



MINUTES

BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

TUESDAY, JULY 21, 2026 – 10:00 AM

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

LOS ANGELES ZOO
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KAREN BASS
Mayor

NITHYA RAMAN
Council Member
4th District

ZOO
COMMISSIONERS

KAREN B. WINNICK
President

BERNARDO SILVA
Vice President

JUSTIN MIKITA

DARYL SMITH

ELNIE VANNATIM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick
Bernardo Silva
Justin Mikita - Absent
Daryl Smith
Elnie Vannatim – Arrived at 10:08 AM

VISITORS

None signed in

COMMISSION STAFF

Misha Body
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 10:00 AM.

AGENDA ITEM 2 - APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF JUNE 16, 2026

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the June 16, 2026 meeting. Commissioner Smith so moved, Commission Vice President Silva seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

AGENDA ITEM 3 - GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No Comments

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL COMMENTS

No Comments

AGENDA ITEM 4 – PRESENTATION – L.A. ZOO VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Cortney Vargas, Conservation Community Engagement Coordinator, provided the following presentation:

Ms. Vargas opened the presentation by introducing the Los Angeles Zoo's zoo-wide wildlife monitoring program, explaining how it helps the Zoo move from reactive to proactive conservation by taking care of the native wildlife sharing their space. She discussed how this work supports three main goals: understanding California wildlife, reducing unintended operational impacts on animals, and using data to make better management decisions.

DENISE M. VERRET
Chief Executive Officer
& Zoo Director



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To kick off the specific projects, Courtney discussed the nesting bird surveys in the oak woodland restoration site, where biologists search for active nests—like a Cooper's hawk nest spotted earlier this year—to set up protected buffer zones before heavy machinery or tree trimming work begins. She touched on the songbird acoustic monitoring, which directly inspired the creation of two native songbird gardens on Zoo grounds, and the bird strike prevention program, which uses staff reporting and protective window films on exhibits to prevent collisions. She also highlighted a recent bird-banding partnership with UCLA that studied light pollution in white-crowned sparrows and collected feather samples to track the local impacts of the 2025 fires.

Moving on, Courtney discussed the bat monitoring efforts, sharing that three years of passive acoustic recordings has generated the largest bat acoustic dataset in L.A. County and identified nine present species. The Zoo is currently working with UCLA to write a scientific paper mapping bat habitat suitability, and has turned real-time active bat tracking into popular "bat walks" during the Zoo After Dark public events.

Finally, Ms. Vargas discussed the broader tracking and community science tools. She explained how the Zoo's Motus wildlife tower can pick up tagged animals within a nine-mile radius, including a male Hoary bat tagged down in Carlsbad and praised the Zoo's entries into iNaturalist. Zoo staff and volunteers have logged over 8,000 observations across 863 species thanks to community members and top contributors like staff member Peggy Woo.

She wrapped up the presentation by showing camera trap footage of nocturnal animals like playful raccoons, emphasizing that all of these interconnected tools give the Zoo the data they need to make real, positive choices for local wildlife.

AGENDA ITEM 5

a. Animal Updates

Dominick Dorsa, Director of Animals Care provided updates which included the following:

Mr. Dorsa noted that gerenuk means "giraffe-necked" in Swahili and explained that these East African antelopes are so well adapted to dry scrublands that they get nearly all their moisture directly from their diet.

He highlighted their unique habit of standing upright on their hind legs to reach leaves 6 to 8 feet high, using nimble lips and pointed heads to navigate thorns—a behavior guests can often spot during Zoo feedings.

He shared that the Zoo has a 49-year history with the species, housing 313 gerenuks and celebrating 230 births from the first calf in 1978 to a recent arrival in November 2025.

Mr. Dorsa concluded by announcing the arrival of a new male gerenuk for upcoming breeding recommendations.

b. Zoo Director Updates

Misha Body, Zoo Deputy Director gave the following updates:

Community Outreach & Engagement

- The 6th annual conservation internship program welcomed eight students from USC and LA Valley College, while two returning interns were hired as assistants to test propagation methods and seed cold stratification for the endangered native Nevin's Barberry plant.

- Zoo Camp ran at 101% capacity with 583 campers across its first five weeks, operating smoothly thanks to new management software, splash rallies, and hands-on animal experiences.
- The outreach team brought native California ecosystem exhibits and interactive games to the Mayor's "Kick It in the Park" World Cup viewings at Echo Park and Whitsett Park, and educated families on fire safety and displaced wildlife during Wildfire Day LA at the Autry Museum.
- The Zoo hosted South LA students from the Children's Collective Family Source Center for tailored keeper talks on animal care careers, which sparked strong interest in volunteer opportunities among the teens.

Zoo Data

- For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, final attendance reached 1,192,113 (80% of budget projections) and main revenue streams totaled over \$18.6 million (75% of budget projections).
- Despite attendance and revenue shortfalls, the Zoo successfully closed out the fiscal year with a balanced budget.
- The Zoo entered the new fiscal year with 22,242 member households, while a vibrant World Cup retail pop-up generated nearly \$5,000 in sales over a month, driven by popular items like Hello Kitty merchandise and commemorative scarves.

Zoo News

- A July 3 article in Pasadena Now highlighted a field trip by Pasadena Christian School students learning hands-on lessons about global biodiversity and conservation.
- On July 9, KNBC featured the Zoo's five great ape babies in a segment, sharing social media updates on their milestones as they begin exploring habitats, foraging, and eating solid foods.

Mail Bag

- The Zoo director received letters and impressive artwork from a 3rd-grade class at Coeur d'Alene Avenue School in Venice following their recent field trip.
- Impressed by the chimpanzee exhibit, several students wrote in to suggest renaming or dedicating the habitat in honor of Dr. Jane Goodall.

AGENDA ITEM 6 - OLD BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

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

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY