

JGI Statement on the death of a baby Orangutan in Switzerland

We've learned that Basel Zoo has recently killed a four-day-old baby orangutan after her mother Revital unexpectedly passed away.

We are saddened by the loss of both the mother and her infant. Moreover, we strongly condemn the unnecessary decision by the zoo management to kill Revital's infant. Instead, the zoo should have immediately started to care for the baby, whilst at the same time consulting other zoos and sanctuaries regarding options for the baby's future.

It is incorrect to assume that hand-raised orangutans are incapable of living in social groups or even breeding. Patti Ragan, the founder of the Center for Great Apes, has welcomed more than thirty orangutans in her sanctuary. Nearly all of them have been hand-raised for years. She confirms that these orangutans successfully live in social pairs or small groups at the sanctuary. One pair of hand-raised orangutans have given birth to and successfully raised a three-year-old infant at the Center of Great Apes. (This infant was conceived because of failed birth control.)

Some zoo managers believe that the killing of young and healthy animals is a responsible way of managing zoo populations, as space and funds are limited, or even as a form of enrichment. We do not believe that this is an acceptable solution: each of these sentient animals is an individual and, as such, should be respected. No animal should be killed unless it can be proved that this is in the animal's best interest – if the animal has physical problems that cannot be cured and are causing great pain or a deteriorating condition. It is the responsibility of the zoo community to breed animals only when they can offer these individuals the chance for a happy, fulfilling life. If this isn't possible, they should end the breeding of these animals and either continue to exhibit them or retire them to a high-quality sanctuary.

This policy of killing healthy animals is diametrically opposed to the efforts by many accredited zoos and sanctuaries around the world to help each and every individual animal in their care. Numerous baby orangutans, chimpanzees and other great apes are brought to sanctuaries in Africa and Indonesia, where caregivers go to great lengths in offering them fulfilling lives. We applaud the incredible dedication of these caregivers who offer around-the-clock care to orphaned animals until they can be fully integrated with conspecifics. Such hand-raised babies have started new lives in sanctuaries and some have even been successfully rewilded in Africa and Asia, living their own lives in their natural habitat, without being dependent upon or interested in humans. Furthermore, all great apes are endangered, and orangutans are critically endangered.

Basel Zoo should have taken the time to find a solution for Revital's baby. The baby could have found a warm, welcoming new home in another zoo or sanctuary, after receiving care for a period of time by a human caregiver. An experienced surrogate female orangutan could have helped raise the baby. The length of time during which she was hand-raised by humans would not have damaged the success of

such a transfer. But any such chance has been missed. This baby was killed after only four days – a period not long enough to search for an alternative solution.

We urge the international zoo community to reject a policy of killing healthy animals. It should be an honour for each and every zoo and sanctuary to care for individual animals. Every zoo and sanctuary should pledge to care for the animals they exhibit as individuals. These animals are not property and decisions should be made that are in the best interests of these individuals themselves. Many baby orangutans and other great apes have found happy, new lives after a period of hand-raising and live their own lives in social groups in sanctuaries around the world.

“It is unconscionable that the zoo would make the decision to kill the baby without consulting as many organisations as possible. That killed infant was an individual and it is not possible to say that he or she could not have enjoyed life, even if it was a non-conventional life.” Dr Jane Goodall

Signed by the members of the Global Ethics Committee of the Jane Goodall Institute: Dr. Jane Goodall, Dr. Marc Bekoff, Dr. Kerry Bowman, Chris Heyde, Dr. Koen Margodt, Mary Peng and Dr. Rick Quinn.

Communication

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Further reading

- Dr. Marc Bekoff's blog on the killing: [Four-Day-Old Baby Orangutan Needlessly Killed at the Basel Zoo \(marcbekoff.com\)](https://marcbekoff.com/2018/04/04/four-day-old-baby-orangutan-needlessly-killed-at-the-basel-zoo/) @marcbekoff