



# MINUTES

## BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

TUESDAY, AUGUST 20, 2024 – 10:00 AM

Los Angeles Zoo  
Grand Room  
5333 Zoo Drive  
Los Angeles, Ca 90027

*“Creating a just and sustainable world where people and wildlife, thrive, together.”*

Los Angeles Zoo  
5333 Zoo Drive  
Los Angeles  
California 90027  
323/644-4200  
Fax 323/662-9786  
www.lazoo.org

### MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick  
Bernardo Silva  
Elnie Vannatim

### VISITORS

None signed in

### EX OFFICIO MEMBER PRESENT

Richard Lichtenstein

Karen Bass  
Mayor

### COMMISSION STAFF

Denise Verret  
Cristina Flores

Nithya Raman  
Council Member  
4<sup>th</sup> District

### MEDIA

None signed in

Zoo Commissioners

### ZOO GENERAL COUNSEL

Steve Houchin

Karen B. Winnick  
President

### AGENDA ITEM 1

#### CALL TO ORDER

Commission President Winnick called the meeting to order at 10:02.

Bernardo Silva  
Vice President

Justin Mikita

### AGENDA ITEM 2

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF JULY 18, 2024.

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of August 20, 2024 meeting. Commission Vice President Silva so moved, Commissioner Vannatim seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Daryl Smith

Elnie Vannatim

Richard Lichtenstein  
Ex Officio Member

Denise M. Verret  
Chief Executive Officer  
& Zoo Director

### AGENDA ITEM 3

#### GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Karen Banadio  
Patricia O'Reilly

### NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

No Comments

### AGENDA ITEM 4

#### PRESENTATION – MONTGOMERY ADVANCED FIELD STUDIES GRANT PROGRAM – GIRAFFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION PROJECT

Animal Keeper, Mike Bona gave the following presentation:



- Mr. Bona discussed his trip to Namibia with the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GFC) to participate in a translocation of Angolan Giraffes from Namibia to Iona National Park in Angola.
- Mr. Bona explained that there are four species of Giraffes, which include the Masai, Reticulated, Northern and Southern with approximately 20,000 Angolan giraffes in the wild.
- Mr. Bona works with GFC to support their objectives to ensure a sustainable future for wild giraffe populations by raising awareness and supporting their conservation efforts.
- The GFC's Khomas Environmental Education Program (KEEP) is one of the GFC's programs. Mr. Bona was able to work with students and teachers who were part of this program. This is an interactive program that brings Namibian students back to nature by providing students and teachers with resources that will teach them about their environment and the steps they can take to help preserve their environment. This is also an opportunity to spend a day in the bush, exposing them to animals in their back yard that they likely have never seen before.
- GFC conducts various surveys as part of their program to assist in monitoring the population as well as habitat assessments, identify changes, identification of threats and conservation planning assessments. These surveys are crucial in developing conservation strategies and allocating resources. Mr. Bona participated in a survey while in Namibia, where they now are able to record data through an app. He also noted that the GFC vehicle used for this survey was named Betty White.
- Mr. Bona explained the impact of the reintroduction of Angolan giraffes to their ancestral home. The translocation project will help restore a species as well as an entire ecosystem and giraffes play a crucial role in shaping their environment.
- After decades of extinction in Angola, thirteen Angolan giraffes were successfully tagged with GPS trackers on their ears, herded using a helicopter, loaded on a truck and released in the country of Angola. This is a significant achievement for the GFC and giraffes as a whole.

## **AGENDA ITEM 5**

### **PRESENTATION – L.A. ZOO PAID INTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

Rachel Helfing, Rosalio Rubio and Earyn McGee gave the following updates:

- Ms. Helfing gave an overview of the Paid Internship Program (PIP), explaining that starting a career in zoos or conservation often requires real world experience. These experiences are often gained without pay, however not everyone has the time or money to volunteer. This program provides students the opportunity to gain paid experience and work closely with professionals in their fields of interest.
- PIP is designed intentionally for outcomes such as developing relationships with experienced mentors, and becoming mentors emerging into professionals.
- This year PIP had nineteen interns, four of which were Learning and Engagement (L&E) interns and twelve Conservation interns. This year three peer mentors were introduced to the program.
- Mr. Rubio discussed working with the L&E interns as well as the newly established peer mentor. He explained how these interns were able to learn what it takes to establish a program from start to finish. Three programs that were piloted as part of this effort were Nature Mural, Pollinator Project and Story Time. The interns were also tasked with creating their own programs.

