



FRIENDS
OF THE
ROSAMOND GIFFORD ZOO

2023
ANNUAL
REPORT

Providing a level of excellence
that makes the Rosamond
Gifford Zoo a national leader in
animal care, conservation and
visitor experience.

A JOINT MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD



Carrie Large
Executive Director
Friends of the Zoo



Terry Hopkins
Chair
Board of Directors

As we reflect on the accomplishments of 2023, we are overwhelmed with gratitude for your support and dedication to our mission. Together, we have achieved remarkable milestones and made significant strides in advancing our vision for the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, with an unbelievable 29% increase in attendance.

Throughout the past year, we have witnessed the zoo's continued growth and evolution, thanks to the collective efforts of our passionate supporters, team members, volunteers, and partners. From groundbreaking conservation initiatives to engaging educational programs, each endeavor has brought us closer to our goal of fostering a deeper appreciation for nature and inspiring conservation action.

One of the highlights of 2023 was the temporary acquisition of koalas Kolet and Kumiri, who were loaned to us from fellow AZA accredited San Diego Zoo. Through our collaboration with the San Diego Zoo's Koala Education and Conservation Program, we extended our backing for global koala conservation efforts beyond borders. This initiative not only allowed us to educate our community about koala conservation but also offered them the enchanting experience of witnessing one of the planet's most iconic creatures up close!

Furthermore, our conservation efforts have made a tangible impact on the preservation of endangered species and their habitats both locally and beyond. Through strategic partnerships and collaborative initiatives, we have contributed to vital research, habitat restoration, and community engagement efforts — ensuring a brighter future for wildlife and ecosystems worldwide.

Looking ahead to 2024, we are filled with excitement and anticipation for what the future holds. Building upon the foundation of our past successes, we are committed to pushing boundaries, embracing innovation, and continuing to raise the bar for excellence in zoo conservation and education.

With your continued support, we are confident that we can accomplish even more in the coming year. Together, we will embark on new adventures, forge meaningful connections with nature, and empower future generations to become stewards of our planet's biodiversity.

On behalf of the entire team at Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, including our dedicated Board of Directors, we extend our heartfelt gratitude for your commitment and belief in our mission. Together, we are making a difference, one paw print at a time.

Thank you for being an essential part of our journey. Here's to an unforgettable 2024 and beyond!

Make every day the best day ever,

Handwritten signatures of Carrie Large and Terry Hopkins in black ink.

Carrie Large
Executive Director

Terry Hopkins
Board Chair

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Over **9,752**
children and adults actively participated in
conservation education learning programs



OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

RECOGNIZING THE FRIENDS OF THE ZOO BOARD

The Board of Directors of the Friends of the Zoo are deeply committed supporters, actively involved in advancing the zoo's mission. Through regular attendance at monthly meetings, participation in planning committees, and offering individual expertise, advice, and support, they played a vital role in the successful execution of major initiatives and projects in 2023.

Their stewardship and mentorship have been indispensable to our organization, providing steady guidance and support. We express our heartfelt gratitude for their dedicated service.

2023 Board of Directors

Terry Hopkins, *Chair*

Megan Thomas, *Vice Chair*

Jamie Card, *Treasurer*

Natalie Scavone, *Secretary*

Dr. Zina Berry

Debra Cody

Tim Crosby

Joanna Dennis

Al Gough

Melissa Hicks

Heidi Holtz

Dan Jenkins

Suzie Lobdell

Ryan Lynch

Dr. Jody Manning

Bishop Colette Matthews-Carter

Debbie Messina

Kathy O'Connell

Melissa Oliver

Austin Philleo

Melissa Piper

Friends of the Zoo board welcome eight new members in May 2024:

Susan Cole

Amanada Foster

Savvanah Gibbs

John Harris

Amanda Hull

Beth King

Steven Lickstein

Sabrina Webster

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023

The Friends funded Koala Outpost – a summer-long exhibit that hosted koalas Kolet and Kumiri through collaboration with San Diego Zoo and donated \$17,500 San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance.

Attendance increased by 29%, driven primarily by the Koala Outpost exhibit, the newborn Amur tiger twins, and the charismatic Asian elephant twins born in the fall of 2022.

A global leader in aluminum recycling, Novelis, was designated as the Friends of the Zoo's sustainability sponsor. This ongoing partnership helped the zoo to further reduce its environmental impact, while promoting sustainability education through the Novelis Party for the Planet and other informative initiatives.

Catering at the Zoo hit their stride. With the popular monthly gourmet dinner series selling out weeks in advance and a record-breaking summer event schedule, CATZ had its most profitable season ever.

Food and beverage options were expanded for zoo guests with the opening of the new Trunk and Tusk Canteen across from the seven-acre Helga Beck Asian Elephant Preserve.

The Friends installed an elephant sculpture monument dedicated to Asian elephant brothers Ajay and Batu, who succumbed to the deadly elephant endotheliotropic herpes virus (EEHV) in December 2020. The statue was donated by Stone Quarry Hill Art Park in Cazenovia.

The Friends of the Zoo and Rosamond Gifford Zoo marked the first birthday of Asian elephant twins Yaad and Tukada in October with special celebrations, unique gift shop merchandise and a calendar commemorating the twins' first year of life.



FUNDRAISING IN FULL SWING

We expanded our ever-popular event series this year, adding sponsors and an extra Eletwin event. Hill Insurance Service, LLC became the official sponsor for Senior Citizen's Appreciation Day, and a special birthday celebration in October commemorated the miracle Asian elephant twins' first birthday.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Novelis Party for the Planet — On April 22, the Novelis Party for the Planet attracted more than three thousand guests to the zoo for an unparalleled celebration of Planet Earth and the wonderful variety of life it sustains. The event offered a chance for us to promote some eco-education to our guests, such as a Decomposers Talk on composting. Plus, we were fortunate enough to have the Men's and Women's Garden Club of Syracuse present a Pollinator Garden Chat, in which our guests could learn how to implement one of the zoo's sustainability initiatives right in their own gardens! **In total, 3,451 guests came to our zoo on April 22 to enjoy our celebration of Earth! Thanks to Novelis for hosting a fantastic Party for the Planet, and to supporting sponsor Leaf Guard.**

LGBTQ+ Family Day of Visibility — A rainbow of families came to the zoo to celebrate Pride in a safe, friendly, and fun environment! We recognize that, like nature itself, our zoo family is incredibly diverse. The Day of Visibility is an event that brings everyone into the fold, demonstrating that our zoo is a welcoming place where people of all stripes can come together and unite through a shared love of our planet and its wonderful biodiversity! With LGBTQ-friendly exhibitors, sponsors, and entertainers set up throughout our zoo grounds, we succeeded in displaying that our institution is a place of acceptance, understanding, and appreciation. We want to inspire pride in our community, and the LGBTQ+ Day of Visibility is an annual celebration of Pride for all the members of our always-growing zoo family. **Thanks to sponsors Advocates, Inc., ACR Health "Q Center," Camp Beyond Binary, Girl Scouts, Hillside Childrens Center and Nave Law Firm for helping us celebrate pride.**

Penguin Palooza — Guests of all ages enjoyed this ice cream party centered around the zoo's Penguin Coast exhibit, featuring an incredible array of fun activities, yoga with the penguins, entertainment, kid-friendly foods, music, face painters, and of course, demonstrations with our colony of Humboldt penguins! The event featured NYS Fishery Biologist Tom Hughes, who presented "One Fish, Two Fish How Many is Too Many Fish," teaching guests about sustainable fishing and brought local marine species to the zoo for educational purposes. **Penguin Palooza attracted 2,063 guests to the zoo. Thanks to Nave Law Firm and CNY Arts, the zoo community got to celebrate our special South American colony, and the cultures of their native countries.**



DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDRAISING

Asian Elephant Extravaganza — Nearly four thousand Ele-fans visited the zoo on August 19 for a celebration of our eight-member elephant herd and the cultures of their native range countries. One of the most popular events of the summer season, Asian Elephant Extravaganza began with an early-morning yoga session. Throughout the day, guests enjoyed games, cultural music and dance performances, and elephant activities such as an elephant watermelon smash – made even more special as it was the first time the miracle twins Yaad and Tukada interacted with watermelons. A birthday celebration for Siri and Romani, the elders of our elephant herd was the day’s highlight. The elephant care staff conducted creature chats throughout the day at the Helga Beck Asian Elephant Preserve, giving our guests a chance to learn more about the herd. The zoo raffled off three animal art pieces created by the twins, Siri, and Romani. As an added delight, visitors were able to watch Romani paint her artwork live at the Asian Elephant Preserve. Representatives from SU’s South Asia Center provided fun and educational rangoli coloring sheet craft, promoting the Indian art style to our guests. Zoo volunteers educated visitors on the importance of choosing sustainable palm oil -- explaining how unsustainable palm oil sourcing is harmful to Asian elephant populations. **In all, 3,849 guests came to the zoo to celebrate our herd at Asian Elephant Extravaganza. We are grateful to CNY Arts and Nave Law Firm for making this incredible event possible.**

EleTwin Birthday Celebration — A storm couldn’t stop the fun on Sunday, October 22, when 987 visitors joined us at the Asian Elephant Overlook to celebrate the first birthday of our miracle elephant twins Yaad and Tukada. Through a truly torrential downpour, our loyal guests looked on as the one-of-a-kind twins, together with their herd, “opened” their birthday gifts and devoured their birthday “cake” (made of the twins’ favorite fruits, vegetables, and marshmallows). And while it may have rained on Yaad and Tukada’s parade, we appreciate the visitors who braved the elements to show these extraordinary calves just how special they are!

Zoo Boo — Fan-favorite Zoo Boo returned this year for another kooky-not-spooky Halloween season and saw great engagement from our community. Over six weekend days in October, more than 3,400 guests visited to see the terrific transformation of our zoo grounds into a Halloween haunt. The Wildlife Trail transformed into the Spooky Stroll, coming alive with all sorts of monstrous decorations and “creepy” installations. With 24 keeper talks, 13 treat stations, a crafts station, a selfie station, and a new prize wheel station, guests young and old had many ways to join in the fun. Treat stations provided an opportunity to highlight our conservation mission sharing messaging about the adverse effects of purchasing products which use palm oil, which is causing disastrous deforestation when farmed unsustainably throughout the world. **More than 3,400 guests attended Zoo Boo, generating nearly \$32,000 for our conservation mission. Zoo Boo was a success but we couldn’t have done it without our 200+ volunteers — donating 825 hours of service — and the support from Community Bank, NA, Girl Scout Troup 60500, Matthews Auto, New York Life, Syracuse Orthopedic Specialists, and Tops Friendly Markets.**

Holiday Nights — Holiday Nights returned for the third year bringing festive lights, refreshments, and entertainment to the zoo after-hours — seeing the highest attendance ever. Friends of the Zoo staff and volunteers installed more than 10,000 lights throughout the zoo and P-Tech students from the Syracuse City School District created and installed two unique light displays. The event offered an abundance of activities for everyone in the family with more than 15 craft vendors, holiday entertainers, a Santa Claus photo-op, ice carving demonstrations, S’mores stations, and more. Throughout the six evenings of Holiday Nights, **more than 7,300 visitors explored our festive zoo grounds.** Holiday Nights wouldn’t have been possible without the help of our volunteers. In all, more than 100 volunteers committed nearly 700 hours of service to make this event a success. **Holiday Nights generated just under \$75,000 in revenue to support future conservation. We’re thankful for our generous sponsors Amazon, Alzheimer’s Association, Bankers Life Conesco, Berkshire Bank Foundation, Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, Tops Friendly Markets, and Wegmans.**

Noon Year’s Eve — The kid-friendly Noon Year’s Eve celebration closed out 2023 with more than 2,500 guests joining us to ring in the “noon” year! The first 1,000 attendees received free party hats, and a selfie station in the banquet room gave guests the chance to photograph their fun. Guests gathered at the digital countdown clock (donated by Leone Timing) in the courtyard for the noon countdown and our zoo family shared cheer with a complimentary ginger-ale toast. There was no better way to welcome a new year than surrounded by community members of all ages, joined together in joyous celebration. **Special thanks to Tops Friendly Markets for donating ginger-ale!**

BY THE NUMBERS
Zoo Boo volunteers donated

825 hours

of service to make this event a success.



DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDRAISING

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Dreamnight — The zoo became a dream come true for many special families on June 2, as we hosted our annual Dreamnight celebration. Originating in the Netherlands at the Rotterdam Zoo in 1996, Dreamnight is an inclusive and educational cost-free evening for children with special health care needs and disabilities to enjoy the zoo on this specially dedicated evening. Since 2008, many Central New York organizations have worked with us to provide children in our community the opportunity to participate in Dreamnight by distributing free tickets to families served by these organizations. Children and their families enjoyed Creature Chats at Koala Outpost and Penguin Coast, as well as musical and ballet performances throughout the zoo grounds. **Nearly 700 guests came out to experience Dreamnight and we are grateful to our sponsors who helped make this memorable event possible: Wild Republic, NAVE Law Firm, Mohawk Global Giveback, Jim and Juli Boenheim Foundation, The O'Donnell Family.**



Hill Insurance LLC Senior Citizen Appreciation Day — Our second annual Senior Citizen Appreciation Day brought a record number of senior citizens to the zoo on the morning of May 10 giving us a chance to recognize the elder members of our zoo family, some of whom have been zoo members for many years. Seniors 62 and older received free admission to the zoo and a tasty continental breakfast from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. They enjoyed access to senior-specific exhibitors, met Chuch the Mediterranean donkey, and got to learn more about the animals at the zoo. Our senior guests had the chance to watch the miracle twins Yaad and Tukada playing together at the Helga Beck Asian Elephant Preserve as well as observe a “Caring for Senior Elephants and Elephant Yoga” demonstration, in which our elephant care team explained the routine care that our senior elephants receive. A creature chat at Penguin Coast and a “Senior Animal Companions” chat on our pair of Colobus monkeys were also offered. Throughout the morning, attendees were able to visit and gather information from exhibitors Nutrifi, Onondaga County Office for the Aging, Men and Women’s Gardening Club of Syracuse, Loretto, Catholic Charities, AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP Volunteer Program, and Senior Home Care & Alzheimer’s Solutions. **More than 340 seniors registered to participate in this event which was made possible by presenting sponsor Hill Insurance Company, LLC with additional support from Humana, United Health Care, Loretto, Nascenia Health, Excellus BCBS, HearingLife, Aetna Medical Solutions, InterFaith Works and State Wide Insurance.**



WE PUT THE "FUN" IN FUNDRAISERS

Zoo Run Run — Friends of the Zoo hosted its second-annual Zoo Run Run held on April 22 in support of animal care and conservation at the zoo. This crossroads of exercise and conservation brought in companies, families, solo runners, and teams to participate in this 5K walk/run event. The run included a Joey Jog for our young athletes. Participants in the Zoo Run Run received a medal on completion of the run, and were granted free admission to the zoo for the rest of the day. Many runners stayed after the 5k to enjoy some well-earned snacks and refreshments, engage with our exhibitors, and take in all the wonders that our zoo has to offer. **In total, 549 runners took to the zoo's trails to run in support of our zoo. The run raised \$42,980.15 making this a wonderfully successful and fun-filled fundraiser. Many thanks to Zoo Run Run sponsors Woodlawn Cemetery, Print Solutions Plus, GHD, Empower Federal Credit Union, Blink Fitness, and Girl Scout Troop 60500 of GSNYPENN Pathways for making this event possible.**

