

D U B L I N



2025-2031 ANIMAL WELFARE MASTER PLAN

Continuing to provide the best welfare for all animals at Dublin Zoo

Dublin Zoo is run by the Zoological Society of Ireland.
Registered Charity Number: 20003715

We are Dublin Zoo. Our purpose is to save wildlife and inspire a passion for nature; to be a place where our visitors become active conservationists and help us achieve our vision: a world where people live in harmony with nature.







Contents:

Introduction	2
What is Animal Welfare?	6
Defining Welfare	8
Dublin Zoo's Animal Welfare Practices	12
Our Animal Welfare Master Plan	17
Culture	18
Cycle	25
Collaborate	30
Communicate	37
Glossary	42

Introduction

Dublin Zoo is the fourth oldest zoo in the world, opening on 1st September 1831. Since then, it has evolved and grown to its current size of 28 hectares in the Phoenix Park. The Zoo has over 100 employees, 90 volunteers and over 1 million visitors every year. More than 400 animals representing over 70 species are cared for by the Zoo, with each species having its own requirements for nutrition, husbandry and care.

This first-ever Animal Welfare Master Plan for Dublin Zoo sits under the 'Dublin Zoo 200: Vision 2021-2031', which highlights how we aim to transition into a zoo-based conservation organisation by 2031. The Vision 2021-2031 is underpinned by five objectives that embody and advance our purpose to save wildlife and inspire a passion for nature – one person, one family at a time. Within our Vision 2021-2031 sit the Conservation Master Plan, Conservation Education Master Plan and Sustainability Master Plan. Each Master Plan lays out strategic goals and actions we aim to achieve by 2031 and highlights how these align with the United Nations' (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Goals (SDGs).

As a Zoo, we are constantly evolving. Through our conservation partnerships, we support species conservation efforts across more than 20 countries worldwide. We also support conservation efforts to protect Ireland's biodiversity through the launch of the Centre for Species Survival: Ireland in 2023, working in official partnership with the IUCN Species Survival Commission. In 2025, we were officially recognised as a Global Humane® Certified Zoo, a prestigious certification awarded by Global Humane Society, the international organisation dedicated to helping ensure high standards of animal welfare in zoos, aquariums and conservation organisations worldwide.

It is our responsibility to achieve the highest standards of welfare for the animals in our care at Dublin Zoo. Our Animal Welfare Policy, created in 2020 and based on the Five Domains Model (Mellor et al., 2020), ensures the highest standards of animal welfare for all animals at Dublin Zoo. This includes wild and domestic species housed at Dublin Zoo and wild and domestic animals that live or temporarily stay within Dublin Zoo's premises.

This Master Plan was created as a way of solidifying Dublin Zoo's commitment to animal welfare by identifying the strategic welfare goals and actions that we aim to achieve by 2031, when we celebrate our bicentennial. From the very beginning, animal welfare has been central to Dublin Zoo's mission. The Zoo's founder, Sir Phillip Crampton (1777-1858), said in his foundation speech:

“To cultivate a kindly disposition towards animals, it is only necessary to know them. An intimate knowledge of their characters, disposition, and talents, may... tend to abate that spirit of cruelty and selfishness which leads us to seek amusement in the suffering and destruction of the most beautiful, harmless, and happy of sentient beings.”









Our commitment to maintaining excellent standards of animal welfare here at Dublin Zoo is evidenced every day through the hard work of our dedicated Animal Care and Horticulture Teams in looking after the animals and creating and maintaining habitats that are naturalistic and reflective of what they would experience in the wild.

At Dublin Zoo, all of our welfare activities are underpinned by our Animal Welfare Policy and see us referring to the practices laid out in the Irish Standards of Modern Zoo Practice (ISMZP, 2016) developed by the Irish Government. Regionally and internationally, we align our welfare activities and standards with those set out by professional industry bodies, such as the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA), the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). This Master Plan also sees us continuing to meet the requirements of the WAZA 2023 Animal Welfare Goal, and aligns with the 2025 WAZA Animal Welfare Strategy: Advancing Animal Welfare.

The Strategic Goals set out within this Master Plan were derived from reviewing documents at a zoo accreditation and government level and by working with key partners. Throughout the development of this Master Plan, we consistently collaborated with a range of professional experts, including the Animal Care Team, the Veterinarian Team, the Curatorial Team, external researchers, and academics, seeking input and guidance.

The goals we have set ourselves in this Animal Welfare Master Plan are ambitious, and some targets may be challenging. However, we are determined to achieve these goals and know that the process of working towards them will stimulate innovation, new ways of working and new collaborations, enhancing the lives of the animals in our care at Dublin Zoo.

