

Animal Tracks

There is a New Firefox in Town!

Read some interesting facts about the newest animal family member at the Zoo!

+ BEE A POLLINATOR HERO

**Help Combat
Wildlife Trafficking**



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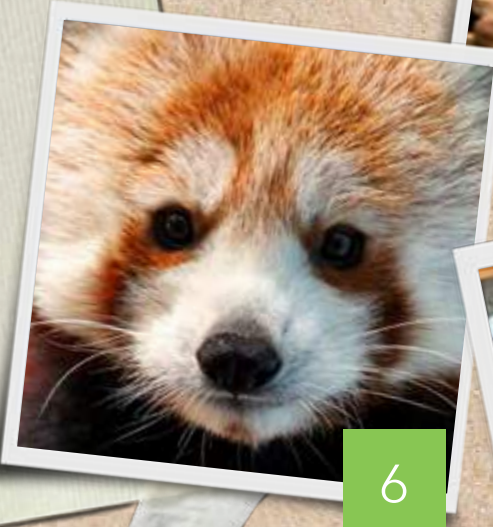


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LETTER FROM The Director

Dear Members,

2020 was a year like no other. It brought profound changes to our world and tested us in ways that few could have imagined. Although we embark on 2021 with challenges, your Birmingham Zoo is filled with gratitude, optimism, and passion that does not wane. We are stronger, more resilient, and determined to continue serving our community in remarkable and impactful ways.

We are proud of the accessibility the Zoo provides, and we are committed to connecting generations of people to wildlife and the natural world. With our 2021 projected budget deficit of \$1.5 million, your generous support during this time has been and will continue to be crucial to the Birmingham Zoo being an essential resource for education and conservation—locally, regionally, and globally.

On behalf of our dedicated staff, volunteers, and board of directors—**thank you** for helping your Zoo exceed our goal in raising over \$780,000 for the Feed Your Animals campaign last fall! Your considerate gifts, no matter the amount, make a tremendous difference in providing care for your Zoo's 550+ animals representing 185 species from 6 continents. You are a vital part of the Zoo family!

In April, we continue our fundraising efforts in a new meaningful campaign, Wild about Wildlife, with an aspiring fundraising goal of \$200,000. Funds raised will provide our animals with specialized medical attention, food, and ensures that our loving Animal Care Professionals can give these animals the care they deserve. If you are able, please consider donating to your Zoo on our website at birminghamzoo.com/donate.

We are determined to make this year an outstanding one for your Zoo with initiatives that inspire, programs that safely bring us together, and welcoming new additions to our growing animal family. Soon you will meet our new male red panda, two-year-old Gizmo, who arrived from Sacramento Zoo. Red pandas are an endangered species, and the Birmingham Zoo joins other Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accredited zoos around the world in maintaining Species Survival Plan® (SSP) programs for cooperative breeding and conservation initiatives.

With productive days and months ahead, we have many more exciting things awaiting you at the Birmingham Zoo. As you turn the page to read our stories, we hope that you learn something new about your Zoo, feel inspired and connected, all the while uncovering your passion for wildlife and wild places.

While we work together to reimagine a new normal for the Zoo, our staff and volunteers look forward to safely connecting with you through new offerings and experiences. Until then, your Zoo will continue to be a steward and community partner forever Inspiring Passion to Conserve the Natural World.

Chris Pfefferkorn

Chris Pfefferkorn
President & CEO



Birmingham Zoo Mission: Inspiring Passion to Conserve the Natural World.

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BEE a Pollinator Hero


BY TERRA MANASCO, CONSERVATION MANAGER AND
JESSE DANIEL, INTERPRETATION & ONSITE PROGRAMS MANAGER

What does a Pollinator do?



Pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, moths, beetles and other insects, as well as some birds and bats, play a critical role in flowering plant reproduction throughout the world. Most of the time, pollination is accidental. An animal will land on a flower to drink its nectar and when they land, a bit of pollen sticks to their body. Then, each time it lands on the next flower, some of that pollen falls off and into the new flower, causing fertilization. After pollen fertilizes the flower, fruits and seeds begin to grow.


Why are Pollinators so important?



