



How African Primate Sanctuaries Have Fared During the 2020 Global Pandemic

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The Role of PASA

The Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA) was founded in 2000 to help connect sanctuaries caring for primates across Africa. A key role that PASA plays is facilitating and enhancing communication between primate sanctuaries, something that is extremely important during times of crisis. Communication has allowed for advancements in care, sharing of resources, identification of trends, and professional networking for sanctuaries in 13 countries across Africa. Similar to AZA Accreditation for zoos, PASA accreditation requires sanctuaries to have a clearly organized and ethical management plan and a budget to be defined and documented to reduce corruption and ensure that funds are being directed toward caring for their primates. PASA has several different accreditations and acknowledgements earned by being a reputable and ethical non-profit organization (Guidestar by Candid, 2003; Great NonProfits, 2019). PASA Director Gregg Tully is a familiar figure within the zoological community and has been a speaker at many different primate and animal care conferences across the world. His contributions to AAZK Conferences each year has inspired many keepers and volunteers to get involved with conservation initiatives impacting the animals they know and love at zoos. For the first time in PASA's 20 year history, every single member sanctuary has experienced a loss of profits and an increased need for support all at the same time (Tully, 2020). Sanctuaries rely heavily on ecotourism to make ends meet (Eshun and Tonto, 2014), and like many other organizations and businesses, they were forced to close their doors to combat the global COVID-19 pandemic for nearly an entire year.

Increased Precautions at PASA Member Sanctuaries

In addition to decreasing the human-to-human spread of this deadly virus, PASA member sanctuaries have had to deal with another major concern for their primates. Primates are susceptible to the same illnesses as humans, which means they are also at risk for

contracting and possibly spreading the COVID-19 virus with both their human caretakers and other sanctuary residents. Though the risk of spreading illness from international travelers has been a manageable concern in the past (Muehlenbein et al., 2010), the highly contagious novel coronavirus has changed precautionary methods required to reduce the outbreak (Mohapatra et al., 2020). Sanctuaries have had to create strict quarantine protocols for animal care staff and for incoming primates (Colin, 2020). With roughly 3,000 monkeys and apes being cared for at PASA member sanctuaries, the increased cost of personal protective equipment required to keep everyone safe has been extreme (Tully, 2020). All PASA member sanctuary staff members are required to wear protective gear like masks and gloves, all food gets disinfected, and many staff members have been rotating on and off in multi-week shifts where they stay 24 hours per day at their sanctuary (Colin, 2020).

Hardships and Triumphs at PASA Member Sanctuaries

At Lola Ya Bonobo, doors were closed to visitors at the same time that staff began living at the sanctuary to

protect their bonobo inhabitants. This significant drop in income paired with the increased hours employees needed to be paid has made for an incredibly tight budget (Tworoski, 2020). Limbe Wildlife Center created promotional videos thanking their donors and asking for more help (Kang, 2020). The Vervet Monkey Foundation noted that the loss of their international volunteers is one of the things that has impacted them the hardest. Volunteers help to monitor food and water intake, behavior of their new and longer resident orphans, and even help bottle feed new infants when they first come in. The loss of this volunteer lifeline has put extra strain on staff caretakers that are now covering the work that once belonged to several different people (Du Toit, 2020). Kenya went a step further and fully locked down borders and cancelled all travel visas to slow the spread of COVID-19. This dramatically impacted Kenyan PASA member sanctuaries, Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Colobus Conservation. Dr. Stephen Ngulu noted that the problem is threefold: revenue has decreased, food prices have increased, and biosecurity measures have increased in cost (Tworoski, 2020). Lwiro Primate Sanctuary has