Lucy Stratford

Lucy Stratford
Behaviour and Welfare Scientist, Dublin Zoo

What is Animal Welfare?

Historically, animal welfare was viewed primarily in relation to the animal's fundamental, physical needs. If an animal was healthy and free from physical suffering, they were considered to have good welfare. Further developments in this field saw emphasis placed on the interactions an animal has with its environment, how it copes and adapts to change, and natural species-typical behaviour. Efforts to avoid anthropomorphising (attributing human characteristics to animals) often prevented the inclusion of how an animal feels within welfare discussions.

However, over the last several years, there has been a clear shift towards including affective state and the subjective experiences of an animal into welfare considerations. Moreover, we now see the importance of positive experiences highlighted within the literature, encouraging individuals to promote positive welfare states in the animals housed in human care.

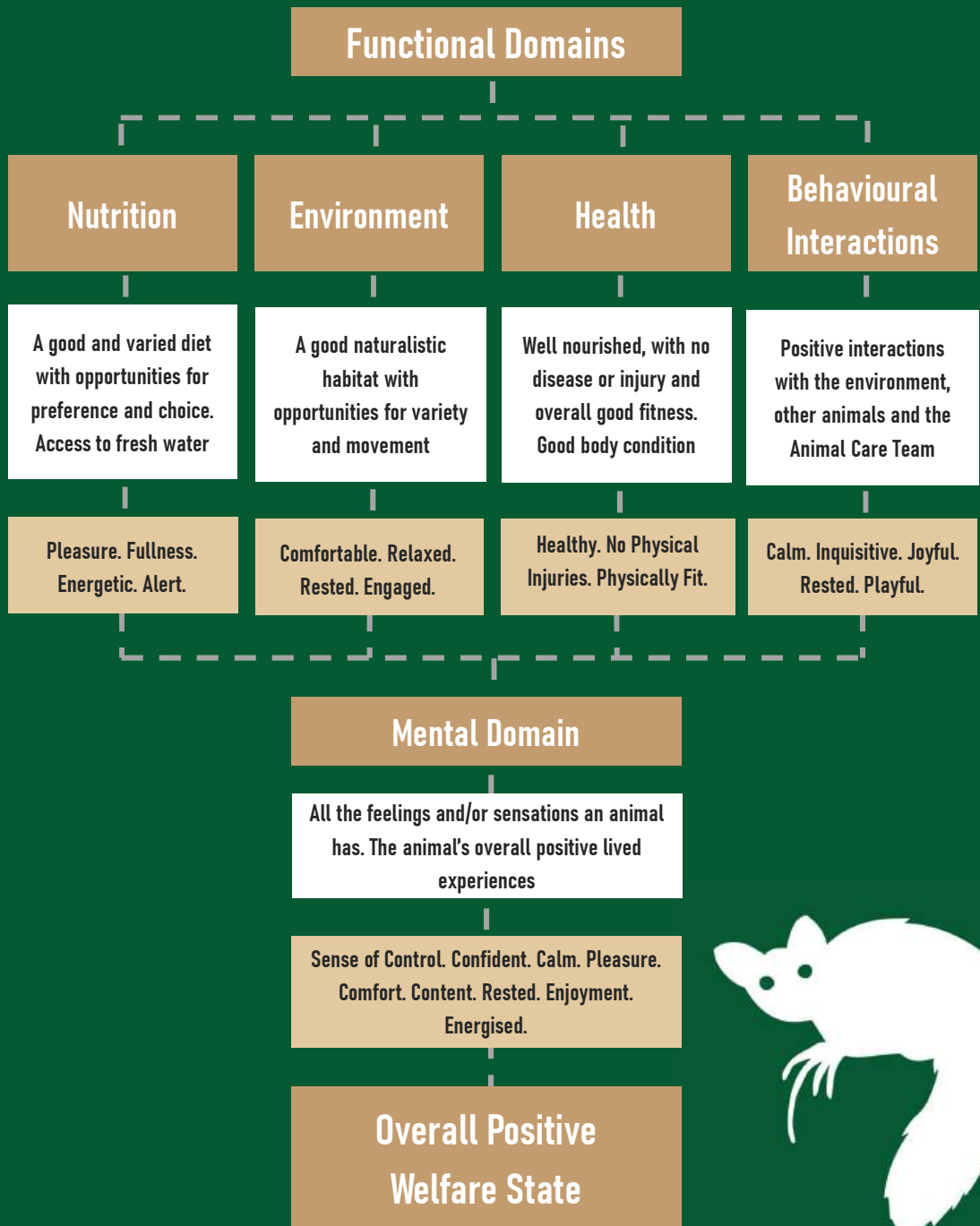
The Five Domains Model, first created in 1994 by David Mellor and colleagues, is a globally accepted framework of welfare at a BIAZA, EAZA and WAZA level. It has been adapted several times since its initial development to reflect advancements in scientific knowledge. Most recently, the Fourth Domain, Behavioural Interactions, was expanded to incorporate interactions with other animals, with humans and with the environment.

This model is the foundation of Dublin Zoo's Animal Welfare Policy and of all animal welfare assessments at a species and individual level due to its comprehensiveness and broad applicability to animals housed in human care.

At Dublin Zoo, we are exploring ways we can move towards measuring the Fifth Domain, currently understood as the accumulated output of the first four Functional Domains. The Mental Domain encompasses all the feelings and/or sensations that an animal has across their whole life, providing a holistic overview of their lived experience.



The Five Domains Model



Adaptation of the Five Domains Model showing the goals and corresponding examples in relation to how an animal will express each domain

Defining Welfare

Animal welfare is a broad topic, and agreement on a definition of welfare is an ongoing discussion. The word 'Welfare' itself can be thought to have negative connotations, sometimes linked to poor welfare and/or suffering. For these reasons, some zoos have opted to use synonyms such as 'Happiness', 'Wellness' or 'Wellbeing', particularly in their public-facing documents. However, it is important to emphasise that welfare is a continuum between positive and negative. It is possible for animals to experience positive welfare, and that is what we continuously strive for at Dublin Zoo.

Regardless of the synonym used, we need to have a solid understanding of what our definition of welfare is before we begin to assess it. The process of deciding upon our definition at Dublin Zoo was comprehensive and included reviewing existing definitions and discussions with key individuals at the Zoo. Definitions of welfare used by accreditation bodies are shown on the next page, alongside the definition of welfare that accompanies the Five Domains Model.



Definitions of Welfare

Please note some definitions have been simplified for the purpose of this document

**ASSOCIATION
OF ZOOS &
AQUARIUMS**

“The state of being comfortable, healthy or happy.”



“The state of the animal as perceived by the animal itself with regards to its attempts to cope with its environment.”



“The physical, behavioural and social well-being of animals...”



“How an animal experiences its own world and life through its association with pleasant experiences specific for that species, such as vitality, affection, safety and excitement...”



“The physical and mental state of an animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives...”



The Five Domains Model defines welfare as: “The state of being manifest in an animal when its nutritional, environmental, health, behavioural and mental needs are met.”

Our Definition

At Dublin Zoo, we choose to use the word *welfare*, a robust term rooted in scientific study, over any other synonyms.

We emphasise that welfare is a continuum including positive and negative states across the whole life of the animal.



We choose to understand welfare by its key components rather than attempting to simplify such a multi-faceted concept into a single-sentence definition.

This allows us to be open to evolving, following advancements in scientific knowledge, as animal welfare science is a rapidly developing field.



Components of Welfare at Dublin Zoo

Health and Diet

Individual is of good and consistent health, with a suitable species-specific diet



Social Interactions

Including positive behavioural interactions with conspecifics and animals from other species (where appropriate) and good relationships between the animal and the Animal Care Team



Lived Experience

Considering the whole lived experience of the animal, promoting positive experiences, agency and positive affective states



Interactions with the Environment

How an individual adapts and responds to environmental changes, how they engage with enrichment and training opportunities





Dublin Zoo's Animal Welfare Practices

In 2020, we developed our first **Animal Welfare Policy**, which ensures the highest standards of animal welfare for all animals at Dublin Zoo, in line with the Irish Modern Standards of Zoo Practice and the Five Domains Model. Animal welfare underpins everything we do at the Zoo, and the Policy highlights that in relation to specific principles and cases, such as animal transfers and events onsite at the Zoo.

At Dublin Zoo, we use the term '**Welfare Interest**' to capture opportunities for improvement and enhancement. We continue to foster and promote a psychologically safe environment for all employees at the Zoo to express a Welfare Interest through the appropriate channels of communication.

We have two main welfare assessments at Dublin Zoo: our Focal Welfare Assessment and Species Welfare Audit. Our **Species Welfare Audit (SWA)** is conducted annually, in line with BIAZA and EAZA requirements. Currently, we are working to ensure this tool is as relevant to individual species as possible, with species-specific information incorporated. We are also exploring ways to incorporate personality within the assessment, emphasising the importance of considering individual differences in animal welfare.

Dublin Zoo's **Focal Welfare Assessment (FWA)** offers a snapshot of an individual's current welfare state and is adapted from the BIAZA Quality of Life Assessment. We changed the name of the assessment to greater reflect its neutrality and emphasise the importance of considering each individual animal's unique experiences. Most recently, a comprehensive review of all impact and likelihood levels has been conducted, alongside the creation of a new **Positive Impact Matrix**. This matrix enables the evaluation of actual or anticipated positive impacts on animal welfare resulting from specific actions or situations. It represents an important step in promoting positive animal experiences and provides a framework for highlighting existing positive animal welfare.

However, it is important to highlight that monitoring animal welfare is not reserved simply for completing formal welfare assessments. Welfare is integrated into everything we do at the Zoo. Animals are checked daily as part of routine husbandry practices by the Animal Care Team. A summary is distributed to and reviewed by key personnel across the Zoo to inform all future decisions.





When should a welfare assessment be conducted?

Daily

Animals are checked daily by the Animal Care Team. Daily Reports are generated and reviewed by the Curatorial Team, Veterinary Team and Behaviour and Welfare Scientist

Weekly

The Curatorial Team, Veterinary Team and Behaviour and Welfare Scientist meet weekly to discuss individual animal welfare cases

Monthly

Meetings are held monthly with key members of the Animal Care Team, Veterinary Team, Senior Management and the Behaviour and Welfare Scientist to review the Welfare Action Plans

Quarterly

The Veterinary Team and General Curator review mortality and morbidity records quarterly and present findings to the Animal Team, Senior Management Team and the Ethics Committee

Annually

In line with EAZA recommendations, Species Level Welfare Audits are conducted annually, unless special requirements indicate the need for additional evaluation*

* When Required

Focal Welfare Assessments are completed if an animal has been identified as having known health complications, is geriatric, if there has been changes to their social structure or if it has specific behavioural needs



DUBLIN







Our Animal Welfare Master Plan

This Animal Welfare Master Plan identifies the key goals and actions necessary to further solidify our commitment to animal welfare. It spans the period 2025-2031 and sits under the overall 'Dublin Zoo 200: Vision 2021-2031' and alongside the Conservation Master Plan (2022-2031), the Conservation Education Master Plan (2023-2031) and the Sustainability Master Plan (2023-2031).

We commit to reviewing our Animal Welfare Master Plan annually and updating it in line with advancements in welfare knowledge, reflecting the good practices and professional accomplishments made here at Dublin Zoo and externally.

At its core are four strategic goals where Dublin Zoo aims to achieve the best levels of animal welfare for all animals in our care. These interlinked goals are underpinned by a set of clear actions that will enable us to achieve our goals in the desired timeframe. All actions are cross-departmental and involve collaboration across Dublin Zoo.



1. Culture

Empowering staff by developing a culture of animal welfare science

We will continue to foster a culture of animal welfare science at Dublin Zoo. This refers to the shared values, behaviours and practices within the Zoo, and how we continue to prioritise and uphold animal welfare, ensuring it permeates through everything we do at all organisational levels. We know that when staff feel empowered, their work reflects this, and at the Zoo, the welfare of the animals in our care also reflects this. All activities at the Zoo are interconnected, and a solid culture of animal welfare is at the heart of this. We want to ensure that all staff have the same educational foundation, in relation to general welfare science and Dublin Zoo welfare activities, to provide the best possible care for the animals housed at the Zoo. We want to offer opportunities to staff for continual personal and professional development and will explore ways to expand our culture of animal welfare outside of the walls of the Zoo, connecting with local schools, universities and our wider audience to inspire future generations of conservation and welfare scientists.

Alignment:

This goal aligns with: Goal 4 'Cultivating the Next Generation of Conservationists' in the 'Dublin Zoo 200: Vision 2021-2031', Goal 7 'Creating Conservation Scientists' in the Dublin Zoo Conservation Master Plan, and Goal 3 'Education, Training and Public Engagement' in the Dublin Zoo Sustainability Master Plan. This goal will also contribute to Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.





Actions:

1.1 We will continue to ensure that animal welfare is central to everything that we do at the Zoo, across all organisational levels and departments.

1.2 We will develop a training programme to ensure that all staff have the same zoo-specific educational foundation in relation to animal welfare.

1.3 We will offer opportunities for staff to further develop their animal welfare knowledge through professional training opportunities supported by Dublin Zoo's Staff Development Fund.

1.4 We will host regular internal workshops and seminars, led by the Conservation and Science team and other relevant staff, both internal and external to the Zoo, to continue to train, develop and educate staff in animal welfare.

1.5 We will explore ways to further understand perceptions of welfare amongst our visitors, to extend the culture of animal welfare across the Zoo and create opportunities for knowledge change.

