**Scenario 2: Euthanasia of an elderly blind howler monkey**

**Background:**

Howler Monkeys (*Alouatta caraya*) are found in tropical Central and South America. Their name comes from the loud cries they use to send messages to other monkeys that this territory is already occupied. Black howler monkeys are social animals that live in groups of five to 19 individuals consisting of one to three adult males, two to four adult females and their offspring. There may also be bachelor groups.

Females play an important part in infant development.

One of the howler's primary senses is its keen sense of smell. These monkeys have short snout with wide O shapes nostrils that are capable of smelling food such as fruits and nuts from over two kilometers away. The tail of howler monkeys is in most cases roughly the same size as the body and is prehensile, meaning it can fully wrap around objects such as branches and have tactile pads. This means that the tails of a howler monkey acts as a fifth limb for them that is ideal for movement through the trees.

Howler monkeys are considered Least Concern on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. However, one of the largest threats to the howler monkey is the deforestation of their homes to use as land for farming or to obtain wood to sell. Another large threat is their value in bush meat. Howler monkeys are a large and cheap source of protein and because of their usually docile nature they make for easy prey.

Welfare in captivity is generally good as long as they are provided appropriate social grouping, relevant diets and a stimulating environment. Aspects such as social integration, controlled temperature, indoor and outdoor enclosures, and hiding places are important controls that need to be met. The provision of foraging plants within the enclosure is ideal to stimulate natural feeding behaviour and behavioral enrichment measures need to be devised to prevent behavioral disorders.

Acute and chronic syndromes such as gastric dilatation, howler monkey wasting disease, and metabolic bone disease can be prevented when provided adequate diets. The average lifespan of the Howler Monkey in the wild is 10 years, but in captivity they can live up to 20 years.

**Scenario:**

A zoo has a group of 6 black howler monkeys, 2 adult females, one young female, one infant female, and 2 adolescent makes. Recently their elderly male died. Otto, and adult female aged 15 has developed cataracts over the past few years and is now mostly blind. She has had trouble sourcing the food provided (greenery and small amounts of fruits) which can only be placed in one area of the enclosure due to keeper access issues. The enclosure is quite small and was not originally built for this species, so does not adequately allow for natural behaviours and keeper access. As a result of her poor food intake she has lost weight and condition.

Staff are very worried that if she does not get treatment for her blindness that she will continue to decline in health and her welfare will be severely compromised. Due to her age she is non-breeding, but has in past had 3 offspring by the recently deceased male, one of which remains in the group.

Cataract operations have been successfully carried out on Howler monkeys, but staff at the zoo are concerned about anesthetizing Otto due to her age. The current veterinary team have never carried out such a procedure, and do not have sufficient experience to carry out the procedure, so an external expertise would need to be sought. Apart from the cataracts Otto remains a healthy and agile animal for her age, and is regularly seen socializing with her group.

This particular zoo does not carry out management euthanasia (the process of euthanizing animals to control its population and maintain genetic integrity), and the keeping staff in charge of the howler monkeys are particularly anxious that Otto doesn’t get put down as they are very fond of her.

The howler monkeys are popular at the zoo due to their distinctive call and past breeding success, and are used in the zoos promotional material. Visitors can sponsor individual animals including Otto to support the zoos global conservation projects, including habitat protection of the black howlers natural habitat.