

Dear Mr. Thomas Kauffels, EAZA Chairman,
 Dear Mr. Frank Rietkerk, Chair of the EAZA Membership and Ethics Committee,
 Dear Ms. April Adams, Mr. Dag Encke and Mr. Douglas Richardson, EAZA Screening Team Members,

Re: Nikolaev Zoo Screening 30-31 August 2016

1. First of all we'd like to express our gratitude to the screening team members April Adams, Dag Encke and Douglas Richardson for their scrupulous inspection of the zoo and give our consent to have Douglas Richardson as an EAZA mentor.

2. We adopt the EAZA Council decision to recommend Candidate for Membership status for Nikolaev zoo. Please see the signed Agreement attached.

3. We attentively studied *EAZA Screening Team Questionnaire of 30 - 31 August 2016* and the screeners' comments, sent to us. As a result an order has been issued in Nikolaev zoo and a plan of measures was compiled aiming to delete the drawbacks.

4. Naturally, we believe the decision to shift Nikolaev zoo to the Candidate for Membership level is very strict and even unduly severe. The reason is the following: according to the EAZA Accreditation Manual a citizen of this country (if possible) should be present in the screening team, who would know local realities and the present situation in the country. We asked for a specialist from Czechia or Poland. Regretfully, it was not fulfilled and possibly it led to misunderstandings in some situations.

The screeners did not make serious remarks concerning the main questions of the animals' feeding and diets, veterinary supervision of the collection, appearance of the animals, sanitary state of the enclosures and the zoo territory, as well as the educational programs and the work with the visitors. It is shown in the EAZA Screening Team Questionnaire.

We also don't think it's right to allow our participation just in 5 EEP Programs, not even being informed in *which* Programs. It looks like punishment, like deprivation the zoo of rights. It is harmful not just for Nikolaev zoo but for the whole rare species conservation program, bearing in mind considerable achievements of the zoo in the rare species breeding.

Nikolaev zoo has been a full EAZA Member since 1993, it participated and participates in many EEP Programs till now and we ask EAZA Council to reconsider its decision in this regard.

We consider the statement (Question 10) that our staff members have stale data and are unaware of modern achievements in their professional field as offensive and ego-dystonic. We have high-class specialists graduated from the higher schools and universities, some of them have academic degree. Even if they don't know English they use Internet, which is at their disposal at any time, they visit the zoo library where they can read biology periodicals, look through EAZA and WAZA journals. We have a good interpreter/translator, we are on friendly terms with the Czech, Polish, Russian colleagues. As far as we understand, the screening team is obliged to check the zoo, but not the zoo personnel and their learning curve.

In the comment to question 1 it is written, that the zoo doesn't have Collection Plan and Master-plan. Now the Collection Plan is compiled according to the given template. But we would like to mention that the zoo has much more fundamental document, which was submitted to the screening team. It is "A Project of the Territory Formation". The document was compiled by a scientific research institute "Technokhimcomplex" (Simferopol, Crimea). The Project describes the zoo plans in all the fields of its activity for subsequent 5 years. It is adopted by the Ministry of Ecology of Ukraine and by Nikolaev City Council.

In the comment to question 9 it is written that the cleaners have some internal training. Yes, it's right, but it is necessary to add, that their level of knowledge is regularly controlled and scored. According to our legislation the cleaners work under a head of department's and keeper's control and just together with them they feed, enrich the environment, upbringing the young. There are no educational institutions for such category of workers in this country. It's not essential who fulfils the work, but it is important, that it is fulfilled. Lately Ukrainian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (UAZA) has developed a program of a three-week training for cleaners. An author of the program is Kharkiv zoo director, Doctor of Veterinary A. Grigoriev. Representatives of UAZA zoos will come to Kharkiv zoo for a week three times a year for training.

Physical Facilities

Comment to Question 18: Practically in each page of the comments it is underlined that the zoo facilities require reconstruction. Yes, we absolutely agree with it, and it is the main problem of the zoo, but during the last several years a great work has been fulfilled, new expositions have been built, which the screeners have seen.

In this connection the answer to Question 29 is strange, as all the individual questions got positive remarks of the screeners. We don't have zoo branches (Questions 24, 25) and accordingly they are not in the bad sanitary state as well as there are no chipped tiles and rusty metal, peeling paint and exposed wires.

