



PRESS RELEASE

The Kukang Rescue Program has been protecting slow lorises in Sumatra for 6 years - and modern zoos have made it possible.

5th November 2020 – **The Kukang Rescue Program, which aims to combat the illegal wildlife trade and protect slow lorises in Sumatra, has been around for 6 years. The support of zoos played and still has been playing a key role not only in the program’s establishment in 2014, but also in the numerous nature conservation activities realized during the following years. Through this cooperation, these zoos together fulfill their modern mission, i.e. the conservation of endangered animal species not only by their breeding in human care (*ex situ*), but also by protecting them directly in the places of their natural occurrence (*in situ*). Modern zoos thus play a vital role in an increasingly urgent global effort to save species from extinction.**

The Kukang Rescue Program began writing its story in 2014. František Příbrský, a then recent graduate of the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague and now the director of the Kukang program, decided to establish a hitherto missing rescue and rehabilitation centre for slow lorises, which, due to their cuteness, are frequently becoming a subject of poaching and illegal trade for the pet market. This is despite the fact that they are the only poisonous primates in the world. The Ostrava Zoo, which employed František Příbrský as a field zoologist operating in Indonesia, helped to finance the establishment of the centre itself, and thus became the main partner of the program. Right at the beginning, the Ostrava Zoo was joined by the Olomouc Zoo as the second main partner, employing Lucie Čížmářová, the coordinator of veterinary care and welfare of the Kukang program, as its field zoologist, too. At the same time, the Liberec Zoo also joined, which from the very beginning has been supporting the much-needed education of local people - specifically the operation of the English-Environmental School for children living near the rescue centre in the village of Bandar Baru.

With the developing activities of the program over the years, we managed to establish cooperation with other esteemed partners from Czech and foreign modern zoos - namely Hodonín Zoo and Na Hrádečku Zoo in the Czech Republic, Wrocław Zoo in Poland, NaturZoo Rheine in Germany, Ouwehands Zoo in Netherlands, and we just recently started a cooperation with the Prague Zoo, specifically on the protection of pangolins. Furthermore, the program is part of the Prosimian TAG’s In situ Conservation Plan within the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), and is supported also by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). *“Without the trust and financial and moral support of these zoos, the operation and development of The Kukang Rescue Program would be much more difficult, if not impossible,”* said Jennie Natalia Simanjuntak, a director of the PASAL Foundation, under which the Kukang program in Sumatra is run. Through their partnership, all these zoos together contribute to a unified breeding and conservation strategy of modern zoos, whose philosophy is the conservation of species not only in human care, i.e. *ex situ*, but also at the place of their natural occurrence, i.e. *in situ*.

The key importance of zoos in preserving the species of our planet is unquestionable, as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) officially declared in October 2019 in its [Abu Dhabi Call for Global Species Conservation Action](#). In this document, experts call for an urgent and effective solution to the unprecedented, unsustainable and ever-increasing impact of human activity on wildlife - and the need to cooperate with zoos has become a key theme. The fact that, among other things, without the

initiative of progressive zoos, the current rate of man-made extinction would be three to four times greater is also evidenced by a new study published in the scientific journal [Conservation Letters](#). According to this study, the extinction of 48 species of mammals and birds has been successfully prevented since 1993, and rescue breeding programs in zoos and the controlled return of species to the wild are among the main measures that have made this achievement possible. The support of field nature conservation is another, no less important aspect of the contribution of zoos in saving biodiversity. *“Zoos of today already have enough knowledge, and especially the means, to effectively protect animal species around the world. They thus become really significant players in the field of nature conservation,”* explains František Příbrský, the director of The Kukang Rescue Program and at the same time the coordinator of international *in situ* projects at the Ostrava Zoo.

One of the other concrete examples of how The Kukang Rescue Program managed to connect Czech and foreign zoos in favour of joint support for nature conservation is the Stolen Wildlife campaign informing about the illegal trade in animals in Europe, and especially in the Czech Republic. The campaign was originally created in cooperation between The Kukang Rescue Program and the Ostrava Zoo, but since 2018, 16 Czech and Slovak zoos, the German Kölner Zoo, the Estonian Zoo Tallinn and more have joined the campaign and installed an exhibition of its educational photographs. *“Zoos are visited by millions of people every year, making it ideal educational institutions. Thanks to the photographs of Stolen Wildlife installed in the zoo area, many people will learn about the problem of illegal trade in animals. And it is them who can directly influence the disappearance of animal species from nature by changing their own behaviour,”* explains the author of the photographs Lucie Čižmářová.

The spiritual father of this campaign, as well as the main architect of the zoo’s partnership with The Kukang Rescue Program in 2014, was the recently deceased director of Ostrava Zoo Petr Čolas. He was a great conservationist and visionary who worked hard for many years to make (not only) Ostrava Zoo a leading conservation institution supporting field projects in different parts of the world. There is no doubt that he succeeded.

“All partner zoos deserve our sincere gratitude and great thanks for their partnership and support of The Kukang Rescue Program. The activities and successes we managed to achieve in those 6 years were possible thanks to them. I think we can all be justifiably proud of our modern zoos, because not only are they critical gene banks for the conservation of many species, but they are also becoming increasingly important conservation institutions to help survive endangered species around the world. The Kukang Rescue Program is a living proof of this,” adds František Příbrský.

The attached photographs may be freely used for press, Internet and television news purposes.
Photo author: Lucie Čižmářová

Kateřina Holubová

Chair and the spokeswoman
The Kukang Rescue Program, z.s.
Tel.: + 420 **777 153 133**
Email: holubova@kukang.org