



I. APPLICANT GUIDELINES

Before submitting an application to become a Partner of the European Alliance of Rescue centres and Sanctuaries (EARS), potential applicants should read these guidelines carefully. Rescue and rehabilitation centres and sanctuaries seeking to join the EARS are strongly encouraged to consider why they wish to join the EARS, and whether they comply with the EARS criteria and are able to fulfill all obligations and responsibilities. It is highly recommended to discuss the application with the EARS prior to submission. We encourage potential applicants to attend the open sessions of the annual General Partner Meeting to become more familiar with the EARS and its current Partners.

The EARS aims to be a strong and effective European network to support, promote and achieve continuous improvements in animal welfare and respect for animals, tackling the very reasons that necessitate the existence of rescue centres and sanctuaries. To be perceived as a professional and influential movement respected by private and public institutions we have designed an application process to ensure that only qualified institutions can join and maintain Partner status. Becoming a Partner to the EARS is open to all wild animal (exotic and native species) rescue and rehabilitation centres and sanctuaries in the European Union compliant with EARS joining criteria and who fulfill the commitment to a high level of professionalism that being part of the alliance entails.

II. CRITERIA TO JOIN THE EARS

Applicants should provide evidence of the following:

1. Operate a rescue and rehabilitation centre and/or a sanctuary in the European Union.
2. Is a legal entity with the necessary national licence and/or permits.
3. Provide humane and responsible care of the animals. The outcome of this should stimulate and support:

Expression of natural species-specific behaviour (physical, social and psychological):

Partners should *strive to*¹ provide all species and individuals with a suitable environment that allows the expression of a natural repertoire of physical and social activity and behaviour, and supports psychological well-being.

*Good physical health*²:

Partners should provide a management system, including professional veterinary care and quarantine (or isolation facilities as appropriate), environment and healthcare regimes that support animals to maintain an appropriate weight and body condition for the species and individual; be free of pain, injury and disease; and display an appropriate degree of physical mobility and flexibility. This requires Partners to keep up-to-date with and apply best practice in rehabilitation and captive care according to current scientific knowledge and practice.

4. Operate in a manner, non-profit or commercial, that does not negatively impact on animal welfare.
5. Do not buy, sell, or trade animals for commercial purposes.
6. Prevent breeding. Appropriate measures must be taken to prevent propagation and to have species appropriate contraceptive programmes in place.
7. Work to prevent the need for sanctuaries and rescue centres, for example through education and communication, and involvement in conservation issues.

¹ 'Strive to' is included for rescue centres that are designed for short-term stay only with some limits to expression of species-specific natural behaviour, but should be omitted for sanctuaries providing long-term and/or permanent captive care.

² Physical and mental health care closely linked.

8. Work to ensure every intake helps to reduce the very drivers that cause animals to need rescue, rehabilitation and sanctuary, and not increase it.
9. Restrict physical contact between the public and animals.
10. Provide education as a condition for the visiting public.
11. Conduct euthanasia only for terminally ill, critically injured, or severely psychologically and behaviourally impaired individuals, for whom there is no reasonable recovery and quality of life. This should be determined by a multi-disciplinary team, including a qualified vet, taking into consideration physical and psychological impacts.
12. Do not conduct research if it compromises animal welfare and/or conservation.
13. Actively engage with the alliance and work in the spirit of collaboration, sharing knowledge and information.

In addition to the above EARS Partners are obligated to:

1. Become an active member of the Partner Council (PC)³.
2. Attend the annual EARS General Partner meeting (GPM)⁴.
3. Each year sign a communiqué confirming continuation of adherence to criteria and obligations.
4. Each year pay the annual Partner fee.
5. Ensure that the EARS logo is displayed on the Partner website, promotional literature and presentations.
6. Display the EARS Partner Certificate at the facility.
7. Annually provide the requested organisational information including updating the animal census database.
8. Provide regular updates on developments, progress and news from their facility.
9. Once every three years complete a questionnaire to confirm compliance to the EARS.
10. Once every five years be subject to an official onsite visit⁵.
11. Aim to reduce and limit the environmental footprint of the facility and its activities.
12. Promote the interests of the EARS and do a full share of work in support of the concepts and ideals of the EARS.

³ The PC is the body comprised of rescue centre and sanctuary Partner representatives that provide advice to the board and help formulate and execute activities.

⁴ The GPM annually convenes Partners to share information and expertise and support areas of requested capacity development. It is expected that representatives will, upon their return, develop a mechanism to convey key information to other staff and board members.

⁵ Costs are covered by the Partner facility.