Without pollinators, most natural ecosystems would collapse. An astounding 75% of the world's flowering plants depend on pollinators to produce their fruits and seeds, while 35% of the world's food crops depend on pollination. That means literally one of every three bites of food you take is thanks to a bee, a moth, or even a fly. Did we say a fly? That's right! Chocolate comes from the cacao tree, which is entirely pollinated by flies!

Today, despite this crucial role, many pollinator species are declining throughout their range. Threats include habitat loss and fragmentation, invasive species, pesticide use, climate change, and disease. One pollinator particularly at risk is the iconic North American monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), which is one of our most recognizable butterfly species, due to its distinctive orange and black markings. The monarch is considered especially vulnerable, due to fact that its larva (caterpillar) feeds exclusively on milkweed. Milkweed species are rapidly declining, largely due to habitat loss and overuse of herbicides.


Pollinators - the Day Crew



Most daytime pollinators are attracted to flowers by both color and smell. The structure of a flower is also important, and it varies for each species. A well-known example is the hummingbird, whose bill is perfectly designed to gather nectar from long, tubular flowers. Butterflies prefer flat or clustered flowers that are easier for them to land on. Butterflies, like many others, are accidental pollinators, visiting flowers mostly for their nectar, yet they are responsible for pollinating many important food crops including broccoli, cabbage, peas, and artichoke!


Bees collect both pollen and nectar from flowers, using pollen as a food source during the summer for adults and for their larvae in the hive. The nectar they gather is used to make honey, which is their food source in the winter. More than 100 food crops are pollinated by bees, including berries, apples, almonds, tomatoes, avocados, pumpkins, and squashes!

Pollinators - the Night Crew



Some nocturnal animals are also important pollinators, such as moths and bats. Because some plants flower only at night, the nocturnal animals take over the job of pollination when the sun goes down. Nocturnal pollinators locate the night-blooming flowers mostly by scent. Hundreds of different plants are pollinated by bats, including agave, bananas, and mango.

How is the Zoo helping Pollinators?



The Birmingham Zoo supports the conservation of pollinators and their habitats through our certified Monarch Waystation and through the use of pollinator-friendly plants throughout the Zoo. We have created a habitat for monarchs by planting milkweed and in 2020, we had both monarch caterpillars and adults at our waystation. We also provide additional pollinator-friendly plants for other types of butterflies, as well as bees, hummingbirds, and more.

Did you know that the Zoo has a honeybee colony? The colony is located in one of our behind-the-scenes areas and regularly produces honey! During spring and summer, our bees use clover and wildflowers in the areas surrounding their hives for food. In the winter, they use their own honey as a food source and staff occasionally need to feed them supplemental sugar water. Rain or shine, we have a dedicated team of Zoo employees that care for our honeybees all year round.

What can You do?

Take the BEE a Pollinator Hero Pledge!

I pledge to maintain my yard, garden and landscape as sustainably as possible by...

Planting butterfly- and bee-friendly organic flowers and shrubs.

Not buying plants that have been treated with pesticides.

Reducing or eliminating use of pesticides and herbicides at home.

Creating more pollinator habitats in my own yard and community.

Telling everyone that I am a Pollinator Hero and asking them to BEE one, too!





Springtime SCALY FRIENDS

BY ANDY SCOTT, ANIMAL CARE PROFESSIONAL III, REPTILES

It's that time of year again! As the weather warms up, all kinds of wildlife resume their summer activities, including one of my favorite types of animals, snakes! Every spring, we get questions about snakes coming out, and what to do about it. The simple answer? Leave 'em alone! It's really that easy, and let's talk about why. Here in Alabama, we have about 40 different species of snakes, and only 6 are venomous, with only three seen in central Alabama with any regularity: copperheads, cottonmouths, and timber rattlesnakes. The vast majority of snakes here in the south pose no danger to us, and in fact, there's less than a 1% chance of death from a venomous snake bite in the U.S. If you've ever been outside in Alabama, there's a high probability that you've been within feet of a wild snake and had no idea! Snakes are secretive and just want to be left alone. To a snake, you are a predator, and they want nothing to do with you. Snakes aren't aggressive, and despite the stories you may have heard, snakes don't chase people!

