



## Post-Conference Summary Report

Name of Event: **5<sup>th</sup> International Meeting on Zoo Research, Conservation and Biodiversity (IMZRCB)**

Date of Event: **April 2 to 5, 2025**

Location of Event: **Hybrid (In-person at the Serengeti-Park Hodenhagen and Online via CVENT)**

Number of Persons Attending: **66**

Hosting Organization: **Serengeti-Park Hodenhagen GmbH**

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## IMZRCB 2025 Conference Summary

The Serengeti-Park Hodenhagen held its 5<sup>th</sup> International Meeting on Zoo Research, Conservation and Biodiversity (IMZRCB) on April 2 to 5, 2025. The hybrid nature of the event created the opportunity for attendees from many parts of the world to connect and learn about zoo research projects and ongoing initiatives to protect biodiversity and enhance conservation efforts. A total of 66 people attended the hybrid event in-person or online, representing 17 countries. There was a mix of students, veterinarians, conservation biologists and senior scientists presenting their work on a good range of topics covering many taxa.

On April 2, the conference began with an icebreaker evening and a presentation by York Hovest, renowned explorer and photographer. He took us on an unforgettable journey with his “Heroes of the Sea” expedition. Aside from being an adventure, his journey was a bold statement about the urgency of protecting our oceans. He shared incredible stories of courage, survival, and hope, shedding light on the challenges our oceans are facing today: climate change, pollution and overfishing. York also inspired us with a message of optimism and actionable solutions, highlighting the global need to rethink and change our relationship with nature.

On April 5, we began the day with an inspiring welcome address by the CEO and owner of the Serengeti-Park Hodenhagen, Dr. Fabrizio Sepe, and the Head of the Serengeti-Park Department of Research and General Chair of the IMZRCB conference, Dr. Idu Azogu-Sepe. The address was centered around the theme: “Zoological Gardens: What’s in it for me?”, exploring the intersection of zoos and society, and our personal enrichment. With a park’s mission statement that is focused on the human being, Dr. Fabrizio Sepe further explained that the aim was to reach the souls and hearts of human beings, mostly children, and show them that there can be places like animal parks and zoological gardens where human beings, nature and animals can live in harmony, and that these kinds of futures are possible to recreate.

Our keynote speakers brought forward thought-provoking discussions and groundbreaking research. Dr. Marcus Clauss offered an insightful keynote on anthropomorphizing in the zoo, challenging us to rethink how we perceive animals in captivity. Dr. Angela Stoeger delved into the innovative use of AI in conservation to analyze elephant vocalizations, showcasing how technology is transforming animal communications research.





The expert discussion panel was moderated by Jon Taylor of Conservation Optimism. Along with 4 other panelists, they explored the topic “Shaping biodiversity: Nature’s course or ours?”. Considered questions included the role of technology in shaping future biodiversity, whether our current captive breeding programs are designed to ensure the survivability of species in the wild, and whether preventing extinction is always a moral choice or if there are cases where letting nature take its course is preferable.

During the conference, we had fantastic presentations on animal communication, animal husbandry, and zoo research, as well as a hybrid poster session, each inspiring us to rethink the future of animal care and conservation. A hands-on workshop on data loggers by Luci Kirkpatrick was crucial for modern-day conservation research. We also had an interactive workshop by Monika Fiby where she took us through practical and theoretical approaches to exhibit design and improving habitat for animals. In the spotlight, we learned about BORIS and Noldus Behavioral tracking software – tools that are helping us study and improve animal welfare in zoo environments.

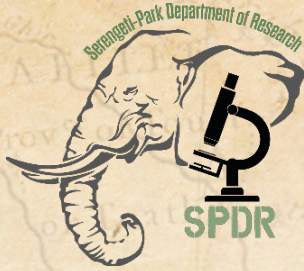
Our Flagship Species Support Program was reframed to now support in-house Serengeti-Park research projects that may be realized within our own research department or through collaborations with other institutions and researchers. It was initially created not only to help to preserve a particular species, but to support efforts to rescue a specific area where biodiversity is heavily impacted and where the conservation efforts can reverse the degradation the most. The flagship species is not necessarily endangered, but its existence is important to the survival and balance of their ecosystem. In 2025, our flagship species is the Pygmy hippopotamus! They are characterized as solitary, evasive, nocturnal and semi-aquatic mammals, however little is known about their behaviour, ecology, and social dynamics in the wild. They have also been classified as endangered by the 2015 IUCN Red List. This year, funds raised during the silent auction will directly support our ongoing research on a pair of pygmy hippos at the Serengeti-Park Hodenhagen, allowing us to allocate funds in improving data collection, investing in monitoring equipment, and producing key information that will enhance knowledge on the conservation of these species and improve management strategies in our park, with other holders of the species, and in the wild. In particular, this long-term research will focus on identifying the key vocalisations of pygmy hippos and their contexts, exploring space use and habitat preferences, conducting regular behavioural observations with the use of nightly video recordings and ethograms designed and validated for the project, assessing individual personalities, and contributing to a better understanding of pygmy hippos’ behaviour, particularly in a mixed-species exhibit.

The conference concluded with a gala night filled with great company, delicious food, and a silent auction benefiting our Flagship Species Support Program for the Pygmy Hippo. For the project, we raised EUR 427.89. Our gratitude to those that participated and supported this important program.

