



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Belfast Zoological Gardens – research activities with universities
Date:	24 February 2015
Reporting Officer:	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Mark Challis, Zoo Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	One of the key roles of a modern zoo is to undertake research activities. In Belfast Zoo, this manifests itself in a range of guises, and is applied to a variety of aspects in the zoo's business.
1.2	The zoo cares for a unique and valuable collection of animals, many of which are endangered in the wild. The biology of these species, even today, is often poorly understood, infrequently studied and, at times, seldom the subject of published data.
1.3	The results of research on captive animals is often also applicable to animals in the wild, and such studies can provide useful as training opportunities for researchers to apply to the study and research of wild animals in their natural environment.
1.4	Further, the zoo's licence to operate, issued by the NIEA, under The Zoos Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, specifically requires the zoo to undertake 'research which benefits the conservation of the species kept', 'training in relevant conservation skills', and 'exchanging of information related to species conservation'.
1.5	In order to ensure compliance with these specific conditions, the zoo has developed a long term and ongoing relationship with QUB's Schools of Biology and Psychology, and other universities including the University of Ulster and has for many years provided access to facilities and animals for relevant and non-invasive research activities.

1.6	We actively encourage and receive many research requests each year, and numerous studies have been undertaken in recent years. Research has been undertaken by undergraduates, and also at Masters and PhD levels from a range of universities.
1.7	Requests for research undergo ethical review at QUB, and are also reviewed in the zoo by keepers, animal managers and the consultant veterinary surgeon to ensure the relevance of the proposed work.
1.8	Much of this work is published, and has been applied at other zoos.

2.	Key Issues
2.1	Under the terms of our zoo licence issued by NIEA, the zoo is required to undertake research activities which will result in conservation and welfare benefits to the animals in the zoo.
2.2	We are in the process of agreeing formal arrangements for engaging with universities.
2.3	Research undertaken in the zoo has had significant positive impacts on Belfast Zoo's, and other zoos, abilities to manage captive animals, and the techniques applied in the zoo's captive setting have also on occasion been replicated in the wild.
2.4	Access to the zoo's animals and facilities for students undertaking appropriate and approved research should be continue to be granted. Members should note that students are not granted access to the animal enclosures or out of hours due to health and safety risks.

3.	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>There are no financial implications in regard of this work.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>There are no immediate resource HR implications. Some staff resources are involved with a variety of elements of the research programme, but staff remain committed to this vital component of the zoo's work and are willing to undertake additional duties to support these functions.</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u></p> <p>There are no other implications identified at this time.</p>

4.	Equality Implications
4.1	There are no equality or good relations implications associated with this report.
5.	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is asked to approve the zoo's ongoing programme of research and cooperation with animal conservation and welfare studies.

6.	Decision Tracking
6.1	None required.

7.	Key to Abbreviations
	NIEA: Northern Ireland Environment Agency QUB: Queens University of Belfast

8.	Documents Attached
	None