1.6 We will work with the Conservation Education team to further embed animal welfare within their educational activities, looking at how we can inspire the next generation of welfare scientists, in line with the 'Dublin Zoo 200: Vision 2021-2031'.

1.7 We will extend our culture of animal welfare to the broader community in which we function through work with external organisations.





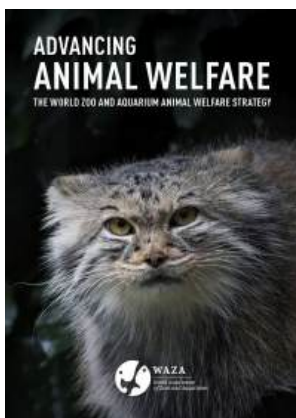
Case Study:

Strengthening Dublin Zoo's Culture of Welfare Through Collaborative Animal Transport

The transportation of animals between accredited zoological institutions requires meticulous planning, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to welfare. In November 2023, Dublin Zoo successfully coordinated the transfer of four Asian elephants to the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden (USA), following a joint recommendation from the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria's Ex-situ Programme (EEP) and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Species Survival Plan (SSP). This transfer represented the largest and most complex animal transport in Dublin Zoo's history.

Over an 18-month period, each elephant was trained to voluntarily participate in the process, including entering transport crates calmly. Our staff worked with expert consultants from around the world to ensure the highest possible standards were met. This dedication ensured minimal stress and fostered confidence and trust throughout. The training formed the foundation for success, underpinned by consistent teamwork and daily reinforcement of key behaviours.

A multidisciplinary team, including Veterinary, Animal Care, and Conservation and Science staff, collaborated closely to collect detailed behavioural and physiological data before, during, and after the move. Continuous care and monitoring by the dedicated team during the eight-hour direct flight maintained optimal conditions and exemplified the culmination of a phenomenal, welfare-driven effort.



Following their arrival, the elephants adapted quickly, displaying exploratory and social behaviours consistent with positive welfare. This project exemplifies how inter-institutional collaboration, meticulous preparation, and evidence-based welfare monitoring can set industry-leading standards.

As a result, this project was recognised as a case study in the 2025 WAZA Welfare Strategy: Advancing Animal Welfare, for its exemplary welfare-focused approach to the transport of animals.







2. Cycle

Ensure that the welfare of animals in our care is continually monitored and enhanced

It is our responsibility and duty to regularly monitor the welfare of all the animals in our care. It is a requirement in line with practices laid out in the Irish Standards of Modern Zoo Practice (ISMZP, 2016), developed by National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS), and as part of our accreditation process through professional industry bodies, such as BIAZA, EAZA and WAZA. We want to ensure that we are using the best tools available to us to observe and evaluate the welfare of all animals in our care, continuously using the information we have gathered to inform and improve practices. Dublin Zoo's Animal Welfare Cycle – Observe, Analyse and Act – allows us to do just that. We value the importance of assessing welfare at an individual level, exploring ways we can move towards measuring the Fifth, Mental, Domain within the Five Domains Model of Animal Welfare. Through consistent and systematic observations and reporting, we can identify actions and take the necessary steps to enact positive change where needed.

Alignment:

This goal aligns with: Goal 4 'Evidence-based Conservation' in the Dublin Zoo Conservation Master Plan. This goal will also contribute to Goal 14 (Life Below Water) and Goal 15 (Life on Land) of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



Actions:

Observe

2.1 We will review and coordinate the process of assessing animal welfare, from raising potential Welfare Interests to enacting positive change where needed, ensuring the process is as timely and efficient as possible.

2.2 We will continually revise the current welfare assessment processes at Dublin Zoo, ensuring they are regularly updated in line with advancements in scientific knowledge.

2.3 We will develop supporting documents providing information on the three elements of animal care: species-specific behaviour, natural habitats and husbandry practices.

2.4 We will employ technologies that can assist us in gathering observational data, for example, using cameras and software such as ZooMonitor®.

Act

2.8 We will develop comprehensive Action Plans, following the completion of welfare assessments, to standardise the process of refining and prioritising actions.

2.9 We will regularly and systematically review the Action Plans for efficiency and effectiveness and disseminate relevant information to key personnel across the Zoo.

2.10 We will establish an internal Animal Welfare Working Group, in line with EAZA recommendations, to evaluate Welfare Interests and review policies and procedures.

Analyse

2.5 We will work with professionals within the zoo and aquarium sector and other organisations, including local universities, to develop the most cutting-edge data analysis techniques.

2.6 We will embed welfare science into our Conservation Scholarship programme, supporting postgraduate students (MRes and PhD) to undertake welfare-related research of relevance to Dublin Zoo.

