



*"Creating a just and sustainable world where people and wildlife thrive together."*

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Karen Bass  
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Zoo Commissioners

Karen B. Winnick  
President

Bernardo Silva  
Vice President

Justin Mikita

Daryl Smith

Elnie Vannatim

Denise M. Verret  
Chief Executive Officer  
& Zoo Director

## MINUTES

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

TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2025 – 10:00 AM

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

#### MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick  
Bernardo Silva  
Justin Mikita - Absent  
Daryl Smith  
Elnie Vannatim – Arrived at 10:02 AM

#### VISITORS

None signed in

#### EX OFFICIO MEMBER PRESENT

Richard Lichtenstein - Absent

#### COMMISSION STAFF

Denise Verret  
Cristina Flores

#### MEDIA

None signed in

#### ZOO GENERAL COUNSEL

Steve Houchin

#### AGENDA ITEM 1

##### CALL TO ORDER

Commission President Winnick called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM.

#### AGENDA ITEM 2

##### APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF MAY 20, 2025

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the May 20, 2025 meeting. Commissioner Silva so moved, Commission Vice President Silva seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

#### AGENDA ITEM 3

##### GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No Comments

#### NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

No Comments

#### AGENDA ITEM 4

##### PRESENTATION – MONTGOMERY ADVANCED FIELD STUDIES PROGRAM – BAT CONSERVATION

Cortney Vargas, Curator of Conservation gave the following presentation:



- Ms. Vargas discussed her 12 years at the LA Zoo working in various roles such as education, development, animal care, and recently conservation, emphasizing her passion for bats and her ongoing efforts to reintroduce them to the Zoo.
- She explained the incredible diversity of bats, highlighting that they represent over 20% of all mammal species with more than 1,400 species found worldwide except Antarctica. She noted bats are the only mammals capable of true flight.
- Ms. Vargas emphasized the vital ecological roles bats play, including pollination of fruits, seed dispersal over long distances, and insect pest control by consuming large quantities nightly.
- She shared that although the LA Zoo used to have bats on exhibit from 1969 to 2004, bats have actually been present around the Zoo all along, confirmed through a recent acoustic monitoring project that identified at least nine bat species regularly using the Zoo grounds.
- She described the acoustic monitoring setup, with four monitors recording nighttime sounds that were analyzed to identify bat species and activity, highlighting the presence of the Mexican free-tailed bat, the fastest mammal on Earth.
- Ms. Vargas discussed her experience after receiving the Montgomery Advanced Field Studies Grant, which allowed her to work with Bat Conservation International on two projects: studying the critically endangered Florida bonneted bat in Miami and rare cave bats in Jamaica.
- She detailed the Florida bonneted bat project, explaining the challenges of studying this rare species affected by habitat loss and climate change. Using artificial roosts and mist nets, they captured bats and fitted some with GPS collars to track their movements and habitat use.
- Ms. Vargas described the Jamaican bat projects focusing on the Jamaican flower bat and Jamaican greater funnel-eared bat, both restricted to specific caves threatened by human disturbance, illegal guano mining, and predation by domestic cats.
- Ms. Vargas highlighted major global threats to bats, such as fatalities caused by wind turbines and white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease devastating bat population by disrupting hibernation, resulting in millions of deaths.
- She pointed out the broader consequences of bat population declines, including increased pesticide use, negative impacts on human health, decreased crop yields, and enormous economic costs.
- Ms. Vargas explained how the LA Zoo supports local bats through native gardens that attract insects, a large oak woodland restoration project, and a partnership with UCLA to map bat distribution, using data to inform Zoo operations and minimize impacts on bat populations.

## **AGENDA ITEM 5**

### **GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS**

#### **a. Animal Updates**

Misha Body, Deputy Director of Animal Programs provided updates which included the following:

- Ms. Body introduced the spur-winged lapwing as this month's animal highlight, describing it as an ambush predator native to pastures and wetlands in Central Africa and the eastern Mediterranean.
- She explained that the birds use their large feet to stomp and flush out insects, worms, and small critters for food.

- The lapwings are equipped with small claw-like spurs on their wings, which they use to defend themselves from predators.
- Known for being extremely loud and territorial, these birds serve as indicators of healthy wetland environments.
- Ms. Body noted that the Species Survival Plan (SSP) includes 63 individuals across 24 AZA-accredited facilities.
- She shared exciting news that the Zoo's resident pair recently laid a clutch of five eggs—a rare occurrence, as this species typically lays two to four eggs.
- The hatchlings were observed shortly after hatching, seen nestling under their mother's feathers and beginning to explore their surroundings within hours.
- To close, Ms. Body played a short video of the adorable, newly hatched chicks, offering a heartwarming glimpse into their early development.

b. GLAZA Updates

Dawn Petersen-Amend, GLAZA Interim President gave the following updates:

- March restricted gifts totaled \$147,000, including:
  - \$91,000 from the Gunther Foundation for animal health center equipment.
  - \$55,000 from Linda Duttonhaver to support the Zoo's field study program.
- Restricted fundraising has reached 111% of the annual goal set by the Zoo Director, with six of seven priority areas fully funded.
- Membership
  - March ended at 88% of budget, but is expected to improve as April includes most spring breaks.
  - The Zoo's member household count increased by 707, bringing the total to 37,621 households.
  - The spring membership campaign, launched in February, has so far generated 293 new memberships and brought in over \$282,000 in revenue.
- Attendance:
  - March attendance came in at 108% of budget and 102% compared to the same period in fiscal year 2024.
- March admission revenue:
  - Came in at 121% of budget.
- GLAZA revenue to the Zoo came in at 113% of budget.

c. Zoo Director Updates

Denise Verret, Zoo Director provided the following updates:

- Community Outreach – The Learning and Engagement team participated in the following events:
  - L.A. City College's Earth Celebration, engaging ~250 students and community members on sustainability and conservation.
  - The Girls Rebuild Summit at SoFi Stadium, reaching over 200 girls of color and promoting STEAM careers in wildlife and conservation.
  - El Pueblo's Blessing of the Animals, where the team connected with 550+ attendees, receiving enthusiastic feedback for their educational programming.
- Zoo Improvements:

- The Zoo opened its renovated Swan Lake exhibit, now home to two trumpeter swans—North America's largest waterfowl. The immersive habitat features:
  - A large pond, waterfall, water wheel, islands, and roosting platforms.
  - The project was funded by donations through GLAZA.
- Special Events:
  - Earth Day (April 18–20) attracted over 22,000 guests, featuring eco-activities, live entertainment, and an Earth Day Expo with local conservation organizations.
  - Día de los Niños (May 3–4) drew 12,300+ guests, despite chilly weather. Programming included, folklórico and Aztec dancers, bilingual story time by Zoo Magnet High School students, and animal enrichment featuring Mexican native species.

**AGENDA ITEM 6**  
**OLD BUSINESS**  
None

**AGENDA ITEM 7**  
**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no more business to come before the Commission, President Winnick requested a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commission Vice President Silva so moved and Commissioner Vannatim seconded; the motion passed by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 10:36 AM.

ATTEST:

 _____ PRESIDENT	 _____ SECRETARY
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