III. APPLICATION PROCESS

There are three steps in the application process:

Phase I: Completion of preliminary questions, animal census and questionnaire

Potential Partners are first asked to answer a few preliminary questions and provide information on the animals in their care. This provides an opportunity for the EARS membership committee (MC) to start to get to know the applicant. Assuming there are no obvious conflicting issues, the applicant is then asked to complete a detailed application form with requested supporting information and the non-refundable application fee. The MC reviews the documentation for compliance with the EARS joining criteria. If the submitted application is approved at the administrative phase the applicant proceeds to Phase II of the process. The application can be rejected at the administrative phase if it is clear that the applicant is not working towards the EARS mission and/or does not currently meet the joining criteria.

The EARS has an agreement with The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) whereby Partners of the EARS are automatically verified by the GFAS with no additional paperwork required. We have arranged this endorsement to provide an additional tool to objectively verify that EARS Partners provide high standards of rehabilitation and captive care. In the application questionnaire applicants are requested to indicate if they wish to become GFAS verified if successful in their EARS application. In this case all information provided to the EARS will be shared with the GFAS.

Phase II: Screening mission

If the applicant appears to fulfill the basic criteria on paper then the applicant will receive an official visit to confirm the information submitted, and to become more familiar with the facility and its operations. The EARS has a Register of Experts (known thereafter as independent reviewers) that it calls on to conduct the screening mission. Refer to the document 'What to expect during the screening mission' for more information.

Phase III: Report and review of screening mission

The independent reviewer is asked to submit a detailed report within two weeks of the screening mission. The report will contain a recommendation to approve or deny the application with

supporting arguments, and if appropriate a prioritised list of areas that require improvement deemed either obligatory or optional. It must be noted that any recommendation is made on the facility as seen at the time of the screening mission and is not based on any proposed future developments. This report is reviewed by the MC. Additional information may be requested by the MC from the independent reviewer or applicant. The final decision for joining the EARS rests with the EARS board and will be communicated to the applicant within 4-6 weeks of the screening mission. If approved, Partner status for the EARS is valid for 12 months upon which each Partner is annually required to sign a communiqué indicating a continued interest in being a Partner of the EARS and confirming adherence to joining criteria and obligations.

If an application is declined, the EARS will detail why the decision has been made, and the applicant may not reapply for a period of one year. As an organisation that aims to build capacity and promote high standards of animal care, if the applicant is clearly working towards the overall goals and objectives of the EARS but is not currently meeting all the required criteria, the EARS may continue to work with the applicant to help them meet the said criteria so that they can reapply at a later date. This assistance will not include financial provision but technical advice and support.

All reviewers are asked to sign a confidentiality clause and all information submitted as part of the application and screening mission remain the property of the EARS.

During and after the application process the applicant has certain obligations and responsibilities:

Applicant obligations:

1. Applicants pay a non-refundable application fee of €50.
2. Applicants pay for the costs associated with the screening mission that is part of the application process. The EARS will work to ensure that these costs are kept as low as possible and will not exceed €500.
3. The Partner fee is paid within two months of being accepted as a Partner (annual fee payment runs from June 1st and should be paid before July 1st).

Applicant responsibilities:

1. To answer preliminary questions and complete the animal census, and submit the detailed questionnaire (and requested supporting information). In submitting an application the applicant agrees that the information provided is true and accurate.
2. To be cooperative in providing the EARS Director with additional information or answers to questions before, during and after the screening mission.
3. To assist the EARS Director in organising the screening mission (e.g. with accommodation and travel advice). This will help to minimise costs to the applicant.
4. To meet all associated financial costs (if possible) of the independent reviewer during the screening mission (e.g., hotels, local travel, etc).
5. To ensure that during the visit all relevant staff members are present and available for consultation.
6. To reimburse the independent reviewer as soon as possible with all travel, accommodation and consumption costs not covered during the visit.

IV. SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION

Partner status can be revoked (temporarily or permanently) if:

1. *Partners do not comply with EARS joining criteria and obligations:*

Any concern or complaint raised against a Partner will be investigated by the MC to ascertain if there is a violation.

2. *Regular failure to attend the EARS annual meeting:*

All Partners are required to nominate a representative to serve on the Partner Council, actively participate in the EARS, and attend the annual General Partner Meeting. In most cases, this is the Director of the facility.

3. *Non-payment of the annual partner fee:*

Partners should communicate if they are experiencing financial difficulty as arrangements to postpone payment can be discussed.

V. RESIGNATION

Partners who wish to resign must do so by addressing a letter of resignation to the EARS Director. The letter must detail the reasons for resignation.