

Muri/Bern, 30 August 2008

The European Association's of Zoos and Aquaria European Carnivores Campaign 2009

To whom it may concern:

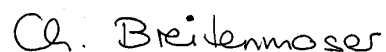
The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) is planning an awareness and fundraising campaign in support of European carnivores in 2009. As co-chairs of the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, we would like to endorse this campaign and emphasize its importance for the conservation and management of viable carnivore populations across Europe.

Carnivores, having long been strongly persecuted by man, have gained the public's interest and are today widely protected by law. Some have made an astonishing comeback – and suffer from the conflicts caused by their renaissance – which others are still on the brink of extinction. The situation of the three European cat species – the Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx*, the Iberian lynx *Lynx pardinus* and the wildcat *Felis silvestris* – differs considerably between species and regions. While the indigenous populations of the Eurasian lynx in the Nordic countries and in the Carpathians have recovered and reintroductions in Central and Western Europe are promising, the subspecies living in the South-Western Balkans is critically endangered. The Iberian lynx, now restricted to two small populations in southern Spain, is the most endangered cat species worldwide; less than 200 individuals remain. The wildcat still exists in several populations in southern and central Europe, but the populations are fragmented, and our limited knowledge about this elusive forest-living cat is often hampering its conservation.

Carnivores are adaptable in their ecology and behaviour and are able to survive even in the human-dominated and cultivated European landscapes. But they cause many conflicts with human land use, and still suffer from direct and indirect persecution. Good science is needed for good conservation – but it is by far not enough. The ultimate condition for a sustainable coexistence of carnivores and people is our will to let them live in our vicinity. We love what we know, and we fear the unknown. Raising awareness for the life and fate of our European carnivores is the first step towards their conservation. And who would be in a better position to tackle this task than the European zoos, located right in our neighbourhoods and reaching millions of interested visitors every year?



Urs Breitenmoser



Christine Breitenmoser-Würsten

Co-chairs, IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group