



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Birmingham Zoo Receives Angela Peterson Excellence in Diversity Award

**BIRMINGHAM, AL** – The Birmingham Zoo has been nationally recognized by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) for establishing excellence in diversity and inclusion. During the 2018 AZA Conference in Seattle, Washington, the Zoo was awarded the Angela Peterson Excellence in Diversity Award, significant achievement, for our Sensory Inclusive Zoo Initiative.

President & CEO of the Birmingham Zoo, Chris Pfefferkorn, is proud of the Zoo's commitment to improving guests' experience and inclusiveness through programs and community partnerships, saying "The Birmingham Zoo is honored to be recognized by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums for the Angela Peterson Excellence in Diversity Award. I am proud of our sensory inclusive initiative and how it has grown to inspire other AZA accredited zoos and aquariums to also become sensory inclusive. We've heard people say they struggle to find places to take their children that are inclusive. We listened to parents and took the steps to make our zoo inclusive, so adults and children with Autism can come and truly enjoy their time with us. The Birmingham Zoo has created a connection to the community that is profoundly unique and impactful to everyone involved."

In 2015, the Birmingham Zoo was the first AZA accredited Zoo in the United States to become sensory inclusive through a partnership with KultureCity. The goal of the initiative was to create an inclusive space for children and adults who have sensory processing needs and to raise awareness among the Zoo staff as well as throughout the community. Our Zoo is a designated "sensory inclusive facility" where families with children who have sensory processing needs have access to a variety of resources, such as designated quiet zones, headphone zones, noise canceling headphones, fidget toys and weighted lap pads. Zoo staff is trained to understand sensory processing and how to best serve guests with sensory sensitivity.

Roger Torbert, Vice President of Education at the Birmingham Zoo, says, "Our work with KultureCity is a 'game changer' for many families in our community." The Birmingham Zoo aims to improve our capacity and increase accessibility by helping visitors as they explore throughout Zoo. Torbert concludes by saying, "The wonderful thing about this entire process is that we discovered that the changes brought about by the Sensory Inclusive Zoo Initiative not only improves access for visitors with sensory processing needs, but also improved the quality of service for all of our guests."

We share this Excellence in Diversity Award honor with the Akron Zoo in Akron, Ohio. By becoming certified sensory inclusive, both the Akron Zoo and Birmingham Zoo have increased accessibility for guests with sensory processing needs and have created an inclusive environment for all visitors on a daily basis.

### **About the Angela Peterson Excellence in Diversity Award**

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums recognizes the value of human diversity (including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs and political or other ideologies) in all endeavors. The award recognizes the most significant innovative, productive, far-reaching, program to promote diversity in institutions throughout AZA.

### **About the Association of Zoos and Aquariums**

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, science, and recreation. AZA represents more than 230 institutions in the United States and overseas, which collectively draw more than 183 million visitors every year. These institutions meet the highest standards in animal care and provide a fun, safe, and educational family experience. In addition, they dedicate millions of dollars to support scientific research, conservation, and education programs.

## LINKS

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) <https://www.aza.org/>  
KultureCity <https://www.kulturecity.org/>

Zoo Logo, Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Logo & KultureCity Logo attached.



## QUOTES

**Source: Chris Pfefferkorn, President & CEO at the Birmingham Zoo**

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## SOCIAL

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## ABOUT THE BIRMINGHAM ZOO

The Birmingham Zoo is an independent, not for profit, 501(c)(3) organization and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

**Our mission:** *Inspiring Passion to Conserve the Natural World.*

Approximately 900 animals of 230 species call the Birmingham Zoo home, including sea lions, zebras, rhinos and endangered species from six continents. The Birmingham Zoo is a non-profit and is open daily from 9am to 5pm. Regular admission is \$17\* for adults and \$14\* for senior citizens and military and \$12\* for children ages 2-12 (\*Price not including tax). All Birmingham Zoo Members and children under two-years-old receive free admission. The Birmingham Zoo is the only AZA accredited Zoo in the state of Alabama.

[www.birminghamzoo.com](http://www.birminghamzoo.com) | 2630 Cahaba Road | Birmingham, AL 35223