Tee Off Fore the Animals — Monday, June 26 welcomed 82 golfers to the greens at historic Bellevue Country Club for the Friends annual charity golf tournament Tee-Off FORE the Animals. Thunderstorms were forecasted for the event, but the rain held off and a beautiful, sunny summer day emerged. Teams arrived early, and a continental breakfast at 7 a.m. gave everyone a chance to get energized before practicing on the driving range and putting greens. Throughout the day, participants had the chance to bid on exclusive animal items in our silent auction, which included sports memorabilia, zoo-themed apparel and artwork painted by our animals. Teams competed while encountering special animal ambassadors on the course. Animal care specialists were stationed on different teeboxes with the various ambassador species, adding an educational component to the already engaging day. **The third-annual Tee-Off FORE the Animals Golf Tournament raised \$55,686.25 for the zoo. This remarkable event was made possible by the generous support of our sponsors: Nave Law Firm, One World For All, Community Bank, Coca-Cola, Dannible & McKee, LLP, RBC Wealth Management, A.L. George, CST Media Productions, imagepress, CNY Business Journal, Arquette & Associates, REALTORS, AYNIBRIGADE, Bowers CPAs & Advisors, Centerstate CEO, Century Heating, Cintas, COAST Physical Therapy, Jim & Carol Gaspo, Mariott Syracuse Downtown, One Group Retirement Advisors, Tracy & Dave Pollock, Practice Resources, LLC, RJ Caruso Tax & Accounting, Shaughnessy's Irish Pub, T.J. Sheehan Distributing, Tompkins Trust Company, and Wilmington Trust.**

BY THE NUMBERS

Our events generated more than **\$257,097** to support the zoo and conservation education.





DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDRAISING

WE PUT THE "FUN" IN FUNDRAISERS

Brew At the Zoo — More than 2,000 guests enjoyed Brew at the Zoo and Koalas, Too! on August 4. This year was especially unique as we played host to special guests from San Diego Zoo, Kolet and Kumiri, giving attendees the opportunity to learn all about these wonderful marsupials. The popular fundraiser featured a selection of 140 regional craft beers, wine, and canned craft cocktails. In addition, guests enjoyed a variety of local food trucks, live music throughout the zoo, and zoo animals on evening exhibit. **Altogether, the event raised \$150,216 – an incredible sum for the Friends' mission! The Friends are extremely grateful for the dedication and support of the generous sponsors that made this one-of-a-kind event possible: Hayden Jewelers, Nave Law Firm, Construction Associates LLC, NBT Bank, Hancock Estabrook, Grossman St. Amour CPAs, A.L. George, T.J. Sheehan Distributing, Cumulus Media, CNY Business Journal, C&S Companies, and Hand In Health Massage Therapy. Many thanks to the 150 volunteers that help make this summer-time favorite event possible!**



Fall Conservation Bash — The Fall Conservation Bash, presented by M&T Bank, was a celebration of all the momentous conservation achievements throughout the year – and there was much to be proud of! First and foremost, we had to celebrate a conservation milestone never before accomplished: the successful birth of the miracle Asian elephant twins Yaad and Tukada. In the year since they were born, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo's elephant care team has learned so much from these unique brothers. Other conservation achievements include the temporary acquisition of koalas Kolet and Kumiri from San Diego Zoo; the birth of twin Amur tiger cubs, Coba and Zuzaan, to mother Zeya and father Thimbu in April; and the emergency incubation of ex situ endangered piping plover eggs. Held on Friday, September 22, the Fall Conservation Bash was an outdoor dining experience hosted in the Rosamond Gifford Zoo's courtyard that featured a delectable, themed cuisine, an open bar sponsored by Tito's Handmade Vodka, and conservation messaging explaining and celebrating the zoo's various conservation achievements throughout the past year. **In all, 134 guests came out to enjoy this fantastic food experience while reflecting on the many milestones met in the past year, raising more than \$43,000 in the process. Thanks so much to our sponsors M&T Bank, C&S Companies, The Gifford Foundation, Hayden Jewelers, Visual Technologies, Triad Foundation, Tito's Handmade Vodka, and BPRK for making this possible.**



ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

Our ever-popular Animal Encounters brought members of our zoo community up close and personal with the animals that inspire their imagination! Animal Encounters are fun and educational, allowing guests to observe and even participate in everyday animal welfare routines – all while interacting with animal care specialists and learning about the daily health care administered to the respective species.

The zoo proudly offers more ways than one to get up close and personal with some amazing species. Guests receive an unparalleled interaction with their species of choice, between Hoffmann's two-toed sloths, Humboldt penguins, and Asian elephants. These intimate experiences reinforce the work that our animal specialists perform day in and day out to maintain the highest pedigree of care for the wonderful animals in our care.

Our guests purchased:

57 **Elephant Bath Encounters**, which allow guests to go behind the scenes at the Helga Beck Asian Elephant Preserve, experience how our expert elephant team cares for this critically endangered species, the science behind our participation in the Species Survival Plan for Asian elephants and important research for helping them survive in the wild – all while helping give an elephant a bath, a daily practice that keeps our elephants healthy and allows their keepers to check out every inch of every elephant as part of their care.

69 **Penguin Encounters**, which take guests behind the scenes at Penguin Coast to see the infrastructure and question our expert keepers about the care, feeding and training received by our colony of Humboldt penguins, our zoo's participation in the Species Survival Plan to increase the population of this vulnerable species and, of course, meet a penguin up close.

46 **Sloth Encounters**, which brought our guests inside our nocturnal Hoffmann's two-toed sloth exhibit. Guests have the opportunity to feed our sloths while learning more about the daily care of these animals. Our expert keepers also share details about the two-toed sloth's behaviors (such as eating, sleeping, and processing waste), unique adaptations and specialized diet.

Altogether, we sold 172 animal encounters, which connected people to conservation and inspired nature appreciation while bringing in funds to support animal care at the zoo.



EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS



Friends of the Zoo has made significant strides in expanding its educational outreach initiatives, notably by integrating Kindergarten into its existing contract with Syracuse City Schools. This expansion has resulted in a substantial increase in participation, now engaging 3,244 students from 21 Elementary Schools and offering 240 programs tailored for grades K-2. In addition to this expansion, the education team successfully organized a diverse range of community events and activities like a Winter Sowing Activity ran in conjunction with a horticulture intern from ESF and the Cornell Cooperative Extension's Master Gardener program. Volunteers also organized engaging Teddy Bear Clinics on multiple occasions in the Animal Health Center as an extension of the Jr. Vet Clinic.



The education team has switched their focus of engagement for diverse learners to an inquiry-based learning approach that uses the zoo exhibits as a learning tool. They also increased their project-based learning opportunities for student groups that fosters community engagement. For instance, Seven Valleys New Tech Academy dedicated their entire school year across all coursework to helping the zoo. Their project culminated in a celebration of the animals and culture of the 22 Spanish-speaking nations on May fifth aptly named Celebrando Nuestras Costumbres. Another notable project-based learning experience was working with Syracuse University Soft Goods students to educate them on the animals at the zoo wherein they created a custom stuffed animal that unzips to reveal the anatomy of an otter and the baby elephants. These one-of-a-kind toys enhance the learning experience in the Jr. Vet Clinic on what a veterinarian's role is at the zoo. Furthermore, the Career and Technical Education students from the construction pathway at Nottingham High School created and installed a raised garden bed.



From a generous donation from the CNY Community Foundation and the Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County, the education team was able to continue the Tadpole program coming off the great success of previous classes. This program allowed the education team to teach 403 PreK students across seven locations about animal body parts using STEM concepts with BeeBots. The MANOS Dual Language Early Childhood program opted out of a second 6-week session to have a field trip to the zoo for their participants and their families. Each family was given a book to extend their learning at home.