2.7 We will explore different technologies that can assist in data handling and data analysis, for example, using AI to compile and analyse observational data.





Case Study:

Developing a personality and welfare assessment to understand the lived experience of elephants housed in human care

As part of ongoing PhD research with the University of Chester, Dublin Zoo's Behaviour and Welfare Scientist Lucy Stratford has developed a personality and welfare assessment that can be used to understand the lived experience of elephants housed in human care in zoos.

This 22-item Elephant Lived Experience Tool (ELE-T) has been developed in collaboration with the Animal Care and Science Teams at Chester Zoo (United Kingdom) and Dublin Zoo. The first section of the ELE-T is aligned with the Functional Domains of the Five Domains Model, including items on the presentation of diet, general health of the individual and quality of recumbent sleep. The second section explores the lived experience of elephants, asking raters to take the perspective of the elephant and consider the elephant's overall level of contentedness and fulfilment. The final section is a personality assessment and, when coupled with the other two sections, highlights the value of considering individual differences in welfare assessments.

The ELE-T will complement existing welfare practices for the elephant herd at Dublin Zoo. We are also exploring opportunities to embed personality within other welfare activities to support individual-level husbandry practices.





3. Collaborate

Work collaboratively to better understand the welfare of the animals in our care

Collaboration is at the centre of advancing our understanding and extending our impact on animal welfare. By bringing together diverse expertise and creative insight, we can continue to drive innovation and meaningful progress in this field. We are committed to forming strong and effective purpose-driven partnerships with other organisations including universities, zoos and aquariums, and government bodies. Together, we will continue to produce high-quality scientific research, actively participate in knowledge exchange, foster accountability and support one another to achieve excellent standards of animal welfare. Equally, we also recognise the importance of collaboration within the Zoo itself. By strengthening connections across departments, we aim to further our collective understanding and promotion of positive animal welfare through comprehensive welfare assessments, research initiatives, and the ongoing exchange of information and ideas.

Alignment:

This goal aligns with: Goal 3 'Leading our Sector to Achieve Higher Impact' in the 'Dublin Zoo 200: Vision 2021-2031', and Goal 4 'Evidence-based Conservation' and Goal 7 'Creating Conservation Scientists' in the Dublin Zoo Conservation Master Plan. This goal will also contribute towards Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 17 (Partnership for the Goals) of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.





Actions:

3.1 We will develop and share a list of research objectives that align with our priorities for animal welfare at the Zoo which will include, validating proposed indicators of welfare and prioritising the under-represented taxa housed in our care.

3.2 We will form partnerships with universities at national and global levels, other zoos and aquariums, and government bodies, including but not limited to Fota Wildlife Park and Dublin City Council, to produce high-quality scientific welfare research.

3.3 We will collaborate with our Conservation Partners in Ireland and around the world, looking at new and improved ways to monitor welfare and offer welfare-related support.

3.4 We will promote collaboration within the Zoo, encouraging and supporting opportunities for cross-departmental research and staff development.

3.5 We will look at ways to continuously support single or multi-institutional animal welfare research led by students or other zoos.

3.6 We will explore and welcome opportunities to collaborate with external researchers or other zoos in the development or refinement of animal welfare tools, documents or policies.





Case Study:

Implementing a Collaborative Framework for Welfare Assessments at Dublin Zoo

The process of doing a Focal Welfare Assessment (FWA) at Dublin Zoo is unique due to its highly collaborative and multidisciplinary approach. Traditionally, welfare assessments are conducted by single or few individuals, such as the Animal Care staff having worked the longest with the animal. Indeed, research indicates that those most familiar with an animal are best placed to assess its needs. Moreover, limited staff availability and resources are a large factor in determining the frequency and process of conducting welfare assessments in zoos.

However, previous work on elephant personality and welfare has shown that involving the entire Animal Care Team in discussions does not only offer a wider range of perspectives but also increases the reliability of data. At Dublin Zoo, we prioritise multidisciplinary collaboration and aim to foster an environment of open discussion around an individual animal's welfare. Present at the FWAs are members of the Veterinary team, multiple members of the Animal Care Team, including the team leader, members of the Conservation and Science team and, if applicable, a member of the Curatorial team. In line with WAZA recommendations, these conversations are guided by the Behaviour and Welfare Scientist, who also acts as a point person, arranging meetings and generating action plans in collaboration with the Curatorial team following completion of the assessment.

Different participants can contribute to the discussion in different ways, depending on their background and expertise, which may correspond to different domains of animal welfare. For instance, veterinarians may have greater insight into the animal's physical health, the Animal Care staff may be more familiar with its mental state, and the Conservation and Science team can contextualise this with empirical data from supporting behavioural observations. Moreover, each contributor may experience the animal at different times and in diverse contexts, offering a more comprehensive and accurate picture of its welfare.