Snakes are, however, defensive, especially if cornered, picked up, harassed, or someone is coming after them with a shovel. They will be inclined to bite as a last resort. Most snake bites happen when someone is messing with the snake. The best thing to do if you see a snake is to give it room and let it keep doing what snakes do best – provide free pest control. Most snakes eat rodents that would get into our houses, eat our crops, and possibly spread diseases. Have you seen a snake in your yard? Guess what? They've probably been there for years before being spotted. This scaly friend knows your habits and knows how to stay away from you. Removing it could cause an increase of prey, and an increase of other snakes! If you want to limit snakes around your home, the best things to do are to limit prey and hiding spaces, store your food in airtight containers, keep your grass cut, clear debris piles, and check your house for any cracks or gaps that rodents could enter through.

Occasionally, some bites happen by accident, usually from someone stepping on a snake, or while working in the yard. This is rare, but there are some ways to stay safe by understanding snake behavior. After sundown, snakes will often use the warmth of rocks to increase their metabolism for a night's work. What's a concrete driveway, but a manmade rock? It is always a good idea to use a flashlight and wear shoes, if you are out after dark. Gardeners, make sure to never stick your hands where you cannot see, and use hand tools like rakes when cleaning up leaves, and you should be perfectly safe. Still worried about a snake? The best and safest way to "shoo" a snake out of your way is a gentle spray with a garden hose. The snake will be on its way, you'll be safe, and so will your friendly neighborhood pest control. Shovels are for digging, not for going after our scaly friends!

Photo Credit: Lawson Hopper



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**WELLS
FARGO**

"Firefox" is a nickname for red pandas because of their fiery looking tails.

THERE IS A NEW *Firefox in Town!*

BY BOBBIE CAVANAUGH, ZOOLOGICAL MANAGER OF PREDATORS/SEA LIONS

The Predator team is excited to have red panda, Gizmo, join our Zoo family! Gizmo was born at the Sacramento Zoo on June 6, 2019, to mother Amaya and father Benjamin. He arrived at the Birmingham Zoo on the evening of December 2, 2020, and he has recently completed a routine quarantine at our Animal Health Center. The Health Center Animal Care Professionals (ACPs) worked hard to keep up with his bamboo fixation - he loves it so much! Gizmo is skittish when in new areas or around new people and he likes his space. His ACPs at Sacramento Zoo report that he seems to do best training and interacting with care staff who take the time to build a relationship with him. He is very smart and playful, especially when he is comfortable. He loves his snacks, so going slow and offering bamboo, grapes, Craisins, and apples helps him to become comfortable and confident. The Predator ACPs are looking forward to working with him to gain his trust. Gizmo will also start to fill the space in our hearts left by the passing of the Zoo's beloved red pandas, Parker and Sorrel, whom the ACPs miss tremendously. The Predator Building isn't the same without a red panda, and the Zoo is passionate about informing our guests about the importance of red pandas as a species, the Red Panda Network, and how we can help a species that lives so far away from Alabama.

Red pandas are found throughout the mountains of south Asia in countries such as Nepal, China, and Myanmar. While they are affected by several

challenges, the major impacts are deforestation, degradation, and fragmentation of their habitat, due to the rapidly increasing human population in the eastern Himalayas. Livestock herding is also a significant contributor to habitat destruction, which threatens the existence of this species. Other issues affecting red pandas are poaching and illegal trade, free-roaming dogs, and low awareness of red pandas. The Birmingham Zoo is a partner in the Red Panda Network, which works to protect red pandas in the wild. But why are Red Pandas so important? Areas in which they thrive indicate a strong ecosystem, such as healthy forests, clean water, and sustainable livelihoods for the people in those regions. In the last 20 years, however, the global population of red pandas has declined by 50%. Currently, there are as few as 2,500 red pandas remaining in the wild.

Did you know that red pandas were the first panda? That's right! They were discovered about 50 years before the giant panda, which is not a closely related species. Both species are carnivores that have adapted to eating almost exclusively bamboo, and both are the only species in their taxonomic family. Dr. Angela Glatston, President of the Red Panda Network's Board of Directors, has said, "Losing red pandas to extinction would be like losing the whole cat family from lions to domestic cats." Red pandas are important, endangered, and unique, and we are proud to have Gizmo represent his species for all our guests here at the Birmingham Zoo.



