



**RZSS**  
BRINGING CONSERVATION TO LIFE

**RZSS STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 - 2022**  
*FROM EMPATHY TO ACTION*



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# INTRODUCTION



## About the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland

Our natural world is a beautiful and precious place where all living things, including humans, are connected. It is also a planet which is warming, crowded and damaged – where the population of wild vertebrates has more than halved in just 40 years, where children and young people are increasingly disconnected from nature, where an ever-expanding human population threatens the very future of our planet and the species that call it home.

RZSS, one of Scotland's leading conservation charities, is dedicated to protecting endangered species through conservation, research and education – not only those native to Scotland, but all around the world. Through our two sites, Edinburgh Zoo and the Highland Wildlife Park, we provide unique and memorable experiences and engage with nearly 750,000 visitors per year in the wonders of the natural world, taking care of over 1,000 rare and endangered animals in safe and stimulating surroundings.

We lead innovative conservation programmes both here in Scotland and in 21 countries around the world, from saving the Scottish wildcat to uncovering the hidden world of the giant armadillo in the Brazilian Pantanal. We carry out cutting-edge research through our dedicated WildGenes genetics laboratory – underpinning our work with robust science – and we inspire the next generation to protect the natural world through a suite of formal, informal and outreach education programmes, engaging over 25,000 people a year. These activities simply would not be possible without the financial support of our visitors, members and funders.

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland has grown considerably since its inception over a century ago; however, its mission has remained a constant:

*To connect people with nature and safeguard threatened species.*

# STRATEGY OVERVIEW

**OUR MISSION** To connect people with nature and safeguard threatened species.

**OUR VALUES**



**OUR VISION**

RZSS will engage an ever-increasing community of people in a journey from empathy to action through a direct connection with animals, and become an international authority on the conservation of threatened species.

**OUR STRATEGIC THEMES**



**OUR STRATEGIC GOALS**



# STRATEGIC THEMES



## Our animals

Exceptional animal care is a prerequisite for all RZSS's activity and our commitment to an ethically and environmentally sound living collection is absolute. We will aim for over 50% of the animals in our care to be vulnerable or above on the IUCN Red List of endangered species, contribute to well-managed European breeding programmes and bring our genetics expertise to bear on the management of effective species studbooks. Closer links will be forged both domestically and internationally between our collections, education, research and conservation activities, with our parks helping narrate a wider story about species conservation and our role in protecting the environment. We will also play a leading role on the domestic and international stage through partnerships with other collections, scientific organisations and bodies such as BIAZA, EAZA and WAZA.

## Our people

RZSS has a talented and passionate staff and volunteer team which will be essential if we are to achieve our ambitious targets for growth over the coming five years. We aim to increase the levels of stakeholder engagement across all areas of RZSS through inspirational leadership, effective communication and involvement in the development of the organisation, beginning with the dissemination and adoption of this strategy. All our stakeholders – staff, volunteers, visitors, members, partners and funders – will feel that RZSS is a place for them to realise their aspirations in an inclusive and accessible environment, and the organisation will develop a reputation as an employer of choice amongst the wider conservation community. We will continue to develop both our parks, with a particular emphasis on visitor amenities, staff and volunteer facilities, and wider accessibility improvements.

## Conservation

Conservation is at the heart of everything we do at RZSS and the successes of recent years – from the reintroduction of beavers to Scotland to the growth of the Budongo Conservation Field Station in Uganda – highlight the unique opportunity the Society has to develop an international reputation for excellence, particularly in the field of species protection and restoration. Our plan is to focus RZSS's activities on areas where we can have the most impact – on rewilding, the application of conservation genetics research and in-situ capacity building, for example – partnering with likeminded academic and conservation organisations both here in Scotland and around the world, using tried and tested zoological techniques in an applied setting.



# STRATEGIC THEMES cont.



## Engagement

RZSS currently engages with 30,000 people a year through our formal and informal education programmes, nearly 750,000 visitors through our parks and over 20 million online and via social media, encouraging audiences to move from empathy to action. We will foster a deep and lasting connection with the natural world for all our stakeholders, making connections between the challenges faced by species in the wild and practical actions they can take to make a difference. We aim to become a market leader in education, helping tackle emerging threats such as Nature Deficit Disorder, digital literacy and health and wellbeing. Technology will play an increasingly important role in all our activities – from augmented reality to virtual fieldtrips – and we will develop innovative partnerships to reach new and diverse audiences not presently accessible by traditional means.

## Research

We will underpin all of our living collection, education, veterinary and conservation work with evidence-based research, as exemplified by the WildGenes laboratory based at Edinburgh Zoo. This genetics lab – one of only a handful in the world – will provide practical tools and insight to guide activity in the field, from the molecular genetic management of conservation breeding and reintroductions to delivering in-country training in applied genetics. Elsewhere, we will prioritise partnerships which help us better understand the species in our care and research which can make a meaningful contribution to our field programmes, informing an adaptive management approach to the Society's mission activity.

## Sustainable growth

Like most organisations, RZSS is facing an increasingly competitive funding environment. Whether it be increased investment by comparator attractions or greater competition for fundraising income, we recognise the need to grow and diversify our income streams sustainably to underpin our charitable mission. Whilst we will seek to grow visitor numbers at both Edinburgh Zoo and the Highland Wildlife Park and create an innovative, world-class visitor experience, we will also seek to increase the share of income generated through memberships, individual donations, trusts and foundations, public and lottery funding, and the private sector.