The Education Department's continued commitment to inspiring conservation focused instruction struck a chord across generations, evidenced by an increase in class participation across all ages, from youths to adults.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY

Celebrando Nuestras Costumbres Education Collaboration — The students of Seven Valleys New Tech Academy in Cortland brought their language talents to our zoo in May. Using the anniversary of the Cinco de Mayo as a jumping-off point, they presented the cultures of the 22 different Spanish speaking countries around the world to zoo visitors. The celebration represented the culmination of a project spanning this entire past academic year, and the students were delighted to see their work come to fruition. Seven Valleys instructs students through project-based learning, giving the students the opportunity to provide input and help design their own assignments and projects. The success of this format was clear, as students eagerly set up tables in our courtyard to present on their Spanish-speaking research projects. Some students researched the histories and cultures of certain Spanish countries, while others highlighted the animals at our zoo that are native to those countries. Still other students crafted fictional stories about trips to our zoo, which were written in both English and Spanish. The students also got to show off some of the artwork they completed throughout the year, with some students drawing realistic depictions of zoo animals, and others opting for the abstract, or even self-portraits. It was a pleasure to be able to host these young creatives, who demonstrate a true zeal for both learning and teaching.

Conservation Crew Guides Budding Conservationists — The Education department's Conservation Crew, composed of children ages 10 to 16 and mentored by zoo educators, logged more than 422 hours of conservation education last year. Through info-boards, games, and other fun projects, the Conservation Crew presents fun information to zoo guests while giving conservation-minded kids purposeful projects to pursue. The Conservation Crew presented environmental information to more than 1,600 guests last year!

Standout Statistics:

- Conducted 34 virtual programs at 16 locations, including Mexico!
- Hosted Summer Zoo Camp with 731 participants, ages 3-17, over nine weeks.
- Provided 12 Zoo to You programs in conjunction with Syracuse City Parks and Recreation
- Provided 31 Zoo to You programs for Onondaga County Public Libraries titled "All Together Now: Calling all Conservationists"
- Hired eight ZooGuides who engaged with more than 60,000 zoo guests from June through October teaching them about elephants, tigers, leopards, penguins, koalas, pollinators, and water pollution from June through October.
- Conducted seven free classes for zoo members in Member September
- Piloted a new program, Zoo School on the GO!, to 25 Home School Group households from November 29 through December 15. The new program is planned for release in 2024. This project was completed by Maddy Witt, an ESF major.





Zoo volunteers worked over
86,665 hours hours in 2023.



DEDICATED VOLUNTEERISM

VOLUNTEERS' VICTORIOUS YEAR

In 2023, the Volunteer program saw significant participation, with **390 individual volunteers collectively completing 9,165 hours of service**, averaging 23 hours per volunteer. This represented a notable 14.8% increase in volunteer hours compared to the previous year, accompanied by a 6% increase in active volunteers. Among these volunteers, 55 individuals dedicated more than 50 hours, with 21 surpassing 100 hours of service, truly earning their status as **Zooperstars**.

The volunteer efforts were diversified across various tasks, including animal care, education programming, gardening, and event volunteering. Notably, volunteers contributed 1,090 hours to animal-related tasks, such as supporting our koala “summer residents” from San Diego, including trips to pick up browse and serving as Koala Watch and Koala Docent volunteers. Additionally, volunteers devoted hours to diet preparation, education programming (such as Zoo To You and Day Camps), gardening activities supported by external organizations like the Syracuse Garden Club and Master Gardeners from Cornell, and event support for major occasions like Zoo Boo, Brew at the Zoo, Holiday Nights, and Catering at the Zoo events.

Volunteers raised more than \$1,500 at the Volunteer Appreciation Dinner’s pound auction.

More than 110 participants regularly attend monthly volunteer meetings, emphasizing the ongoing engagement and commitment of volunteers to support the zoo’s operations and events throughout the year.

Community Service Groups Rallied

- In 2023, we participated in the United Way Day of Caring for hosting companies doing community service.
- Each year, local businesses and organizations reach out to complete group community service at our zoo. **This year, 25 companies/organizations sent 620 volunteer employees to the zoo** for their “Days of Service,” collectively completing **77,500 volunteer hours**.
- Several companies came for multiple service days and/or also organized their workers to assist at our events throughout the year, including M&T bank, Target, National Grid, Wegmans Cicero, and Ernst & Young.
- Student volunteers from Syracuse University, SUNY OCC, SUNY ESF, and several area high schools including the On-Tech Charter School, also provided assistance at the zoo with community service projects. Several college student groups help organize and provide groups of volunteers for our events all year long: SUNY ESF SEEC, Delta Sigma Pi, Alpha Phi Omega, Lambda Alpha Upsilon, and OrangeSeeds.

OUR GROWING MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERSHIP MULTIPLIED

The membership department was a crucial part of our success in 2023. Beyond the 7,485 members who renewed their membership, 2,747 new members joined our zoo community. We ended the year with **10,232 active member households** (our highest on record). Our membership database reaches over 570+ zip codes, spanning across New York and neighboring states— as well as Canada! The success spanned every marketing initiative; even 2023's member t-shirt design (featuring the EleTwins) was the most popular ever. The EleTwin was the most redeemed member t-shirt design, and had the most "add-on member shirts sold (members purchased extra t-shirts).

Membership Campaigns

Our membership campaigns enjoyed great success in 2023, casting a wide net and bringing in almost 2,500 members.

Both the Spring and Holiday Gift Season acquisitions generated record-breaking revenue, amounting to \$91,337 and \$96,250, respectively.

Spring Acquisition – Featured new koala exhibit and Asian elephant twins, with a special promotional offer

- 1,251 total memberships acquired
 - 524 new memberships
 - 727 renewed memberships
- \$91,337 generated in revenue

Holiday Gift Season – Special offer on gift-memberships for the holidays

- 1,234 gift memberships purchased during holiday season
- \$96,250 generated in revenue

Our Spring Member Acquisition campaign resulted in **1,251** memberships to the zoo – one-third of them brand-new members – and raised over **\$91,337!**
12% increase dues revenue





THE CURIOUS CUB GIFT SHOP

THE GIFT SHOP

The Curious Cub Gift Shop had a banner year, netting over **\$1.3 million dollars** from nearly **50,000 transactions**. Of the more than 41,000 plush animal toys sold in 2023, the eight-inch red panda plush was the most popular with 873 units sold, while the “Mom and Twin” custom plush (featuring mother Mali and the miracle twins Yaad and Tukada) was a close second with 772 units sold – netting more than \$27,000 in sales. Other popular items included jewelry, animal magnets, and a Miracle Twins sticker, while gift card sales generated nearly \$11,000.

The Curious Cub Gift Shop partnered with new conservation-minded companies for several new product designs, such as ornaments, keychains, bottle and can koozies, stickers, enamel pins, souvenir fans, coffee mugs, shot glasses, water bottles, and more.

The Gift Shop’s “Shop Local” product line continues to highlight local businesses:

- Nav’s Popcorn
- Syracuse Salt Company
- Syrachacuse
- Brainard Farmette – Honey
- Bedtime Studio – Custom Clay Earring including an exclusive “Yaad & Tukada” earrings
- Custom Rosamond Gifford Zoo “Butt Be Dry” which was featured on Shark Tank
- Earthquake Spices – Hot Sauce

The Conservation in Action product line garnered nearly \$40,000, which the Friends of the Zoo can direct entirely toward conservation efforts. General donations amounted to more than \$12,000, while “dollar donations” tacked on another \$2,500.

The real success story for this conservation fundraising was the profits generated by the Adopt an Animal line, which came to more than \$25,000.

The products we buy and sell are sourced from environmentally-friendly companies that align with our ongoing conservation mission. We seek to work with sustainable products, and even donate some of the proceeds to various global conservation groups. In this way, the Gift Shop helps us to further connect guests to nature, while directly supporting the critical conservation efforts.

BY THE NUMBERS

The Gift Shop generated

\$1,335,732.34

in total sales in 2023.

Transactions

49,753

Plush Revenue

\$721,358.11

(41,139 units sold)

Camel Feedings

\$12,395

Animal Enrichment

\$3,112.53

22% increase in sales

PHILANTHROPY EARNED OUR COMMUNITY'S SUPPORT

Total Contributions **\$382,360**

We are always grateful for the consistent support that our community shows for our conservation mission. The Philanthropy department coordinates with donors to ensure that their generous support is recognized and implemented in the most effective ways. The department's facilitation of various donations throughout the year helped make many of our key achievements possible. **The combined efforts of the spring, summer, and fall appeal letters along with a variety of other fundraising endeavors the Philanthropy department raised \$382,360.**

In addition to variety of fundraising efforts in which we received significant donations from our valued community, the Philanthropy department raised \$82,707 with spring, summer, and fall appeal letters. Each letter featured key mission-focused initiatives for the zoo, and our community responded each time with an outpouring of support.

One exceedingly generous donation came from National Grid, who contributed \$75,000 to the upcoming installation of the zoo's new Botanical Garden! This partnership will offer the opportunity to educate and connect our community with not just the conservation and species survival of animals, but with plants as well. As a longtime supporter of our institution's mission, National Grid has continued to build on its strong legacy of belief in the work of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.

Memorial Gifts

Many guests made generous donations in the form of Memorial Gifts, in the name of loved ones. These donations -- often in memory of members of the zoo community -- graciously supported our mission while paying tribute to animal enthusiasts, conservationists, and nature lovers who have passed on. While guests can submit memorial gifts as general donations, some opted for physical tribute to accompany their donation, dedicate either a leaf to our new Tree of Life or a memorial bench in their love one's name.

The Friends worked together to create a new, more vibrant Tree of Life display spanning the cafeteria wall, (replacing the original Tree of Life in the upper lobby). Like a real tree, this vibrant exhibit will grow and expand over time. The ten-foot-long, multi-colored tree display spans the wall as branches reach out with colorful leaves bearing dedications to loved ones. Of course, we retained the dedications from the previous Tree of Life, but also have ample room for new leaves and new memories.



The Friends envision the Tree of Life serving as a collection of more than just memorials, and encourage visitors to consider purchasing a leaf as a gift for the holidays or birthdays, a tribute, or just a milestone marker to remember an unforgettable day. Since its installation, the Tree of Life has already sprouted new leaves dedicated to community members, and the tree is sure to bloom even more in 2024.

Guests also had the option to leave a lasting legacy at the zoo by donating a park bench commemorating a loved one. These tribute benches come with an inscribed plaque affixed to the top of the bench, allowing a dedication to loved ones with up to 200 characters of text. Guests could choose between available locations around the zoo grounds, including the Animal Health Center's beautifully landscaped courtyard.

Thank you to everyone who gave to all of our animals, especially those who donated to the Elephant Restricted Fund.



THE WAY TO THEIR HEARTS

FOOD AND BEVERAGE/CONCESSIONS

The Honey Bee Café recorded a revenue of \$176,363 – an all-time high for the Café! The café made investments in conservation-driven initiatives and in the construction and renovation of the Hofmann Dog Haus and Trunk and Tusk Cantina. And, for the first time, the café offered a summer camp meal program for hungry camp-goers!

Other developments included:

- Completing construction on the Hofmann Dog Haus in the zoo's courtyard.
- Completing construction of the Trunk and Tusk Cantina across from the Asian elephant Overlook.
- Securing zoo's first on-premises liquor license for the entire zoo property.
- Partnering with Coca-Cola Northeast to remove all single-use plastic containers and switch to aluminum.
- Removing all straws from zoo property.
- Transitioning all paper products to World Centric compostable products.

Record annual revenue of
\$902,527,
 exceeding 2022 by **\$164K (+22%!)**

Exceeded budgeted revenue by **\$82K**
 and profitability by **\$15K**

Revenue of **\$741,863** all-time high for Café!

44% increase in sales

CATERING AT THE ZOO

The Food and Beverage department established itself as a bona fide culinary competitor in 2023, smashing its previous record revenue for Catering at the Zoo! The numbers speak for themselves, reading like a highlight reel. **The department's hard work resulted in a record annual revenue of \$902,527, exceeding 2022 by \$164K (+22%!)**. One of the big contributors to this was the rave popularity of our monthly pairing dinners – all 12 of which sold out! The pairing dinners, each featuring a different menu and conservation topic, have garnered glowing reviews and “regular” return guests. Catering improved across the board, enjoying a substantial increase in holiday party bookings. Finally, a new era ushered in with the internal promotion of Allison Walts to executive chef, solidifying an all-female Catering leadership team.

22% increase in sales



CATERING AT THE ZOO



MARKETING AMPLIFIED OUR STORY

The vast number of events, programs, new initiatives and exciting zoo news introduced in 2023 provided the marketing department a plethora of information to share with the public which helped grow the zoo's social – making it the centerpiece of the zoo's communications. The addition of key staff enabled the department to effectively expand efforts to reach local, national, and international audiences in many ways.

Marketing Highlights

- In 2023, the department branded and marketed the Koala Outpost exhibit, and produced two zoo gate driver commercials which were viewed on regional TV/cable stations as well as the zoo's social media platforms.
- Branding was created for the 2024 Dragons Reign! season gate driver exhibit.
- Effectively marketed a record number of zoo events throughout the year to help reach participation and attendance goals
- Launched the “Official Eletwin Fan Club” on Facebook February 14 , garnering more than 400 fans joined in the first 24 hours, and ending the year with over 2,000 members.
- Created designs for a record year of zoo merchandise sold in The Curious Cub Gift Shop and for events. (Created a 2024 Eletwin Commemorative Calendar in celebration of Yaad and Tukada's first year of life. --collage of all t-shirt designs we did for events and special exhibits, etc.)

It was a sensational year for social media. Our social media presence expanded across all platforms, gaining a total of 85,907 followers, representing a 585.8% growth:

- Facebook, 63,300 followers gained, a 662.5% increase.
- Instagram, 10,861 followers gained, a 278.6% increase.
- LinkedIn, 813 followers gained, a 58.5% increase.
- Twitter, 1,222 followers gained, a 45% increase.
- **In total, our videos across all platforms earned 53,680,859 views, representing a growth of 1,389.8%.**



Social Media Fans at the close of 2023:

 **Facebook – 63,300 followers gained, a 662.5% increase.**

 **Instagram – 10,861 followers gained, a 278.6% increase.**

 **LinkedIn – 813 followers gained, a 58.5% increase.**

 **Twitter – 1,222 followers gained, a 45% increase.**

SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

Savvy social media posts from Camille Murphy, the Friends' photographer and social media coordinator, received national and international attention from both fans and large media outlets:

- A video of the Eletwins making their Super Bowl “picks” (by stomping on Philadelphia Eagles and Kansas City Chiefs-themed enrichment) was picked up by **Yahoo News**.
- A video the Eletwins' first bubble bath was featured on **Good Morning America**.
- A Facebook reel of Amur tiger mother Zeya lifting her cubs by their scruff has gained **26,000,000 views!**
- A YouTube short of the Eletwins smashing watermelons during Asian Elephant Extravaganza has hit **9.9 million views!**



FORGING PARTNERSHIPS

- **Partnered with staff from Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine** to welcome Atlanta veterinarians Dr. Vernard Hodges and Dr. Terrance Ferguson, of the popular National Geographic series “Critter Fixers Country Vets,” to co-host an educational experience for young animal enthusiasts and budding conservationists in the Animal Health Center. Students, alongside the Critter Fixers, toured the Animal Health Center and witnessed the veterinary team perform a penguin welfare procedure and an ultrasound on a tamandua. Drs. Hodges and Ferguson expressed interest in returning to the zoo for collaboration on a future episode of the Critter Fixers.
- **Collaborated with Snow Leopard Trust** to create a story for the Fall 2023 issue of *MyZoo Magazine* that highlighted the inspiring work being done to reduce and prevent human-wildlife conflict in snow leopard range countries.
- **Worked with Spectacled Bear Conservation Society** to create a story for the Fall 2023 edition of *MyZoo Magazine* which chronicled an intrepid project aimed at camera-trapping the Andean bears in the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu in Peru.



