



NABU Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Internationaler Artenschutz

To whom it may concern

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29. November 2013

Morgan's case

Statement of the Federal Working Committee International Species Conservation of NABU

Date: 29.11.2013

Against the background of the cooperation agreement between NABU and Loro Parque Fundación (LPF), the signatories have studied Morgan's case in depth, together with all documents and recordings.

In Loro Parque, we were convinced of the significant progress that the female orca 'Morgan' has achieved. When she was rescued in 2010 by the staff of the Dolphinarium Harderwijk in Holland, she was apathetic and weighed only 450 kg. It was doubtful whether she would survive or not. In November 2013, we could observe an outwardly healthy and nearly adult orca weighing over 1600 kg.

Despite her severe hearing impairment, diagnosed in autumn 2012, that also affected her ability to communicate acoustically, Morgan has built a relationship and a bond to the other 5 orcas remarkably quickly, according to experts, and she is now well integrated in the group.

Morgan is apparent for making loud sounds outside the water that are mainly directed to humans. The sounds she makes under water show structures that indicate that she grew up in Scandinavian waters and can be clearly distinguished from the other orca's vocalization. This requires urgently further studies. As of today Morgan's family hasn't been found.

It is also noticeable that Morgan has a very strong focus on humans. The trainers look after the orcas in an attentive, competent and responsible manner. They also try to gently relax the strong relationship that Morgan maintains with humans at first sight, and to strengthen her bonds with her fellow species (this is done, for instance, by giving food to Morgan in a way that she does not realize that it is coming from the trainers).

Morgan's rescue by the experts of the Dolphinarium Harderwijk and Loro Parque can be described as successful.

Actually Morgan is not apt to live in the wild.

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The introduction into the wild at this moment would be her certain death.

Whether the introduction into the wild could be possible in future, depends on an examination at a later date.

However, the chances for a successful reintroduction of Morgan seem to be more than questionable, considering the following aspects:

For free-living cetaceans an intact hearing is vital for the communication as well as for obtaining food and the orientation (echolocation). Given Morgan's acoustic handicap, the failure of a reintroduction would be even more probable as it was in the case of Keiko, which, as it is known, had no social contact after his reintroduction and perished miserably after a few months. For wild animals in our care, we have a very special responsibility.

Due to the loss of her family at a very young age, Morgan has suffered a very traumatic situation. Whether her family is dead or has expelled Morgan, or why she got separated from her family, is still unclear.

From the biobehavioural and ethical point of view it would be unacceptable to destroy the relationships she established with her new family so far, especially, as the family ties have highest priority for female killer whales.

The orca facility at Loro Parque is the most modern and one of the largest worldwide. Living in this facility is the best alternative for Morgan.

We urgently recommend further investigations about the hearing defect and the reasons for this defect. Was it existing from birth on or was it maybe an anthropogenic event which induced it? Has her family come to harm as well?

The clarification of the causes and events will be of great importance for the future conservation of cetaceans.

The case of Morgan once more serves as a reminder for all associations for nature conservation to make the habitats of cetaceans safer and to detect and eliminate possible dangers and damages, also caused by noise.

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