

## Why arguments for killing of giraffe Marius don't stand up to scrutiny

By Liz Tyson , animal rights campaigner, Special to CNN  
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**Editor's note:** Liz Tyson is Director of UK charity, [The Captive Animals' Protection Society \(CAPS\)](#). She previously lived and worked in the Colombian Amazon on conservation projects. She is a board member of conservation charity Neotropical Primate Conservation and a doctoral researcher at the University of Essex, School of Law. The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely hers.

**(CNN)** -- The [killing of a young giraffe named Marius](#) at Copenhagen Zoo sparked international outrage this weekend. On Sunday, he was shot with a bolt gun then publicly dissected before being fed to the lions.

In its defense, the zoo has argued that Marius' death was necessary to protect the genetic diversity of his species. It was claimed that to allow Marius to take up space that could be used to house another animal with more desirable genetic make-up may hinder conservation breeding programs.

Contraception which required sedation is dangerous and [giraffes might die during the procedure](#). As such, Marius' birth could not have been safely prevented. Marius could not be rehomed because sending him somewhere other than a zoo which was a member of the European Association for Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) could result in him being sold into a circus, which would be against [EAZA rules](#). In effect, the zoo's hands were tied, it was implied.

None of these arguments appear to stand up to scrutiny.

As the head of the European endangered species program for giraffes stated in press, [Marius was not from a rare sub-species](#).

Given that zoos claim that animals are kept in order to support the conservation of threatened species, it is therefore unclear why any member of Marius' subspecies should be held captive at all.

### [Zoo staff get death threats](#)

It was further confirmed that a contraceptive for giraffes has been developed in the last few years which [allows females to be safely injected at a distance](#) thus suggesting that Marius' birth was not inevitable.

The director of EAZA supported the stance that Marius had to die and encouraged people to consider the ["bigger picture"](#). But EAZA itself is less than consistent in its approach to inbreeding and, indeed, in its concern for the ultimate fate of animals in its member zoos.

EAZA and similar zoo bodies discourage member zoos from deliberately breeding white lions; a practice which is recognized as involving inbreeding in order to [perpetuate the unusual white coloring of the animals involved](#).

Due to the serious welfare implications and the lack of conservation value of inbred animals, breeding of

white lions is theoretically not allowed in EAZA zoos. In practice, both [West Midland Safari Park](#) and [Paradise Wildlife Park](#) in the UK breed white lions.

Both are EAZA members and yet, despite vociferously supporting the killing of Marius to prevent the same problem, a blind eye has been turned by EAZA to the persistent inbreeding of other species in its zoos. White lions are, perhaps tellingly, a great crowd pleaser.

In 2012 West Midland Safari Park were revealed to have sent four white lions to a circus trainer, who sent them on to a [Japanese circus](#). That the safari park remains an EAZA member means that the rules on sending animals to non-EAZA collections are not consistently applied. Despite this, no exception was made for Marius.

In fact, rather than Marius being a tragic exception, the killing of animals considered to be surplus to requirements by zoos is something which is common in the industry. [A 2003 study suggested](#) that there are around 7,500 animals deemed "surplus" in European zoos at any one time.

Whilst it cannot be undone, Marius' death has served an important purpose in shining a spotlight on a practice which is normally kept well-hidden from public view. As long as there are zoos, there will be unwanted animals. And as long as there are unwanted animals, more like Marius will be killed.

It has long been recognised that conservation success is achieved not in city centre zoos or safari parks, but in natural habitats. We would urge anyone with a passion for conservation to support effective in situ efforts which are truly making a positive impact on species conservation.

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