- The L&E interns used the L.A. Sanitation guidelines to create a sorting game called Compost Match to engage the public in learning what items can be composted to reduce waste and resources. They also created a Scavenger Hunt, hiding items in and around the Project Pollinator Headquarters (PPHQ). Sensing the need of the Zoo guests, the interns also created a Spanish version of this game.
- Stella Lissak, Junior at Sarah Lawrence College discussed her time as an L&E peer mentor, discussing how she was able to foster the curiosity of visitors and connecting with them on a deep and rewarding level while teaching them about pollinators and composting.
- Natalie Jeronimo-Goytia, a student at Loyola Marymount, discussed her time as a peer mentor for L&E, sharing a prior experience with another mentor who discouraged her from pursuing her goals because of her background. She discussed how that negative experience made her experience here as a mentor more meaningful and impactful for her and those she was able to mentor.
- Dr. McGee discussed how the conservation interns were tasked with gathering baseline data from the Oak Woodland area. Interns broke up into three groups, The Free Birds focusing on three types of gardens and the birds they attract, The Leafy Scouts focusing on the impact of the invasive panic veldt grass and The Jar-Mageddon who focused on invertebrates in the Oak Woodland.
- Interns came up with research projects, using skills labs, researching by collecting and analyzing data and ultimately presenting their data to the public in the PPHQ.
- Conservation Mentors created a mentor handbook that will help support the next group of mentors and can grow as each group of mentors adds to it.
- Aria Rebollo, Conservation Intern spoke about her time as an intern and the valuable time doing field work and interacting with her peers and gaining a sense of belonging. Ms. Rebollo discussed the impact the Zoo has on the community of Los Angeles and how while conservation efforts can be daunting, she realized that she could potentially participate in a research project that she may not be able to see the results of but future generations might and that is why it's important.
- Grace Parker, Conservation Intern discussed her opportunity to focus on a project and learn to use experimental design, field research techniques and statistical analysis. The freedom for hands on work and support of the conservation team was very educational and it was exciting to be working on a project that could actually make an impact.
- Paola Suarez, discussed her time as a Peer Mentor for the Conservation Interns and how mentors being close in age to the interns allowed them to be able to provide guidance and understanding in a way that L.A. Zoo staff may not, since they don't have similar lived experiences. This provided a safe space for them to discuss things such as impostor syndrome, educational challenges, barriers to entry in science and other obstacles young adults face today, creating a bond with mentors and mentees as well as creating a bridge between interns and Zoo staff.
- Ms. Helfing discussed the PIP field trip to the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, Cabrillo Marine Aquarium and the opportunity to see an aquarium run by another City department.
- Interns also participated in an Alumni Networking event which consisted of a breakfast and a Gharial Keeper talk. This event brought twelve interns from previous years together with current interns providing a network opportunity.

- Ms. Helping highlighted some of the goals for next year's PIP mentors and interns which included the continuation of peer mentors, expanding the Peer Mentor Handbook, researching demand for additional internship opportunities and the expansion of internships to other division.

#### GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS

##### a. Animal Updates

- Loans/Sales
  - 5.5 New Mexico ridgenose rattlesnakes were brought in as part of establishing a breeding and species recovery program
  - 1.1 Blue-billed curassow in from Houston Zoo as part of a breeding recommendation
  - 1.0 Lesser Madagascar hedgehog going to Moorpark College as an ambassador
  - 0.1 Sacred ibis going to Idaho Falls Zoo at Tautphaus Park in Idaho as part of a breeding recommendation
- Births/Hatchings
  - 1 Mimic poison dart frogs
  - 250 Mountain yellow-legged frog tadpoles were sent out to Long Beach Aquarium
  - 2 Phantasmal poison dart frogs
  - 3 Vampire crabs

##### b. GLAZA Updates

- Nearly \$100,000 was raised for the restricted priorities, finishing up the fiscal year at \$1.647 million (89% of the goal)
- Restricted Gifts
  - \$50,000 from a private trust for the Conservation Strategic Plan (CSP) Implementation
  - \$38,350 from the 2024 Beastly Ball Fundraiser benefiting the CSP and GRACE
  - \$6,000 from the Phoenix Zoo for the Peninsular Pronghorn Recovery Project
  - \$2,000 from a Private foundation for Zoo Camp Scholarships
- Membership revenue ended at over 72% of the monthly budget reaching 91% of \$5.4 million annual budget. Member households ended at 40,074
- Spring Acquisition garnered 5,035 memberships and over \$680,000 in revenue.
- Attendance for June was at 120% of budget with total fiscal year at 12% over projections
- Admissions for June came in at 73% of the budget, total fiscal year ending at 98% of budget
- GLAZA June revenue came in at 87% of the budget with total fiscal year ending at 97% of the budget.

##### c. Zoo Director Updates

- L.A. Zoo has begun working in partnership with the US Fish & Wildlife, and other organizations to start the New Mexican Ridgenose Rattlesnake Recovery Program
- L&E team participated in the Descanso Gardens, Cultivate Event with the theme of taking flight. The L&E team took the opportunity to talk about the California Condor program including the record-breaking hatchings this year.

- Zoo Camp Program has come to an end, we welcomed over 1,100 participants over eight weeks awarding 100 scholarships for this program
- The partnership with the Los Angeles Public Library ended with a theme of pollinators, participants made butterflies. This summer L&E engaged over 1,250 participants, visiting over 34 libraries.
- The Migrant Education Program in partnership with LAUSD culminated our seventh year with 45 participants. The culmination event with family members was attended by LAUSD's Superintendent as well.
- In preparation for the 2028 Olympics the Zoo Director and Deputy Directors met with the Director of the Paris Zoo.
- In the News
  - Record Breaking Egg Hatching season was picked up by AP and internationally
  - Migrant Education Program was also featured in the news with a feature by the LA City View

**AGENDA ITEM 6  
OLD BUSINESS**

None

**AGENDA ITEM 7  
ADJOURNMENT**

There being no more business to come before, Commission President Winnick motioned to adjourn the meeting; Commission Vice President Silva so moved and Commissioner Vannatim seconded; the meeting was adjourned at 11:21 AM.

ATTEST;

  
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PRESIDENT

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
SECRETARY