

Zoo Support for Conservation

With the active participation of Fauna and Flora International (FFI) and the support of the Rufford Foundation, the Zoo Counterpart Initiative was launched in 2005 to enable greater collaboration between zoos and International Conservation NGOs.

The Initiative's first objective is to ask what UK zoos are already doing in conservation; the second is look at where zoos could work with FFI and the third is to facilitate and monitor a case study conservation match between FFI and a zoo.

Who's doing what - where

Fifteen zoos were interviewed to establish with what conservation work they are engaged; with whom they collaborate; how the projects came about; and where they are situated - in the wild or managed (*in- or ex-situ*), in the country of origin or overseas (in- or ex-range).

Whereas these definitions work most of the time, there are grey areas. For example, stag beetles hatching in their woodpile inside Colchester Zoo and flying away were finally credited with '*in-situ/in-range*'. But what should be done with Przewalski horses from Marwell Zoo, put out to graze a heathland SSSI in Hampshire?

In order to compare like-with-like, it was necessary to establish common 'categories of conservation' to describe all activities - though this proved challenging. Many zoos had made a distinction between breeding programmes for species due for release and those that weren't. However, the latter included some of the best release stories, which begs the question, when is a breeding programme not a release programme?

Making a match

While the second objective of identifying where zoos could work with FFI is underway, the third, to find one or more zoos to work with FFI on one or more overseas projects, is attracting interest. A contender is the Guizhou snub-nosed monkey, *Rhinopithecus brelichi*. With numbers probably well under 1000, the species survives at around 1,000 m as in the Fanjingshan National Nature Reserve, South West China.

There is a captive facility near the reserve holding twelve monkeys. It is quite spacious but the reserve administration and FFI need help and expertise with management and husbandry. Ambitious hopes for release need grounding in appropriate strategy and protocol. A first priority is to fund a visit by staff to the Cuc Phuong Endangered Primate Rescue Center, across the border in Vietnam.

This project would suit a zoo wanting to venture overseas, but unable, initially, to consider taking on more than an advisory, training, funding role. Indeed FFI's core principle is 'building capacity', and the aim is to enable the reserve staff to manage their own breeding and - hopefully - release programme.

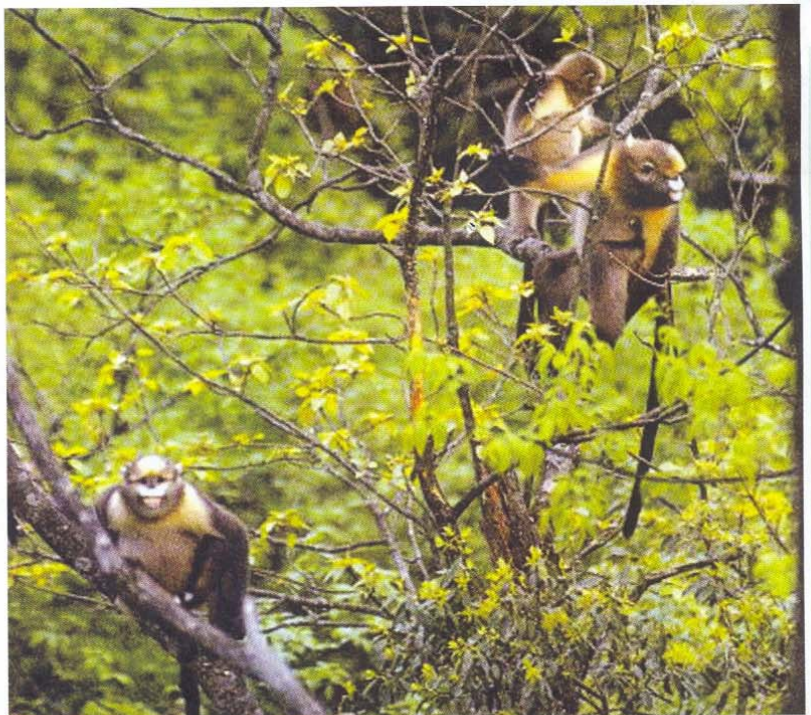
Simon DJ Hicks.

Simon Hicks and Karen Hayes are the independent advisors, Hicks&Hayes, 'developing opportunities for conservation'.

For further information on the Zoo Counterpart Initiative please contact simon.hicks@hicksandhayes.com



Przewalski stallions *Equus caballus przewalskii* roaming 'wild' on Eelmoor Marsh



Guizhou snub-nosed monkey *Rhinopithecus brelichi* in China