Chimpanzee rescue with increased PPE at Chimfunshi Wildlife Orphanage. (PASA Primates, & Chimfunshi Wildlife Orphanage. 2020)



stood out as a leader for positive and effective social media communication during these trying times. Their video of chimpanzee keepers coming together wearing their masks and dancing it out in what they called “The Jerusalem Challenge” received over 20,000 reactions on Facebook and put a smile on everyone’s face (Lwiro Primate Sanctuary, 2020). They branded one of their orphan chimpanzees as “Grape Girl” based on her love for grapes and asked their social media followers if they would be willing to purchase a package of grapes for this sweet young chimpanzee. The response was outstanding and led to a Giving Day for Grapes campaign on Giving Day for Apes, during which they raised a significant amount to help feed and care for their troop of chimpanzees (Lwiro Primates, 2020). They took it a step further by sharing what they learned with other sanctuaries and conservation organizations- that sharing personal stories and asking for smaller donations to cover the cost of tangible items is extremely effective. Though they have suffered along with every other sanctuary, their positive outtake has inspired many.

The Zoo Community and PASA

As zoos were forced to close their gates to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and protect their staff and animals, a major financial crisis arose. While most facilities were able to raise the funds needed to maintain their high quality of animal care, many staff positions were furloughed, hours were reduced, and pay cuts were issued. Facilities had to prioritize maintaining the care of the animals on their grounds over supporting their wild counterparts which meant financial support for conservation organizations like PASA drastically decreased (Pasic and Jovanovich, 2020). In addition to facility support, AAZK Chapters around the country have played a major role in supporting PASA’s work. However, to promote social distancing, most Chapters hosted virtual meetings or chose to postpone meetings all together. Fundraising efforts turned toward supporting their institution, which again meant supporting conservation organizations had to be put on hold.



The author, training gorilla Bantu. Modified gorilla training at Zoo Knoxville complies with COVID-19 precautions, allowing keepers to safely continue keeper chats to promote primate conservation during the pandemic.

Fundraisers that were already planned had to be cancelled due to the pandemic and with businesses everywhere struggling to make ends meet, outside donations dropped almost entirely.

This information is not meant to be a grim reminder of the dangers sanctuaries have been struggling to face, but as a call to action. As zookeepers and zoo enthusiasts, everyone has a common goal of promoting conservation of the species that we care for. It is easy to get stuck in the day-to-day routine of being a keeper, but thinking of the bigger picture of conservation is an important and impactful part of the job as well. 2020 brought upon an era of digital events which helped us step up and think of new creative ways to come together without physically being together. Organizing fundraisers like Bingo for Bonobos events that support PASA and our member sanctuaries make a huge difference- even just a couple hundred dollars goes a long way. Some Chapters have been able to host online

art auctions, sell different crafts, host virtual game nights, and even virtual 5K races. There are many Chapters out there that are in a sort of limbo, waiting for their chance to host events and raise money once again. It is critical to remember that AAZK is a family and was literally founded to help connect keepers across the country (American Association of Zoo Keepers, n.d.). The AAZK provides a solid support system to help us reach new goals and achieve a higher level of professionalism, animal care, and create a greater positive impact as keepers. Connecting with other Chapters that have hosted successful and quarantine-friendly fundraisers is as easy as reaching out on different social media platforms or through e-mail asking for advice or ideas. By supporting one another we can bring on a new wave of support for our struggling conservation organizations.

The PASA-bilities are Endless

2020 showed us now more than ever that PASA is a family, and AAZK is part of

that family. We have had some incredible donors that have pledged to match donations and have donated significant funds to aid in the efforts of supporting these sanctuaries (Tully, 2020). Our sanctuaries have banded together and supported one another through joint fundraisers, sharing social media techniques to raise awareness and connect with donors, and by offering words of encouragement when times are particularly grim. With the support of many volunteers, PASA has been able to increase our presence on social media which has cultivated more connections with potential supporters. Individual AAZK members have offered a helping hand, and have started taking on bigger volunteer roles with PASA and our member sanctuaries. One person can make a difference, one Chapter can save a sanctuary, and one organized group of dedicated and passionate animal lovers like AAZK can make the world a safer place for primates and all other species we share this planet with. 🐒

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Thanks to the support of many dedicated volunteers, PASA has been able to increase their presence across social media platforms to connect with more people during the current pandemic.