Together, this round table approach allows for different perspectives to be heard, promoting inclusion, exchange of knowledge, and a more holistic assessment of welfare.







4. Communicate

Share good welfare practices

Communicating our animal welfare practices clearly and effectively is essential. We aim to engage everyone connected to Dublin Zoo, from our colleagues at the Zoo, to peers in our sector, to our one million visitors who walk through our gates each year. We are dedicated to conducting and publishing peer-reviewed research that continues to promote a culture of animal welfare within Dublin Zoo and the wider sector, enhancing understanding and driving the continued advancements in animal welfare science. We also strive to foster collaboration and support through the zoo and aquarium community, leading efforts by facilitating opportunities to share knowledge and engage in meaningful discussions that drive continual improvements in animal welfare. We will continue to share insights into our welfare initiatives with visitors and supporters, both on-site through targeted welfare interpretation, and online through platforms including our website and social media.

Alignment:

This goal aligns with: Goal 2 'A Cutting-Edge Zoo Inspiring a Passion for Nature' and Goal 3 'Leading our Sector to Achieve Higher Impact' in the 'Dublin Zoo 200: Vision 2021-2031', and Goal 4 'Evidence-based Conservation' in the Dublin Zoo Conservation Master Plan. This goal will also contribute towards Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities,) Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



Actions:

4.1 We will train our staff and volunteers in how to communicate our welfare practices to our visitors, sharing information on species-specific behaviour and habitat design.

4.2 We will communicate our welfare practices to the wider public and community through different platforms, including social media.

4.3 We will prioritise publishing scientific research with a focus on animal welfare.

4.4 We will explore forums to present our welfare activities and research, including through our regular Conservation Lecture Series and at relevant conferences.

4.5 We will host an annual Welfare Workshop, offering a space for the development of an Animal Welfare support network for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, leading and facilitating discussions within the Zoo and aquarium community.

4.6 We will organise events to engage the public and inform them of our ongoing welfare practices at Dublin Zoo.





Case Study:

Enhancing Animal Welfare and Community Engagement Through Enrichment

It is well-established that the provision of enrichment, whether it be environmental, sensory or cognitive, promotes species-typical behaviours and positive experiences for animals housed in human care.

Dublin Zoo's Enrichment Working Group, launched in 2023, has been supporting a wide range of implementations across the Zoo, exploring methods of incorporating enrichment into daily animal care routines. The Working Group is multi-departmental and includes multiple members of the Animal Care Team, representing the variety of different species cared for at the Zoo, members of the Veterinary team and the Behaviour and Welfare Scientist. This allows for clear communication and exchange of knowledge and experiences across Dublin Zoo.

We are passionate about sharing our enrichment practices with the wider zoo and science community as well. In September 2025, Dublin Zoo welcomed a visiting researcher conducting a study on the effectiveness of biologically meaningful scent-based enrichment in stimulating natural behaviours in red ruff lemurs. This research investigated the behaviours associated with olfactory investigation, social interaction, and reproduction. We are also collaborating with researchers across the United Kingdom on a project exploring the relationship between personality and enrichment, and specifically, how we evaluate the effectiveness of enrichment at an individual level in socially and cognitively complex species.

Another key goal is continuing to foster communication and engagement with the general public, including our visitors. During Summer 2025, members of our Enrichment Working Group, in collaboration with our Community & Campaign Co-ordinator, delivered a five-week programme inviting disadvantaged families from the local community to take part in hands-on enrichment activities at the Zoo. Participants learnt about the importance of environmental enrichment and helped design and create items that were later placed in our carnivore habitats. This initiative provided a meaningful opportunity for our Animal Care Team to share the value of enrichment and to engage with community members who may not have previously visited Dublin Zoo.






Glossary

Provided here is a glossary of all relevant terms and their corresponding definitions as understood by Dublin Zoo. Some terms are rooted in scientific study, whereas others sit within animal welfare or husbandry-based guidelines. We hope that all who read this Master Plan view this glossary as the working tool it was intended to be.

Accreditation	A process by which a facility is assessed and passes a threshold of accepted standards to become an accredited or certified member of a regional association, e.g., British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA).
Acute Stress	A short-term event or stimulus which provokes an acute physiological response, for example, a sudden loud noise which prompts an animal to run away.
Animal Care Team	Members of staff at Dublin Zoo who directly care for our animals.
Behavioural Observation	The description and analysis of what animals do in a specific situation, involving systematically recording behaviour and expressing the results in a standardised, defined and analytical way.
Behavioural Repertoire	Every behaviour a species will demonstrate.
Body Condition	The nutritional and health status of an individual, often indicated by weight, muscle tone and skin/scale/feather/coat appearance, represented as a numerical value.
Chronic Stress	A situation or stimulus which provokes a long-term stress response.
Conspecific	A member of the same species.
Contraception	A means to regulate the fertility of animals, which may be used whenever there is a need for population management. All possible side effects of both surgical and chemical contraception are considered.