Photo Credit: Scott Kayser

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YOU CAN COMBAT *Wildlife Trafficking*

BY DANIELLE WILLIAMS, ZOOLOGICAL MANAGER -
SOUTH AMERICA/PRIMATES

Wildlife trafficking is "the illegal trade, smuggling, poaching, capture, or collection of endangered species, protected wildlife..., derivatives, or products" according to the United Nation's Office of Drugs and Crime, and it ranks alongside drugs and human trafficking in terms of profitability and international reach. In short – it's a **BIG** problem. Aside from devastating iconic species, wildlife trafficking negatively influences overall biodiversity, climate change, and human health. As COVID-19 emerged worldwide a little over a year ago, more conversations focused on the impact of zoonotic diseases. Zoonotic diseases are those that are passed between humans and animals, and they account for three quarters of all infectious diseases. Wildlife trafficking is a major factor in transmitting these illnesses.

When we talk about wildlife trafficking, conversations include topics such as wildlife markets, bushmeat, exotic species like pangolins, and smuggling. It is easy to feel that it is all far away, and we are helpless to make a positive impact. Luckily, that's not true! In a previous *Animal Tracks* issue, we shared information on steps to take when traveling – buy local products, be a responsible shopper, travel green, and prioritize ecotourism. However, many of us have limited travel over the last year in order to keep ourselves, our families, and our communities healthy. So, let's talk about a couple of ways we can make positive impacts while we stay within our bubbles.



How you can help

Educate yourself and those around you when it comes to the items you buy, consume, and share:

- **Do not contribute to animal exploitation.** Some animals, such as primates, are taken from their mothers for use in entertainment. This can range from performing in shows or movies to dressing up in clothes. Most of these animals outlive their "usefulness" when they grow up to be too strong and dangerous to be handled. They are then sometimes sold as pets to unwitting or well-intentioned people who do not have the proper means to care for them. By not supporting movies, shows, greeting cards, calendars, etc., that exploit these animals, you contribute to a decrease in demand. Instead, choose to watch the movies and shows that utilize CGI and human actors.
- **Don't share that "cute" video or selfie.** Videos on social media of "tickling" a slow loris or petting a lemur spread rapidly, but research shows that this can be dangerous for those animal populations. Sharing videos of animals in these unnatural circumstances leads to an increased desire for them as pets, which contributes to wildlife trafficking. Often, the animal behavior is also misrepresented – the "tickled" loris was demonstrating defensive behavior, not enjoyment! However, AZA-accredited zoos, like the Birmingham Zoo, care for our animals utilizing thoughtful safety procedures and personal protective equipment to avoid sharing illness with our animal ambassadors. Our underlying goal is to educate our supporters on the amazing animals who call the Birmingham Zoo home and their counterparts in range countries. Look for these differences and consider the source before you hit "share."

We all have the power to make a positive impact, no matter how small the action may seem!

Vulcan

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VULCAN MATERIALS COMPANY HAS A STRONG HISTORY WITH YOUR BIRMINGHAM ZOO

Next time you visit the Birmingham Zoo, take time to notice the entryway and arrival plaza. This gathering space is the perfect, popular spot to meet groups, purchase tickets, and safely transition into the Zoo. All of this was made possible with a generous gift from Vulcan Materials Company and its Foundation. Vulcan Materials Company is the nation's largest producer of construction aggregates, including crushed stone, gravel, and sand. It's also a major producer of aggregate-based construction materials, including asphalt and ready-mixed concrete. Since 2001, Vulcan Materials has been a corporate partner supporting Zoo capital campaigns, programs, and temporary exhibitions. In addition, Vulcan Materials has donated in-kind construction materials to aid the Zoo in building habitats, maintaining roads, and supporting Zoo improvements.

With almost 9,000 employees company-wide, Vulcan Materials supports nonprofit organizations and causes to which its employees volunteer their time. The company also provides a generous matching gift program for employee donations to the Zoo. "Vulcan Materials is the kind of corporate partner that not only makes vital financial investments, but it also contributes expertise, materials, and volunteers," said Zoo President & CEO Chris Pfefferkorn. He continued, "Vulcan Materials employees fulfill needs by serving on the Board of Directors, becoming Zoo Volunteers,

and working on group projects. We are grateful for the many ways that Vulcan and its Foundation are involved in the community and generously support their Birmingham Zoo."

