clifford (Ocean Conservation Trust), Mark Parry (Ocean Conservation Trust), Chris Ransom (Jersey Zoo/Durrell), Sarah Lee (ZSEA), Campbell Murn (Hawk Conservancy Trust).

Note of the meeting

1. Welcome and introductions

Andy Clements introduced himself and welcomed everyone to the meeting, followed by individual introductions including summaries of respective professional backgrounds.

2. Background to the Taskforce

Andy Clements gave a brief account of the formation / backdrop to the Taskforce covering membership, vision, purposes and current activity. Andy Clements also set out the aims and objectives of this meeting: to present the work of the Taskforce and to listen to views, concerns and experiences of the stakeholders.

3. Roundtable discussion

Attendees contributed to a wide-ranging and stimulating discussion, debating contemporary topics and issues around conservation translocations, public communications and ways of sustaining an ongoing interaction with the Taskforce.

Key issues raised and discussed:

- Zoos have a wealth of expertise: taxa specialists, vets, disease risk, welfare, field work, propagation, education, communication etc; the skillset is much larger than just captive breeding.
- Scaling up habitat / land management 'bigger, better, more and joined up', so that we are more than just the sum of our interventions
- Zoos are changing to have a more holistic role in local and national native species and habitat recovery, for example, BIAZA's native species working group

- Need for a strategic plan / national picture / framework for decision making in organisations across the country.
- National priority lists for conservation translocations
- Post release monitoring is essential and invaluable to lessons learned and population health
- Stress in animals will immuno-compromise them and affect their reproductivity. Not just about animals in a zoo but also wild animals.
- Taxonomic bias
- The financial cost/commitment / funding good projects should not be underestimated, for example, disease risk analysis takes time and money
- Funding cycles are often short-term – as little as 18 months.
- Opportunities for blended finance, for example, BNG, ELM and green finance
- Wider ecosystem measures of success – not restricted to one species
- Ocean / marine conservation should not be overlooked
- Need to be more supportive and improve collaboration/data sharing across organisations and sectors especially among smaller organisations
- Expertise from further afield, for example, Denmark has good links between government and zoos to target priority species and Columbus Zoo (USA) has good collaboration with USFAWS on native species.
- Considering conservation translocations as trials – must balance risk of doing nothing vs risk of failing – failing is learning. How risk averse should we be?
- Defining biological, economic, and social successes and understanding the mechanisms for this.
- Opportunity to help the government meet its targets, to engage members of the public.
- How to build trust between regulators, the media, landowners and the public.
- Are we dynamic enough given the Climate and nature crisis?

4. Summary and round up

Andy Clements summarised the discussions – highlighting how important the views of stakeholders are in the work of the Taskforce. Andy Clements thanked attendees for their valuable contributions.

5. Chester Zoo Tour

Attendees were given the opportunity to visit Chester Zoo's conservation management breeding centre and greenhouse.