Cognition/ Cognitive	The mental process of acquiring and storing knowledge through the senses, experience, understanding and thought. Cognition involves reasoning, perception, awareness, intuition and judgement.
Conservation	Actions that promote protection, restoration, preservation and care of ecosystems, and the animals and plants that live within them.
Diurnal	Describing animals which are most active during the day.
Duty of Care	A moral or legal requirement to ensure the welfare and safety of those who are reliant on you.
Enrichment	The provision of species-appropriate environment, sensory, social, cognitive and behavioural opportunities that promotes the expression of species-typical behaviours and leads to positive experiences.
Ethics	A moral philosophy or set of principles that determines how we should treat animals.
Euthanasia	The humane, painless and distress-free termination of an animal's life. An end-of-life assessment will be considered if an animal's welfare is compromised and there is no action, whether medical intervention or otherwise, that can be undertaken to improve it. Euthanasia may also be considered in cases of population management.
Ex Situ	In a situation outside of the wild, for example, animals housed in human care.
Five Domains	A framework of welfare developed by David Mellor and colleagues that encompasses four physical/functional domains (Nutrition, Environment, Health and Behavioural Interactions) and a fifth Mental Domain.
Geriatric	Elderly animals, respective to species' life expectancy, and the management of them relating to their care.

Habitat	The area in which an animal lives and the components of that area, including habitats on public display, off-show habitats, temporary housing, quarantine and isolation facilities.
Human Care	A state where animals are housed in human care, whereby the day-to-day needs and welfare of the animals are subject to the provision of human intervention and care.
Husbandry	The actions involved in the daily care of animals, including feeding, cleaning and environmental factors.
In Situ	In a situation within nature, often termed 'the wild'.
Life Expectancy	The expected duration of life, which differs according to each species.
Nocturnal	Describing animals which are most active at night.
Objective	Unbiased judgement using scientific facts to inform decisions.
Peer-Reviewed	A piece of work that has been subject to evaluation by experts in the same field to ensure quality and validity before publication.
Personality	Consistent individual differences in behaviour over time and contexts. Other interchangeable terms in the literature include 'Temperament', 'Individual differences' or 'Behavioural syndromes'.
Physiological	Relating to the biological functions of an organism.
Psychological	Relating to the mental state of an organism.
Research	The systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.
Sentience	The capacity to experience and perceive emotions such as pain and pleasure. All animals housed at Dublin Zoo are considered sentient.









Social Organisation	The organisation of individuals within a social group, including a hierarchy where some individuals are ranked as higher, i.e. more dominant.
Standard(s)	A level of quality or attainment to be achieved, used as a measure, norm or model in comparative evaluations.
State	As in welfare state or mental state, a particular condition that an organism experiences that can be positive, neutral or negative.
Subjective	Using personal opinions to influence decisions or thoughts on a subject.
Subjective Experiences	Experiences that are subjective/personal to the individual animal having them.
Taxa/ Taxonomic	A classification of a group of organisms, for example, mammals, fish, birds, amphibians and reptiles.
Training	Intentionally changing behaviour with an awareness and understanding of the principles of behaviour analysis and applying these principles with individuals or groups of animals in managed care.
Translocation	The deliberate movement of animals from one zoo or aquarium to another for reproductive or population management purposes.
Veterinary Care	Advanced levels of health care given by appropriately trained personnel, sometimes involving surgery and the provision of medication.

Welfare

Understood by its key components: an individual is of good and consistent health, with a suitable species-specific diet; how an individual adapts and responds to environmental changes; how they engage with enrichment and training opportunities; positive behavioural interactions with conspecifics and animals from other species (where appropriate) and good relationships between the animal and the Animal Care Team; and the whole lived experience of the animal, promoting positive experiences, agency and positive affective states. These key components will evolve with developments in animal welfare science.

**Welfare
Assessment**

Monitor and assess an animal's welfare using the Welfare Cycle (Observe, Analyse, Act), in line with the Five Domains Model.







We are Dublin Zoo. We save wildlife and inspire a passion for nature – one person, one family at a time.



Dublin Zoo, Phoenix Park, Dublin 8

T: (01) 474 8900 E: info@dublinzoo.ie W: www.dublinzoo.ie