On the morning of April 5, we ventured “Into the Safari: Serengeti-Park Tour”, where we had the chance to observe incredible animals like tigers, giraffes, bison, and rhinos—making for a perfect conclusion to our time together.

A heartfelt thank you to all of the attendees, speakers, our cooperation partner and best presentation award sponsor, Journal of Zoological and Botanical Gardens through representative Zorana Repac, and our





dedicated conference committee members and volunteer for making our small conference such a memorable and impactful event. Congratulations to our Best talk, Best in-person poster, and Best online poster winners! Our sincerest gratitude to our wonderful colleagues at the Serengeti-Park Hodenhagen for their kind support, hard work and enthusiasm in making this a successful event.

Next year's IMZRCB conference will take place from **March 18 to 21, 2026**. We look forward to continuing these important conversations and collaborations, while providing networking opportunities for our attendees inside and outside of the zoo community. Furthermore, attendees will experience the uniqueness of our themed lodges and tours of the Serengeti-Park. We are "the little engine that could" and are grateful for the community feel of our event.

### Speakers and presenters of IMZRCB 2025

#### Keynote Speakers

Anthropomorphizing at the Zoo: Diet, Group Composition & Population Management – **Dr. Marcus Clauss**  
EleCom: Towards encoding elephant vocal communication using AI – **Dr. Angela Stoeger**

#### Invited Speakers

Heroes of the Sea - **York Hovest**

Journal of Zoological and Botanical Gardens—Open Access Journal – **Zorana Repac**

Evolution and functional morphology of the mammalian inner ear – **apl. Prof. Dr. Irina Ruf**

Primate cell culture systems for functional genomics research – **Dr. Genevieve Housman**

Trophic rewilding as a restoration approach under emerging novel biosphere conditions – **Dr. Jens-**

**Christian Svenning**

Reintroduction of species that have become extinct due to habitat destruction in Central Europe – **Prof. Dr. Werner Kunz**

Positive communications as a powerful conservation tool – **Jon Taylor**

What can vocalisations tell us about animals? – **Dr. Elodie Mandel-Briefer**

Ethogram of Pygmy Hippopotamus: Understanding Behavioral and Acoustic Communication for Conservation – **Dr. Rosaria Santoro**

The many challenges and opportunities in zoo research – **Dr. Marianne Freeman**

Welfare assessment of zoo-housed giraffes – **Freja Frensdved Nielsen and Kamille Jerri**

BORIS: a flexible free software for behavioral analysis – **Dr. Marco Gamba**

Noldus tools for animal studies – **Niek Wilmink**

#### Invited Workshop Presenters

Conservation tech and proximity – **Luci Kirkpatrick**

Animal exhibit design workshop: How to make use of ZooLex and principles of exhibit design (Part 1 and 2)  
– **Monika Fiby**

#### Symposium presenters

Combating challenges of biodiversity conservation in a developing economy – **Dr. Victoria Montong Yilwa**

**Dan**





Building a Biobank: A One Plan Approach to African Penguin Conservation - **Paweł Borecki**  
Bird or cheetah? – Utilizing playbacks to test prey species reaction to cheetah chirps – **Katharina Prager**  
The relevance of a case study to advancing zoo animal housing and husbandry – **Dr. Paul Rose**  
What Zoo Data can tell you about your animals and your populations – **João Pedro Meireles**  
A step towards advancing the mapping and spatial analysis of zoo-animal data – **Daniel Moloney**

#### **Poster Presenters**

Post-mortem findings in a zoological collection in Northern Portugal – **Dr. Andreia Garcês**  
Safeguarding the future: monitoring cinereous vultures' welfare in a breeding centre - **Margarida Plácido**  
Importance of pack social structure to conservation management of African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) – **Helen Reynolds**  
Effects of enrichment on behaviour of zoo-housed porcupines (*Hystrix indica*) – **Arne Kalinowski**  
Offspring sex bias in Tree Kangaroo (*Dendrolagus sp.*) zoo populations – **Nick van Eeuwijk**  
Acoustic communication in wild African savannah elephant calves – **Sara Bosch**  
Snake aversion training: A case report from Namibia's livestock guarding dogs – **Calum O'Flaherty**

#### **Expert panel discussion**

“Shaping biodiversity: Nature’s course or ours?”

*Moderator:* Jon Taylor

*Panelists:* Dr. Marcus Clauss, Dr. Genevieve Housman, Prof. Dr. Werner Kunz, apl. Prof. Dr. Irina Ruf

#### **Best Presentation Winners (sponsored by the Journal of Zoological and Botanical Gardens)**

Katharina Prager (Best talk)  
João Pedro Meireles (Best talk)  
Sara Bosch (Best in-person poster)  
Margarida Plácido (Best online poster)

#### **Planning Committee**

Dr. Idu Azogu-Sepe (General Chair and Finance Chair)  
Phillip Martens (Program Chair)  
Ruth-Marie Stecker (Activity Co-Chair)  
Janine Riesener (Activity Co-Chair)  
Sérgio Neves (Volunteer, Opel Zoo)

#### **Sponsors and Cooperation**

The Zoo Scientist  
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