NEW TEAM MEMBERS BRING NEW ENERGY AND IDEAS



Sherry Jones, Director of Finance

Friends of the Zoo hired Sherry Jones as director of finance in February. Jones graduated from the University of Rochester with a degree in political science and earned a master's degree in accounting from the University of Phoenix. Having previously worked for nonprofits, Jones was accustomed to the style of philanthropic work that the Friends of the Zoo pursues. Jones has extensive non-profit experience but has never served in a role quite like this one. The position offered familiar work, but a new, engaging work environment. Since joining the team in early 2023, Jones said that she has enjoyed the process of learning about and organizing the zoo's financials, which Jones described as "fascinating." She also said that the staff has made her feel right at home, but her favorite "co-worker" to visit with is Bambino, the Giant Pacific Octopus.



Chris Omolino, Event and Volunteer Coordinator

Chris Omolino joined Friends of the Zoo in April as an Event and Volunteer Coordinator. Omolino worked in admissions and recruitment for graduate studies at Syracuse University for 25 years and retired from that position in 2021. Since then, she had been trying to figure out where her skills could be most useful. It has always been important for her to work for an organization that cares about the planet, conservation, social justice issues and community, and the zoo is all of that – and more! Since joining the team, Omolino has enjoyed getting to know and collaborate with both the zoo's personnel, the Friends of the Zoo, and of course, our dedicated team of volunteers. From avid zoo attendee to new employee, Omolino has maintained her appreciation of the zoo – not just for the vibrant array of animals here, but for the people that keep the lights on, too.



Andrew Brazill, Director of Marketing and Communications

Andrew Brazill was hired as new Director of Marketing and Communications in November. Brazill is a seasoned media professional with a passion for storytelling. He will oversee the zoo's marketing and communications efforts, building on the zoo's strong reputation and expanding its reach to new audiences. Brazill is passionate about the conservation mission of the organization and its significant role as a community resource. Brazill succeeds outgoing director Maria Simmons, who served in that role for 14 years. A lifelong CNY resident, Brazill lives in Liverpool with his wife and two sons. He brings a wealth of experience and media prowess to the zoo, having worked in various leadership positions across the marketing industry in CNY for more than a decade. Brazill will utilize immersive technology to enhance the guest experience, and plans to elevate the zoo's marketing efforts while preserving its rich history and ensuring its continued growth for future generations.



Allison Walts, Executive Chef

The Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo are proud to announce the promotion of Sous Chef Allison Walts to executive chef. Executive Chef Allison earned a bachelor of science degree at Clarkson University in 2008, but withdrew from law school in 2010 to pursue a culinary career. Since then, she's developed extensive experience in working and leading kitchens, as well as overseeing catering events — which she said is always her favorite aspect of her job. She's helped plan and execute weddings, charity functions, festivals, holiday banquets, and more, all while maintaining restaurant-quality standards. Allison's promotion to executive chef represents the culmination of her lifelong culinary aspirations, and is a significant achievement for women in this industry. In the United States, only 12.5% of executive chefs are women.



Patrick McCarthy was hired as writer and content creator in January, producing articles for *MyZoo Magazine*, blogs, video narratives, and more. He facilitated our storytelling and generated compelling and successful fundraising appeal letters.



In June, Alissa Creno was brought in as graphic designer to assist with the growing graphic requirements of the department. Her creative designs and illustrations enriched our content making it more engaging and entertaining.

CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

INVESTING WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

The Friends invested nearly \$650,250 to begin furnishing the new 20,000 sq. ft. Animal Health Center with state-of-the-art equipment, essential supplies as well as technology — including **\$51,000** for ultrasound equipment critical to animal health monitoring and diagnosis.

As part of this investment, \$10,000 was also allocated to design and furnish the Jr. Vet Clinic — providing a fun, interactive and educational plays space for children to engage in their animal care role-playing activities.

The Friends continue to invest in the Animal Health Center, dedicating \$81,380 to purchase endoscopy equipment, including an endoscope and tower. In addition, the Friends invested **\$153,350** for veterinary support. The Friends also allotted additional operational support for a veterinary position.

A seahorse nursery exhibit titled "Sea How They Grow" was installed at the cost of \$13,875. Pediatric Dentistry & Family Orthodontics committed to a \$10,000 gift for the exhibit to be allocated over the course of seven years.

A new point-of-sale system, Square, was installed and implemented at the Honey Bee Cafe and Gift Shop at a cost of \$9,700.

An investment of \$8,181 was made to purchase and install electronic menu boards and iPads for transactions as part of the renovations and upgrades for the new Honey Bee Café.

Renovating both Trunk & Tusk and Dog Haus for \$32,780.

The Friends dedicated \$36,360 to complete the installation of Wi-Fi throughout the entire zoo grounds.

The Friends invested \$5,269 to an exhibit enhancement at the Andean Bear habitat. Thanks to this investment, the gate in this exhibit was upgraded.

The Friends invested \$16,500 to upgrade the Amur tiger habitat. The investment was used to replace tiger doors in this exhibit. Additionally, the Friends dedicated \$8,854 to install Tiger Cub Cameras, which allowed guests to view the Amur tiger cub twins while they spent time with mother Zeya in their off-exhibit den.



CONSERVATION CONTRIBUTIONS

The Friends supported global conservation partners through donations, including:

- **\$1,500 to Ocean Conservation**
- **\$5,000 to the International Elephant Foundation**
- **\$2,500 to the Wild Camel Protection Foundation**
- **\$5,000 to AZA SAFE/ Asian Elephant**
- **\$17,500 to the San Diego Zoo's Koala Education and Conservation Program**



WHY ZOOS MATTER: FORGING THE FUTURE

As the Friends look to the future of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, we want to maintain the wonderful momentum that has helped us achieve so much in the past few years. Here are some ideas we are working on to achieve that goal:

The Friends of the Zoo will bring 10 animatronic dragons to zoo grounds for over 151 days of fun next year during the Dragons Reign! exhibit.

The dragons range from five-20 feet in height, and some possess interactive features, such as fire-breathing or poetry-reading. The Friends have a slate of dragon-themed events lined up for this fantastic, fire-breathing phenomenon!

Botanical Gardens: The Friends of the Zoo are committed to maintaining our status as an essential science-based institution of Central New York. As such, we value life in all its forms, including plant life! That's why the Friends of the Zoo are beginning the initial phase of a multi-year project spanning the entirety of the zoo grounds, as the zoo's gardens become a true botanical garden. These gardens will make our zoo a haven of life, representing and bringing people into contact with the complete array of diverse and complex life with which we share our planet.

The Friends are expanding their presence deeper into the community with a planned expansion of the HoneyBee Café in the Skaneateles Community Center. This expansion will connect our organization with new community members, expanding our focus on the intersection of "nature and neighbors."

African Savannah: In 2022, we heralded the triumphant opening of the Animal Health Center, our state-of-the-art veterinary clinic for the consistent welfare examinations and special procedures that our veterinary clinic conducts on all the species at our zoo. The design and construction of the Animal Health Center was just the beginning of a four-phase plan. **The next two phases involve the design and construction of an African Savannah.** The proposed enclosure would be built behind the Animal Health Center and would play host to a multi-species exhibit. Potentially featuring giraffes, zebras, and ostriches sharing the same exhibit, the enclosure would mirror the natural composition of these species' habitat.

Snow Leopard Overlook: The Friends hope to support the snow leopard exhibit with the creation of a "snow leopard overpass." The overpass would allow our snow leopards to walk across a bridge from their existing habitat to the new, expanded exhibit. The new habitat would give our snow leopards more room to explore, while giving guests a one-of-a-kind glimpse at these awe-inspiring apex predators as they walk directly above guests to get from one section of their exhibit to another.