Ukrainian zoos, including Nikolaev zoo, for the time being, can't look like the zoos in the Netherland, Germany or France due to some circumstances, we don't have such funds and just people living and working here know how difficult it is to reconstruct and keep the zoos and their collections in order without proper investments.

Lately Nikolaev zoo itself earned 80 thousand hryvnas and allocated the sum for the disabled visitors' access ramps designing. Next year, if the city gives money, the ramps will be erected at the zoo territory.

Financial Matters

Questions 33 – 34. During the screening the capital construction of the elephants' and giraffes' enclosures continued. Without a separate budget and a program it would not be possible to get funds for new construction, according to the local legislation.

Animal Care

In the comment to Question 39 it is mentioned that EAZA can offer some support if needed to ask for permission for veterinary drugs. Who in EAZA can we address for help with the drugs and gas anesthesia?

Question 50. We don't understand why positive answer is questionable.

Animal enclosures

Comments to Questions 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 60, 61 are vexed and disputable.

This year we finished constructing big enclosures and a winter house for hyenas, wolves and, possibly, cheetah. The enclosure's total area is 1.5 thousand square meters. Now an electric fence is mounted in the enclosure. After that the animals will be shifted to the new enclosure.

We can't adopt the recommendation concerning the 14-year old wolf female: if we put her to the young wolves group, she will be killed at once. Now she is kept in the neighboring with the young pair enclosure and contacts with them through the mesh.

Winter enclosures at the *Beast Island*, where jaguars and leopards are kept, really have concrete walls, but they are equipped with benches and tree trunks for climbing. (see photo attached).

Wild swine enclosure doesn't have just concrete, but also soil covering (see photo attached).

Eagle Aviary. The screeners mentioned that it is lacking perching, but we equipped the aviary according to recommendations for the bearded vultures, which we received from VCF, Switzerland.

Mandrills' enclosure is too small. We absolutely agree with the screeners and ordered a project for a big roofed enclosure construction.

Special attention of the screeners was drawn to the Elephant Complex. It was built 40 years ago. At present it is the largest elephant enclosure in Ukraine. This year we ended the capital reconstruction of the winter enclosures for elephants and built additional enclosure for a male elephant according to the Elephant EEP requirement. If during the reconstruction we possibly did not take into account some design peculiarities, we surely will invite an expert from EAZA for consultations and advice what construction changes to be done and how to reinforce inner metallic barriers.

We don't give up hope that EAZA will make a decision on transferring some Indian elephants to Nikolaev zoo, when all the requirements will be met, for keeping or, possibly, breeding the animals.

Comment to Question 54. Suggestion to join the Amur leopard and puma enclosures with a bridge is very interesting, and next year we'll realize the idea and also amend the railings around the enclosures to make them safe.

Comment to Question 57. A tree branch in the tigers' enclosure is cut away already.

Comment to Question 61. We pay great attention to the environment enrichment and try to do everything for the animals not to be bored. Regretfully, the screeners did not see that.

Comment to Question 66 – Questionable (not clear).

Comment to Question 68. Pony and horse ridings have been carried out by the zoo staff and the animals are the zoo property. The same animals deliver fodder to the zoo animals. The outside contractor takes the visitors for a drive around the zoo in the auto train.

Collection Plan

You can see our comments to Question 85 above. The Collection Plan has been compiled already.

Safety and Security

Outer railings around the wolves', snow leopards' and pumas' enclosures will be amended in 2017.

Emergencies

In the zoo there exists a plan of measures in case of emergency. Emergency drills are conducted twice a year (see photos attached). In the puma's and snow leopard's enclosures the spy holes, additional doors and outer railings will be installed before the end of 2017.

Comment to Question 126. We explained to the screeners that the zoo is not allowed to have fire weapons according to the Law, that's why we have an emergency knob and an agreement with the local police station for their immediate arrival and help in case of emergency.

Comment to Question 111. Before each festival in the zoo we check up working of the emergency knob together with police representatives.

Regretfully, nobody let us know the preliminary results of the screening, though we several times asked the screeners about that and the general impression about the zoo.

Should it would be done, the decision concerning Nikolaev zoo would not be so severe. There were no negative comments to the main kinds of activity: the animals feeding and diets, exterior view and state of the animals, veterinary service, the sanitary state of enclosures and the zoo territory, the educational programs and visitors' service. Those aspects of work have been considered satisfactory.

Please excuse for straightforward reply and, possibly, for extra emotionality.

With best regards,
Vladimir Topchy,
Director
Nikolaev zoo