

Action Plan for the Amur tiger EEP; final programmatic report to the Save the Tiger Fund

Sarah Christie, Zoological Society of London, 20 June 2000

Introduction

This grant was issued in 1996. The Action Plan is based on suggestions and recommendations made by the zoos during the previous year's meeting in Moscow (also funded by an STF grant) and was close to completion by the end of 1997. Separate reports have been supplied on the two trips undertaken by the Amur tiger EEP support team before that time, and an interim programmatic report was produced on 4/3/97. The project progressed little during 1998 due to my overwhelming workload producing the book "Riding the Tiger". Recent activity (1999-2000) has consisted largely of translations of various material and production of the zoo graphics. A summary report under each heading is given here, and further copies of the previous reports can be supplied if required.

1. Amur Tiger EEP Support Team

The team undertook two visits to zoos in Russia. Tigers in Moscow, St Petersburg and Rostov zoos were health checked and treated as appropriate and given permanent ID in the form of tattoos and transponders where necessary. Blood samples were taken for veterinary checks and genetic work. Semen was collected for banking, and a 30-year storage facility was purchased to hold this and future samples. Discussions were held with curatorial and veterinary staff on all aspects of the housing and management of their tigers. On the second trip, extensive dental work was undertaken on tigers in Rostov and Moscow (this was part paid for by Western zoos).

Products of this part of the Action Plan were; tigers in better health, hence happier and more likely to breed successfully; improved relations between the EEP and the zoos; semen and blood samples banked; sharing of technology and ideas between the Western visitors and our Russian hosts.

2. Veterinary Action Points

The SSP/EEP tiger husbandry manual "The Management and Conservation of Captive Tigers" has been translated into Russian and distributed to all the zoos. Post mortem data is being compiled by John Lewis of the International Zoo Veterinary Group, who is also providing a tiger advice service for tiger EEP participants in Russia and the CIS. A chapter on cat anaesthesia, also by John Lewis, and an article on manufacturing blowpipe darts, have been translated into Russian and distributed to all the zoos.

Products of this part of the plan were; better informed staff; healthier, happier tigers more likely to breed successfully; improved relations between the EEP and the zoos;

3. Husbandry Action Points

The SSP/EEP tiger husbandry manual "The Management and Conservation of Captive Tigers" has been translated into Russian and distributed to all the zoos. Hand-rearing equipment, transponders and a reader, and various veterinary supplies were donated to the zoos. Advice on redesign of enclosures has been provided on request.

4. Education Action Points

A slide set of 37 images and an accompanying text pack of information, translated into Russian and including a complete tiger bibliography, has been supplied to each participating zoo in Russia, Eastern Europe and the CIS. An English version has been made available to Western zoos in return for a small donation. A set of four graphics panels on Amur tiger conservation for each Russian participant has been produced to a high standard; these have been delivered to Moscow and await collection. One set of graphics will be supplied to Zov Taigi, a Russian NGO working in the Russian Far East, for use in a nature reserve.

There could be said to be a single product of this part of the plan; a vastly improved capacity for the zoos to communicate ideas and information about tigers and their conservation to the Russian public.

5. Implementation of the EEP Action Points

Some material in the tiger studbooks has been translated into Russian, but realistically there are neither sufficient funds nor sufficient translator time available to continue with this indefinitely.

Following communication with the Russian CITES authority on the nature of EEP transfers, they have begun to consult with programme coordinators about exports.

The EEP wrote to the Russian authorities on the matter of policy on removal of tigers from the wild, making it clear that the programme did not need and was not requesting tigers from the wild, but would nevertheless be pleased to assist should the authorities need a home for a tiger that had to be removed due to conflict with people. I am extremely pleased to report that this policy is now being incorporated into guidelines for dealing with problem tigers in the wild (Dale Miquelle, pers. comm.).

In general, cooperation and communication in this EEP is vastly improved. Since 1995 most cubs born have remained within the EEP, virtually no tigers of any age have been moved anywhere without EEP endorsement, and animals previously lost to the programme have been regained by it through the efforts of the zoos. This alone is a huge step forward in maximising the potential of this population to contribute to the survival of the Amur tiger in the wild. It is worth noting that Russia is probably the only tiger range state where the zoo tiger population is being effectively managed. Here, as in many aspects of conservation in the field, Russia is leading the tiger world.

Programmatic report for the Save the Tiger Fund

On progress with implementation of the Action Plan for the Amur tiger EEP

(4/3/97)

Sarah Christie, EEP Co-ordinator for Amur tigers and Conservation Programmes Co-ordinator, London Zoo.

1. The EEP Tiger Support Team visit

Attached is a copy of a report on this aspect of the Action Plan, originally compiled for inclusion in the 1996 European Tiger Studbook. A few virology results from the lab are still awaited, but otherwise this report is complete. Genome Resource Banking Action points are covered in this report and so do not appear below.