Interpretive Signage and Engaging the Senses: To provide a more meaningful and inclusive educational experience at the zoo, we will design our interpretive signage to involve all the senses, not just sight — incorporating educational and interpretive displays, such as braille and textures, art, poetry, scents and sounds at exhibits throughout the zoo. The Friends are also in the planning stages to implement the use of technology at the zoo to provide virtual reality and immersive educational experiences for our guests that will enable them to view our animals and the natural world with a fresh perspective.

Climate Change Playground: To create a more inclusive environment while expanding our environmental education, the zoo is renovating and reimagining the Explorer's Outpost play area. The newly themed Climate Change Playground will be an interactive play area to provide a hands-on experience to all abilities. The new play area will feature integrated educational information, where everyone can gain a better understanding of how our planet interacts, learn about the realities of climate change, and come away having had fun while learning valuable information that empowers a new generation of budding conservationists.



ANIMAL UPDATES





KOALA OUTPOST

The Friends of the Zoo were delighted to bring the koalas to the Rosamond Gifford Zoo as a temporary summer exhibit – Koala Outpost – so our community could see these amazing and iconic creatures first-hand. Our animal care specialists were honored to provide care to this unique and increasingly rare species. Knowing our special guests were very fond of getting their beauty sleep, the zoo created two opportunities for guests to observe the koalas while they were up and active. Daily keeper chats – one at 10:30 a.m. that included an enrichment feeding, and a second at 1:30 p.m. – gave our visitors the chance to watch the koalas climb around their exhibit and dine on a variety of eucalyptus leaves (which volunteers drove twice a week to Rochester to collect). Our eternal gratitude to the volunteers! Koalas are particular about the type of eucalyptus leaves they prefer, so animal care staff made sure to provide Kolet and Kumiri with different kinds of eucalyptus each day, and everyone enjoyed watching both of them decide which bundle of leaves they wanted to eat. It's safe to say that our special guests had a luxurious (and pampered) stay here at our zoo.

The koalas were loaned to the Rosamond Gifford Zoo through the San Diego Zoo's Koala Conservation and Education Loan Program, which began in 1983. The program has sent approximately 80 koalas to other zoos over the past 40 years – that's only two koalas a year – so the temporary acquisition of Kolet and Kumiri was a true privilege. "Caring for Kolet and Kumiri was a triumph for the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, one that created a special experience for our zoo community," said Ted Fox, Executive Director of the zoo. The Rosamond Gifford Zoo has never before hosted animals through a program quite like this one, which proved rewarding to our zoo staff, the Friends, and our beloved zoo community. Given the challenges that wild koala populations are facing, our zoo is proud to have played a role in the conservation of this incredible species — and honored to have been able to showcase koalas to our community.

We would like to acknowledge the generous sponsors that helped make our Koala Outpost exhibit possible. Friends of the Zoo extends our deepest gratitude to Southwest Airlines, Hampton Inn East Syracuse, Keybank, M&T Bank, Yellow Tail, and Catania Orthodontics.

AMUR TIGER CUBS BORN

Amur tiger cubs, (one male, one female), were born to mother Zeya and father Thimbu on April 29. The birth of the cubs has been a highly anticipated event, representing over three years of conservation efforts. Zeya arrived at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo in late 2020 from Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo, after the Association of Zoos and Aquarium's Species Survival Plan recommended she be paired to breed with Thimbu, who came to us from the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs in 2019. Amur tigers are some of the rarest large cats on earth, and one of the most endangered species on the planet. They are native to the Amur region of northeastern China and Siberia, and the Amur tiger wild population is estimated to be less than 400. The birth of healthy Amur tiger cubs is an invaluable milestone in the recovery of this rare animal's population.

This was the first time that either tiger became a parent, and the animal care team were hoping that Zeya and Thimbu, would instinctually be successful at producing – and caring for – the cubs.

In the wild, tigers can act unpredictably toward their offspring if they fail to bond. Zeya was hand-raised, which is why the animal care team was watching her birth so closely. Staff wasn't sure what to expect, given that Zeya never got to witness a mother Amur tiger provide for her cubs. In fact, Zeya's mother rejected her and her sister Reka, leaving animal care staff at Beardsley Zoo with no choice but to hand-rear the little Amur tiger cubs. Unlike her mother, though, Zeya immediately connected with her cubs, and has been an exceptional mother in the days since their birth.

The tiger cubs represent the culmination of almost three years of work for the Amur tiger SSP; when Zeya arrived in 2020, the process of introducing her to Thimbu was long, slow, and unpredictable. Years later, the pair has now welcomed its first litter of cubs, a vital contribution to the precarious Amur tiger global population.

While initially the cubs did not go on exhibit until they received all their necessary vaccinations, guests could view Zeya and her cubs daily on a live camera feed in the Animal Health Center lobby. The "Tiger Cub Cam" allowed guests to watch the cubs as they played together growing larger day by day.

The birth of these tiger cubs is a triumph of conservation, and demonstrates the expertise and commitment of the animal care specialists at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo. Having two of these tigers at our zoo was already special — the chance to provide care to their next generation is truly remarkable. This is a crucial moment for the zoo's conservation mission, and should be celebrated as a critically important achievement for the Amur tiger species. After this successful pregnancy, the zoo has hopes for more cubs in the future.



ASIAN ELEPHANT TWINS MARK FIRST YEAR OF LIFE

Miracle Asian elephant twins Yaad and Tukada enjoyed a year of both physical and mental growth. By their first birthday on October 24, the Eletwins had each gained more than 1,000 pounds from their birthweight. Their development wasn't just physical, though; the twins' minds are expanding, too, through engagement with new enrichment items and learning from the elders of the herd. The most consistent education, though, came from daily training sessions with their dedicated care specialists. This training in the two first years of their lives is critical to setting up the Eletwins for success later in their lives. Because they will grow to become nearly 9,000 pounds each, it is important to make them comfortable at a young age with their care team performing medical checks like routine blood draws – because if a 9,000-pound elephant doesn't want to do something, there's no convincing him otherwise!

The elephant care specialists have learned the best ways to engage the Eletwins. Yaad is more food-motivated than his brother and will do just about anything for a tasty enrichment treat, and Tukada tends to follow his “big” brother's lead – but both love to work with their care specialists in training sessions. The boys have become quite dexterous with their trunks, thanks in large part to having so many teachers around them.

As the twins are two truly unprecedented elephant calves, they've caught the attention of elephant specialists nationwide. The Rosamond Gifford Zoo had the chance to share what we have learned over the past year with elephant keepers around the country at the Elephant Managers Association's national. Dallas Zoo and Fort Worth Zoo hosted this year's conference from October 2-5, the zoo sent elephant care specialist Alinda Dygert to represent our elephant care team. She gave a presentation looking back of nearly a year of caring for the miraculous and unprecedented Asian elephant twins Yaad and Tukada.

The twins are curious, energetic and grow bigger and stronger each day. October marked one year of double trouble and tons of fun in the Asian Elephant Preserve, and everyone at the zoo is excited to see just how much the miracle Eletwins will grow in 2024.





ANIMAL UPDATE
HIGHLIGHTS





Male Humboldt penguin Alfredo was hatched to parents Poquita and Veinte on February 4.

Male Moholi bushbaby Pierre was acquired from the Bronx Zoo on February 14. It is fitting that he was acquired on Valentine's Day, as he has been paired with our female Moholi bushbaby, Athena.

Two Luzon bleeding-heart dove chicks hatched on February 14.

Male Humboldt penguin Fernando was hatched to parents Rosalita and Wylie on February 19.

Eleven Black Welsh mountain sheep were born between February 27 and April 8. They represent a threatened species of Heritage Breed livestock that originated in Wales and was prized by spinners for its naturally black wool.

A female Inca tern chick hatched in the Diversity of Birds exhibit on March 14.



One female fairy bluebird was acquired from the San Antonio Zoo on March 23.

Three pink-headed fruit doves were acquired from the Toledo Zoo on April 27.