Established in 1988, the Vulcan Materials Company Foundation focuses on education and workforce development, environmental stewardship, civic and charitable programs. In the last 20 years, the Foundation has awarded \$58 million to nonprofit organizations. Vulcan and its Foundation have long supported the growth of the Birmingham Zoo by investing in capital campaigns for the Children's Zoo, Trails of Africa, and Arrival Plaza at the Front Entrance. Additionally, Vulcan was the Presenting Sponsor of *Dino Discovery: They're Back* and has helped to fund ZooSchool.

Vulcan Materials Company Sr. Vice President and Birmingham Zoo Board of Directors Member, Jerry Perkins, Jr. said, "Vulcan Materials Company is proud to be a longtime supporter of the Birmingham Zoo. For me personally, I have made many great memories taking my children to see the animals, exploring the Zoo with family and friends from out of town and volunteering with Vulcan colleagues. It is a privilege to be part of a world-class organization that is dedicated to conservation and education programs. The Birmingham Zoo is a jewel in our community."

LOOKING FOR WAYS TO "GO GREEN?" THE BIRMINGHAM ZOO GREEN TEAM IS HERE TO HELP!

BY LINDSEY HERRON, ZOO REGISTRAR

Plastic bags were introduced in 1977, and they've become a major pollution problem ever since. One study estimates that the worldwide number of plastic bags used per year tops out at over 4 trillion! Here in the United States, we use over 100 billion plastic bags a year, which totals to more than 300 bags per person. Of those millions of bags, it's estimated that only one percent are recycled, while the rest end up as litter or make their way to landfill, where they will last for over a thousand years! Each plastic bag is typically used for 12 minutes or less, so this is a lot of pollution for a quick convenience.

Not only are plastic bags a trash issue, they are also a major problem for wildlife, especially marine animals. It's estimated that over 100,000 marine animals die each year from encounters with plastic bags. A plastic bag in the ocean can look like a tasty meal to those animals that enjoy jellyfish, like loggerhead sea turtles. Seabirds, fish, and marine mammals can also become entangled in plastic bags floating along the surface, leading to injury or even death.

Luckily, there is a very easy way to help put a stop to the overflow of plastic bags: **make the switch to reusable shopping bags.** As you can see, switching to reusable bags has a big impact, and this one small action is one of the easiest ways to go green. Reusable bags come in all shapes, sizes, and colors, so everyone is sure to find one that fits their personality and lifestyle. Many stores sell reusable bags, some of which fold up or can be stuffed into a small carry pouch for easy transport. Some grocery stores even offer a reusable bag incentive, giving customers who use them a monetary credit per bag used.

Here at the Birmingham Zoo, we're always looking for ways to minimize our environmental impact. Because of this, we've made the switch away from using plastic bags at our gift shops. We offer reusable bags for purchase, so everyone can have a great bag to use again and again.

Remember: every little bit counts!

*Time to
Spare?
We Can Help
With That!*

BY COLLIN HOWELL,
VOLUNTEER SERVICES COORDINATOR

Do you want to donate time to your Zoo, but only on a limited basis? Volunteer at one of our many special events coming up this spring/summer! Special Event Volunteers help us achieve our mission by creating a safe, fun, and educational atmosphere for our guests to enjoy everything our Zoo has to offer. These volunteers aid in critical parts of event logistics like set up, breakdown, and also making sure the event goes according to plan. Volunteer assignments can differ depending on the event. Volunteers helping with our Zoo Brews event (must be 21+) will act as pourers and spend most of their time with brewery representatives while interacting with our guests. Volunteers helping with our holiday events will facilitate activities and games throughout the Zoo grounds. These events are also a great opportunity for groups around the Birmingham area to volunteer together at a local non-profit that has a global impact. Additionally, this is a fun and easy way to receive service hours for your organization.

To find out more about how you and your group can volunteer with the Zoo's special events, email volunteers@birminghamzoo.com. We can't wait to see you at your Birmingham Zoo!



“CAN I TOUCH IT?!”

What is an Ambassador Animal, Anyway?