2. Veterinary Action Points

The Euro-Asian Regional Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EARAZA) has discussed the suggestion that an association of zoo veterinarians of the region should be established, and has initiated the process. Provision of financial assistance for this from the Amur tiger EEP is on hold for the moment, pending both discussion by the newly formed EARAZA veterinary group and assessment of the costs of other, higher priority aspects of the Action Plan.

The SSP/EEP manual "The Management and Conservation of Captive Tigers" has been translated into Russian and distributed to all Russian-speaking participating institutions by Alla Nikitina of Kiev Zoo.

The EEP Co-ordinator has circulated a request to provide post-mortem data to all EEP participants. Dr John Lewis of the International Zoo Veterinary Group, veterinary advisor to the tiger EEPs and to the EEP Felid TAG, has kindly agreed to take on the task of collating and analysing these data.

Following discussions during the EEP Tiger Support Team visit to Russia in September, it has been agreed by EARAZA and the Amur tiger EEP that Dr John Lewis be retained by the Amur tiger EEP to provide a tiger veterinary advice service to EEP participants in the CIS and Baltic States. (Please see the Tiger Support Team report for further details.)

A paper describing the home-manufacture of blowpipe darts has been translated into Russian and distributed to all Russian-speaking EEP zoos. A paper on anaesthesia of the cat is currently being translated and will be circulated in the near future. Further translations will be provided as desirable material is identified.

Other Action points dealing with internal practices in the region's zoos have been circulated in the Russian version of the Action Plan.

Husbandry Action points

A husbandry questionnaire has been designed but not yet circulated due to pressure of work; this will take place in 1997.

Small quantities of vitamin and mineral supplements, and full sets of hand-rearing equipment, have been supplied to the zoos visited during the EEP Tiger Support Team visit.

Transponders have been supplied to the three zoos visited, and one transponder reader left at Rostov zoo. Further zoos may be supplied with this equipment; decisions on this are on hold pending completion of other aspects of the Action Plan.

Education Action points

A slide set on Amur tiger conservation has been compiled, with kind donations of images from conservation organizations all over the world. The set includes text slides and two versions are being produced; English and Russian. The English version is complete and the Russian one is held up only by difficulties in getting the Russian fonts onto the text slides.

To accompany this slide set, a comprehensive text pack containing articles on all aspects of Amur tiger conservation in the wild and in captivity has been compiled and will shortly be translated into Russian by Moscow Zoo.

The Russian version of the slide set and text pack will be supplied to all Russian, CIS and Baltic state zoos in the EEP free of charge; it is also being made available to Western EEP participants on receipt of a donation of £60 or more to the Action Plan for the Amur tiger EEP.

The International Centre for Conservation Education has been commissioned to produce educational tiger graphics in Russian for distribution to the Russian Amur tiger EEP participants. Draft text is currently under discussion with Moscow Zoo, and production of the materials themselves will be undertaken by London Zoo's signage department.

Amur tiger EEP participation in the production and distribution of printed educational materials in the Russian Far East is on hold pending completion of the above two items, which are higher priority; the budget will be reassessed after this. However, it is proposed that many of the materials to be translated into Russian as part of the Amur tiger EEP slide set and educational text pack be made available to the Hornocker Wildlife Institute, in Russian, for distribution as they see fit.

Implementation of the EEP Action points

A cover letter in Russian will be included with the 1996 edition of the European Tiger Studbook (currently at the printers, slightly delayed in publication due to the work involved in the Tigers 2000 symposium).

Tanya Arzhanova of Moscow Zoo has been elected to the Amur tiger EEP Species Committee and is acting most effectively as liaison with the EEP coordinator. By far the majority of Amur tiger cubs born in Russia since the Special Meeting of the Amur tiger EEP in November 1996 remain in the EEP and have been, or are being, transferred to new EEP locations to make up potential breeding pairs.

Recommendations dealing with internal practices in the relevant zoos have been circulated in the Action Plan.

The EEP Coordinator and International Studbook Keeper have written to the Russian CITES authorities recommending that EEP-approved tiger transfers be recognized as being conservation, rather than commerce, based, and that such moves are treated accordingly by the CITES authorities. A positive response to this letter has been received via Moscow Zoo.

The extensive Tiger Bibliography posted on the International Tiger Information Centre is included in the text pack being supplied to all Russian-speaking Amur tiger EEP zoos; it will also be made available, on disc, to any other participants on receipt of a blank disc.

"CAT News" (the IUCN Cat Specialist Group newsletter) has been supplied to all relevant Amur tiger EEP participants for one year. This may be continued for further years, funds allowing.

Moscow Zoo are holding a translation budget and any necessary materials not covered in other sections of the Action Plan may be translated and distributed at the discretion of the EEP Co-ordinator.