Two Amur tiger cubs (Coba and Zuzaan) were born to Thimbu and Zeya on April 29. The Amur tiger is one of the rarest cats on Earth, with less than 400 remaining in the wild.

Two female koalas, Kolet and Kumiri, were acquired on loan from the San Diego Zoo on May 13.

A Victorian Crowned Pigeon squab hatched on May 21. This species is classified as Near Threatened by the IUCN. It is native to New Guinea and related to the extinct dodo bird.

Male Black Welsh Mountain sheep Bryson arrived on November 15.



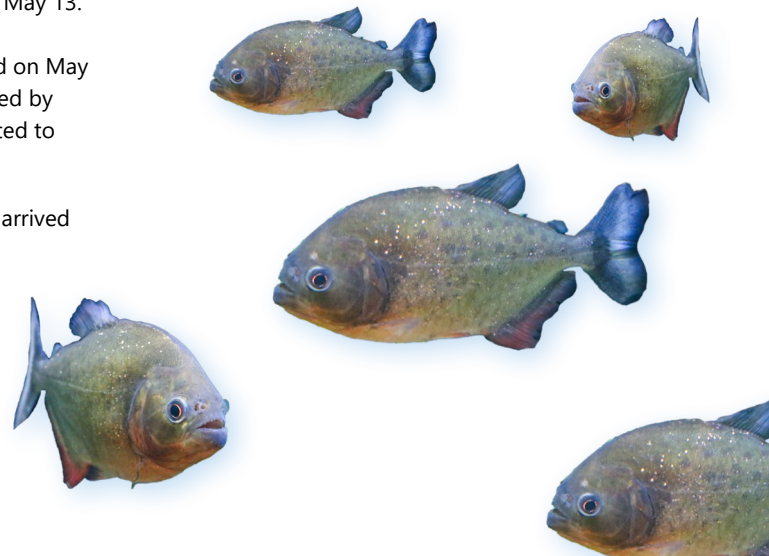
25 red-bellied piranhas acquired in 2023.

A Fijian banded iguana arrived from the San Diego Zoo on June 15.

Female red river hog Zena arrived from the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo on December 2.

Male Hoffmann's two-toed sloth Foley arrived from the Pueblo Zoo on December 4.

Female Amur leopard Iona arrived from the Toronto Zoo on December 8.



IN MEMORIAM



COMMON BARN OWL OTIS was humanely euthanized on August 8 due to declining health. Lovingly hand-reared by zoo specialists, Otis was a fan favorite for over a decade. As an ambassador animal, Otis connected with visitors during creature chats, and his calm demeanor left a lasting impression among both guests and animal caretakers. The zoo is grateful to have been able to care for such a special little owl, and Otis will be fondly remembered for years to come.



RED RIVER HOG NILE passed away on August 5. He and his brother, Nile, were born at the Oklahoma city Zoo in 2018, and came to us a year later. Named after two rivers in Africa, these brothers were two peas in a pod, spending many a day rooting around or cooling off in the mud of their exhibit. Guests loved seeing these two real-life individuals of the species that inspired The Lion King's Pumbaa. The zoo has since brought in a companion for Zambezi, a female hog named Zena.

ANIMALS ON THE MOVE



Three of our female cape porcupines Fennel, Mary, and Jane left for the Phoenix Zoo on January 23.

Our female muntjac Violet left for the Elmwood Park Zoo on January 30.

Six whitebelly reed frogs left for the John Ball Zoo on February 15.

Twenty Northern seahorses left for the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas on March 10.

A male caiman lizard was loaned out to the National Zoo on April 18.



Three Luzon's bleeding-heart doves left for the Oregon Zoo on April 18.

Twenty Northern seahorses left for the Riverbanks Zoo on April 18.

Ten Northern seahorses left for the Mystic Aquarium on April 26.

Fifteen Touch-Me-Not stick insects left for the El Paso Zoo on May 3.

Twenty Northern seahorses left for the Tulsa Zoo on May 17.



Ten whitebelly reed frogs left for the Oklahoma City Zoo on May 22.

Female snow leopard Marcy left for Philadelphia Zoo on September 4.

Female red panda Simone left for Sunset Zoo on November 14.

Female red panda Raji was sent to the Seneca Park Zoo on December 9.





STATEMENT OF OPERATING FINANCES

	2023		2022	
SUPPORT AND REVENUE	\$	%	\$	%
Membership	\$651,644	15%	\$580,160	15%
Retail operations	1,338,097	30%	996,193	26%
Program fees	353,466	8%	343,421	9%
Contributions and grants	956,527	22%	930,591	25%
Fundraising and events	257,097	6%	215,256	6%
Rental and catering income	741,391	17%	599,310	16%
Interest income	120,689	3%	120,689	3%
Paycheck Protection Program Loan Forgiveness		0%		0%
Total Support and Revenue	\$4,448,729	100%	\$3,785,620	100%
EXPENSES	\$	%	\$	%
PROGRAM SERVICES				
Zoo support	\$1,482,595	34%	\$1,667,217	42%
Gift shop	197,127	5%	219,545	6%
Educational programs	415,236	10%	367,167	9%
Facility rentals/catering	660,035	15%	460,723	12%
Total program services	\$2,754,993	64%	\$2,714,652	69%
SUPPORTING SERVICES				
Administration	\$819,345	19%	\$671,902	17%
Fundraising and Membership	734,295	17%	573,299	14%
Total supporting services	\$1,553,640	36%	\$1,245,201	31%
Total expenses	\$4,308,633	100%	\$3,959,853	100%
INCOME (LOSS) FROM OPERATIONS	\$(140,096)		\$(174,233)	
Net change in market value of investments	\$(449,871)		\$(857,311)	
Increase (Decrease) in net assets	(589,967)		(1,031,544)	
Net assets at beginning of year	6,653,871		7,685,415	
Net assets at end of year	\$7,243,838		\$6,653,871	

A full set of financial statements, including a report of independent auditors, is available for review during normal business hours at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.

*The commitment and generosity of the individuals, groups, corporations and foundations listed here help make the Rosamond Gifford Zoo a national leader in animal care, conservation and guest experience.
We thank you for your support.*

2023 DONOR ROSTER

\$25,000-\$90,000

Anonymous
Barbara Glath
Fred J. Harder Foundation
National Grid
Novelis Corp.
Triad Foundation, Inc.

\$10,000-\$24,999

Coca-Cola Northeast
Green Family Foundation, Inc.
Kinney Drugs Foundation
M&T Bank
Micron
The Gifford Foundation

\$5,000-\$9,999

Albert and Myra Fleischman Foundation
Amazon.com Services LLC
Anoplate Corp
Association of Zoos & Aquariums
Lia and Dean Burrows
C & S Companies
Catania Orthodontics
Nancy and Joe Clayton
CNY Arts
CNY Community Foundation
Community Bank N.A.
Construction Associates LLC
Barbara Davis
Phyllis DiRaddo
Equitable Foundation
Hayden Jewelers
Hofmann Sausage Company Inc.
Jim & Juli Boeheim Foundation
Maria Kane
Shannon Magari-Leggat and Tod Leggat
Nave Law Firm
Linda M. Newman
Richard S. Shineman Foundation
Stone Quarry Art Park
Wegmans Food Markets

\$2,500-\$4,999

Alzheimer's Association of CNY
Helga and Henry Beck
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CELEBRATING A STAR

Remembering Ashley Sheppard On November 26, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo was the location the family hosted a celebration of life for our cherished colleague Ashley Sheppard, who passed away on October 29. Ashley was a collection manager and conservationist who dedicated more than 15 years of her life working at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo. Both an animal specialist and an eager educator, Sheppard had a knack for translating the scientific ins and outs of her job into terms that could inform and inspire her community.

Ashley will be remembered for the dedication and zeal with which she approached her work with elephants – but beyond all her incredible contributions to conservation, we will remember the truly irreplaceable glow she brought each day to our zoo.



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