BY AMY OWENS, ZOOLOGICAL MANAGER -
AMBASSADOR ANIMALS

Have you ever been to the Birmingham Zoo and seen an animal with an Animal Care Professional (ACP) that you could closely interact with or even touch? Or visited our UAB Callahan Eye Hospital Wildlife Stage and seen one of our wildlife shows, attended an education class, or come to a special event at the Zoo where an animal was present? If you have answered yes to any of these, you have encountered an ambassador! Many guests wonder what exactly makes an animal an ambassador. AZA defines an ambassador animal as “an animal whose role includes handling and/or training by staff or volunteers for interaction with the public and in support of institutional education and conservation goals.” Ambassador animals allow for the public to have a close experience with an animal, which studies have shown may increase participants’ likelihood to partake in conservation actions or initiate additional conservation-minded behaviors.

At the Birmingham Zoo, the Ambassador Animal collection is home to almost 60 individual animals from various taxa including mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians, and invertebrates, all of which are housed in habitats that are entirely behind-the-scenes. They participate in educational programming both on and off Zoo grounds including educational classes, Zoo special events, wildlife stage shows, pop-up demonstrations, and much more.

Ambassador animals are chosen through an in-depth process, which includes an overall collection plan, educational consideration, knowledge of species care, the individual animal’s demeanor, and many other considerations. It is important to note that while ACPs do work in close physical proximity to these animals, not only are the ACPs professionals, but the animals are as well. All animals in the department go through extensive training to allow them to be able to closely participate in the educational experiences with the public without diminishing their welfare.

When it comes to training ambassador animals, each individual undergoes special, individualized training. They are not only trained to participate comfortably in husbandry and veterinary procedures, but many other situations such as engaging in trained behaviors on a stage in front of large audiences, being in new environments in close proximity to guests, free-flight training (for flighted birds), and in some cases being touched by our guests. When going through this training process, the ACPs have to know how to read an animal’s body language and immediately remove them from any stressful situations, which can be a challenge in itself. Even if the animal is used to being handled by ACPs, some animals do not particularly enjoy being touched by strangers. In this case, the ACPs will continue to train the animal to interact with guests in close proximity, but without allowing physical touch.

With all of this in mind, the next time you see an animal on habitat and wonder “Can I touch it?” please think about all the hard work that goes into the Ambassador Animal Department collection and understand that many of our animals have specialized training (or may still be in training) and each animal has different needs and comfort levels with the public. These animals are not pets – they are highly trained animals, who are conservation ambassadors for their counterparts in the wild.

*Please note that during COVID-19, precautions have been put in place for the safety of both the animals and guests that currently prohibits the touching of ambassadors.

**Pictures were taken pre-COVID-19.



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THE VALUE OF INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTION PLANNING

BY HOLLIE COLAHAN, VICE PRESIDENT OF LIVING COLLECTIONS

Ever wondered how we pick the species we have here at the Zoo? Or maybe you wanted to know why we do not have your favorite animal? Historically, many zoo collections were driven by the interests of the director or curator, but modern zoos use a robust process to develop an Institutional Collection Plan (ICP). The Birmingham Zoo updated our ICP this year by assembling a team that represented every department in the Zoo, not just the animal team. This process ensured that all stakeholder interests were considered, including the perspective of our guests.

The ICP starts with two “deal-breaker” categories: can we acquire the species, and can we take proper care of it? Responsible use of the Zoo’s resources and providing excellent care must be our first considerations. Some species require federal permits, which can be time-consuming and costly. Other species may be expensive to acquire or require expensive facilities, like giant pandas or dolphins, for example. Some species require specialized care or may not be a good fit for our climate, such as polar bears. Once we affirm that we can ethically and responsibly acquire and care for the species, we move on to more specific criteria.

As a member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), we participate in many cooperative management programs. These programs designate which species are high priorities for zoos to hold, and they are more readily available from other AZA zoos. These include Species Survival Plan (SSP) species, such as lions or elephants, so our ICP prioritizes participation in these programs as well. Animals that tell important conservation stories, both local and global, are also key decision-making factors.

Value to our community and guests is also an important consideration. We want to have a collection that reflects the incredible biodiversity of the world and our backyard, as well as select species that provide dynamic and interactive experiences for our guests that come to the Zoo and participate in our Education programs.

Many species that are high-value in the above categories are also high-effort, meaning it takes a lot of time, money or other resources to care for them. It is important that we use the Zoo’s resources responsibly, so consideration is also given to staff time, cost of food, and housing requirements. High-effort examples include elephants, which by virtue of their size need a lot of space and food, but also sea lions, that require extensive life support systems to maintain healthy water quality, and that eat only fish, which must be shipped to the Zoo.

