

Marius, the giraffe

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The news that Marius the giraffe was euthanized at only 18 months of age in the Copenhagen Zoo has raised an enormous controversy and reactions against the measure across the globe¹.

People have questioned the conservation of wild animal species in zoos, a function that zoos take on today, as well as the form of reproduction of animals kept in captivity. Furthermore, in the concrete case of Marius, the public has raised concern about the added spectacle of euthanizing the giraffe before a group of children and, after doing so, throwing the pieces to the lions of the same zoo, also with the public present. This first caused disbelief and later a feeling that the brutality of this action has no justification to achieve the goal, as officially claimed, of allowing those present to be able to learn first hand the anatomy of the sacrificed giraffe. Something like this for a free lesson in anatomy on a Sunday morning, certainly unforgettable!

The Copenhagen Zoo had received offers to buy Marius, made by public and private institutions which it had rejected, since Marius' genetics, after breeding within his family group, had led him to not fulfill the standards of the species. Furthermore, the European Association of Zoos and Aquariums (EAZA) did not authorize the sale to be carried out, given the number of existing giraffes in zoo establishments which belonged to this association.

It is all a chain of unjustifiable reasons. All a foredrawn conclusion legally speaking. It is just a useless and cruel spectacle.

I've already mentioned in this editorial section² that Zoo regulations, unified in the EU since 1999³ which Spain incorporated into its national legislation in 2003⁴, presents loopholes and ambiguities that deserve to be revised and updated⁵. For example, there is the question of whether in EU regulation only the situation of animals in captivity in Zoos are regulated and not in the circus, when, on the contrary, in American legislation⁶ both are included in the same legal parameters with the common goal of preserving species in danger of extinction and providing for these animals a better level of Animal Welfare. This should be the primary objective of the Law, and it is an area in which veterinary science has advanced exponentially in recent years.

1 Vid. CAHAL MILMO, en The Independent, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-killing-of-marius-the-giraffe-opens-an-important-debate-about-genetics-animal-rights-and-zoo-inbreeding-9120219.html>

2 GIMÉNEZ-CANDELA, T., Madagascar (<http://www.derechoanimal.info/esp/page/1448/madagascar>)

3 Directive 1999/22/EC of the Council, of 29 March 1999, relating to the keeping of wild animals in zoos [Download \(in Spanish\)](#)

4 Law 31/2003 of 27 October, on the conservation of wildlife in zoos [Download \(in Spanish\)](#)

5 On this topic, there is the excellent doctoral thesis by Pilar López de la Osa, "El Régimen Jurídico de los Parques Zoológicos y Acuarios" [Legal Regulations of Zoos and Aquatic Parks] (ed. Aranzadi-Thomson-Reuters, 2013).

6 AWA (=Animal Welfare Act) [issued in 1996](#)

The eyes of the giraffe, with his long, dark and thick eyelashes, question us from on high above his neck. Giraffes are miracles of nature which produce intense admiration. We cannot continue destroying their natural habitats if our legal instruments do not form a sufficient safeguard for a respectable existence and if our establishments intended to preserve them are converted into prisons where promiscuity leads to genetic deterioration⁷.

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⁷ Vid. Sentence by the Supreme Court of Justice of the European Union of 9 December 2010:
<http://www.derechoanimal.info/bbdd/Documentos/924.pdf>