Every decision to add a new species to the Zoo must consider all of these criteria. The ICP guides us through this process using expertise from across our Zoo team. As a result, every animal at the Zoo helps us meet our mission of *Inspiring Passion to Conserve the Natural World*.

ICP Effort/Value Examples:

Sea lions

- High effort: food (fish) is expensive and must be flown in, require life support systems for water quality, take a lot of staff time
- High value: popular with guests, participate in public demonstrations and behind-the-scenes tours, help tell ocean conservation story (sustainable seafood, reducing waste)

Lions

- Medium effort: require large, secure space, can be dangerous
- High value: guests expect to see lions, BZL staff are involved in SSP and conservation

Indigo snake

- Medium effort: large snake, special housing requirements for animals being released back into the wild
- High value: Alabama species, zoo animals are being reintroduced back into the wild, high staff interest in working with them

YOU ASKED *We Answered!*

Many of you have asked for an update on Cenzoo the Gorilla, since he left the Birmingham Zoo a few years back. See below for an update from our friends at Riverbanks Zoo & Garden:

Since arriving at Riverbanks Zoo & Garden, in Columbia, SC, Cenzoo has developed his very own family troop! Cenzoo was introduced to three adult females, Kazi, Macy, and Acacia. The four quickly developed into a cohesive family unit with Cenzoo as the leader. Just three years later, in 2018, Cenzoo fathered two little ones, ZaKota and Moyo, with females Macy and Kazi. Now his troop really has their hands full with caring for these two growing boys. Cenzoo is a wonderfully patient father, who loves to gently play with both ZaKota and Moyo. All six gorillas enjoy spending their time foraging in their lushly planted habitat and are known for their afternoon family naps.



CALL FOR STUDENT ART!

The Orangutan SAFE program is hosting an art contest and is now accepting submissions! Students in 6th - 12th grade whose artwork is selected will be awarded incredible prizes. One entry may even be selected as Orangutan SAFE’s new logo!

WHAT IS SAFE?

Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) is an Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) program. SAFE joins the 180 million annual zoo and aquarium visitors with the resources and collective expertise of AZA members and partners to save the most vulnerable wildlife species. The Orangutan SAFE program (OSAFE) focuses on the conservation of the wild orangutan population.

ART

Submissions can include drawn, painted, or digitally created 2-D art! The art should incorporate an artistic representation of an orangutan or physical features associated with orangutans.

For more information and for the information packet, click [HERE](#).

Photo Credit: Riverbanks Zoo & Garden

ZOO INTERLOPERS

BY KATE DAVIS, M.S., CIG, SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER

Since my job provides the opportunity to see lions, elephants, and giraffes every day, it may seem surprising that I still get excited when a chipmunk or native snake crosses my path, but the abundant wildlife we have in and around the Zoo is really quite incredible. I'm not the only one who thinks so; veteran wildlife photographer George Ritchey has found many exciting viewing opportunities with what he describes as "Zoo Interlopers," those native creatures that call the Zoo grounds home, but aren't a part of the animal collection.

George has been serious about photography for more than 35 years. His photos have been published in over 300 publications including The National Wildlife Federation's magazines, and even this very publication, starting his partnership in 1988. While serving International Expeditions as a photo specialist and seminar leader, he was not only able to provide instructions, but also capture unique images in some of the world's most interesting venues.

Nature photography is certainly an art. Ritchey says, "Learning to understand nature's occurrences and to be alert to spotting them are necessary skills required to be effective observers of both natural and human care environments. Sometimes opportunities are obvious, other times in-depth inspection of the surroundings is necessary to view and study the voluntary visitors."

George has led photography seminars

here at the Birmingham Zoo, with guests encouraged to take photos not only of our resident animals, but also the wildlife they may see on grounds. Water snakes, rabbits, frogs, owls, hawks, mink, turtles, and beavers are just some of the wildlife who call the Zoo home. Some of these animals, like the beaver, were only discovered after trail cameras were put out at night on grounds to see who was damaging trees along the pathways and gumming up the waterways. Though not as elegant as Ritchey's images, trail camera photos are still a neat way to see wildlife you may otherwise miss.

George has a special affinity for the birds that travel through Zoo grounds, either year-round or just passing through while migrating. "At various times during the year we will sight green herons, yellow-crowned night herons, and others in and near the water and wetland exhibits. The Canada geese that were formerly migratory visitors have now become year-round residents to Birmingham and frequent the Zoo. One of the most exciting viewing opportunities came this year when a pair of great blue herons decided to build a nest adjacent to the administration building. For months, visitors and staff could view the nest building, the egg hatching, and the feeding activity. This created a high level of interest in visitors. The herons successfully raised four healthy chicks."

During the course of a year, the Education Department offers photography seminars, which are open to the public. Though these classes are currently on hold, we plan to offer them again soon! Through these activities we are able to use not only our resident animals, but also our interloping species. Having images collected of these experiences for reflection, remembrance, and sharing can be priceless.

Photo Credit: George Ritchey

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Kids KORNER

With Earth Day on April 22, we want to celebrate all of the plants and animals from Alabama.

Think you can identify which are native to the area?

Invasive species, or the spreading of animals and plants that are not from the area, is one big reason why our plants and animals here may be having a tougher time. Want to help? Simply ask where your pets or plants are from and practice washing your shoes after you walk around somewhere farther away. This will help make sure we keep Alabama filled with Alabama life, ready to celebrate on Earth Day, or any day!

Answers to which are from Alabama: A, C, D, F, G, H

ALABAMA



A. Pitcher Plant



B. Black-Footed Cat



C. Black Bear



D. Rush Darter



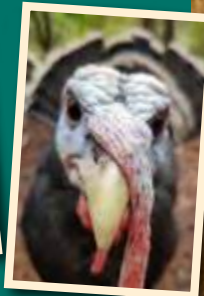
E. Reticulated Giraffe



F. North American River Otter



G. Red Hills Salamander



H. Eastern Wild Turkey

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birminghamzoo.com/adopt



"O" is for Ostrich

ANIMALS Never Stop Teaching

BY KATE DAVIS M.S., CIG, SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER

The most unique objects we use to teach guests about the natural world are our biofacts. Biofacts are real or replica bones, pelts, feathers, and more from organisms that are no longer using them or are now deceased, or artificial recreations of those parts. Guests can compare for themselves how big giraffe vertebrae are to our own, see the skeleton of a snake, and feel the pelts of animals they could never get close to in real life, such as lions and polar bears. Recently, the biofact collection at the Birmingham Zoo has been used in additional ways to help advance research and aid with the healthcare of our animal collection here at the Birmingham Zoo.

When ostrich Charlize Heron was found to have a problem with the tendons in her ankles shortly after arrival at the Zoo in the summer of 2020, Dr. Anne Rivas had to extend her veterinary skillset to shoe design. Dr. Rivas says, "We built a special pair of wedge shoes to help train her to stand upright in a normal position. Since putting the shoes on required anesthesia, we needed to have them already made at the right size and shape before the procedure to limit the amount of time under anesthesia. We borrowed an ostrich foot biofact to help design and build a shoe that would fit Charlize without her having to try them on first! Between the shoes, rest, and a modified sand-based floor in her stalls, Charlize is walking much better now."

More recently, Lead Veterinary Technician Bridget Weidner called the Education Department to ask if we had any rhino skulls (we have two). She needed to x-ray the skull to determine the best settings for the radiograph machine to work on such a large body part. Calibrating the machine in advance using a real rhino skull allows us to expose our rhinos to less radiation during the actual procedure. It also means we do not have to ask the rhinos to hold still for as long of a period of time when we take their radiographs. Skull radiographs are an important part of rhino routine preventive health care, especially as they age, as the x-ray images help us to monitor their dental health and determine if they are having any tooth issues. The rhino whose skull we x-rayed passed away 20 years ago. Even decades later, this animal is still helping us to provide the best health care to its living relatives.

The biofacts we have once belonged to living animals who served as ambassadors to teach about their species. Even though they are no longer living, we can still use these biofacts to teach about them, and more importantly, continue to learn about them in order to provide the best possible care to their living counterparts.

Items from the Birmingham Zoo's biofact library are available to educators and other educational organizations for checkout for up to two weeks. Please contact education@birminghamzoo.com for more information.

"We built a special pair of wedge shoes to help train her to stand upright in a normal position."



Big feet



Kudos

WE KNOW IT'S 'KUDOS,' BUT WE'RE A ZOO!

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