

An insider's view of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo

FALL / WINTER 2025

My Zoo

Magazine



**ARGALI CLONE
FINDS NEW HOME AT THE
ROSAMOND GIFFORD ZOO**

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A Message from the Friends Executive Director

As winter settles over the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, I'm reminded of how deeply this community believes in the power of nature, conservation, and connection. Every visit, every membership, every act of support fuels the work we're able to accomplish together — not only for the animals who call the zoo home, but for the generations of families who learn and grow here.

This past year, your support has allowed the Friends to strengthen educational experiences, enhance guest programs, and continue investing in animal care and welfare. We are proud to stand beside our county partners, our dedicated team, and our remarkable community as we plan for the future — one filled with innovation, inclusivity, and opportunities that inspire.

As we look ahead, I invite you to stay engaged, stay curious, and stay connected to the mission you help make possible. Thank you for your commitment, your generosity, and your belief in what the Rosamond Gifford Zoo can achieve. We truly couldn't do this without you — and I hope to see you at zoo in 2026!

Carrie Large

Carrie Large
Executive Director
Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo



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ROSAMOND GIFFORD ZOO



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ON THE COVER:

Marco Polo Argali Sheep
photo by Camille Murphy

From Our Board



Serving on the Rosamond Gifford Zoo board is meaningful to me because it supports an organization that leads in conservation, education, and community engagement. As a mother, I value how the zoo inspires curiosity and learning, giving my children memorable opportunities to connect with nature. When our daughter Rory attended the zoo's summer camp this year, we saw how powerful hands-on experiences with wildlife can be. She came home full of questions, excitement, and a deeper interest in the natural world. Alongside animal interactions, she explored conservation and engineering through STEM projects. Being part of the board allows me to advocate for these sustainable practices and help strengthen the zoo's impact on both our community and the environment.

Suzie Lobdell
Friends of the Zoo Board Member

Illegally Created Argali Clone Finds New Home at Rosamond Gifford Zoo

The Rosamond Gifford Zoo recently welcomed a new Marco Polo argali sheep with a truly wild story.

As a zoo accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), the arrivals of new animals and departures of current residents are routine parts of zoo operations, but this particular arrival was anything but routine. The new Marco Polo argali sheep, now named Tilek, is actually a clone. He was an unfortunate victim of an elaborate, illegal wildlife breeding and trafficking plot. The Rosamond Gifford Zoo is grateful to be able to provide Tilek with a new home where he will be taken care of by our team of animal care specialists. In addition to sharing this unique story with our community, we want to share that visitors will be able to view Tilek in his spacious habitat on the Wildlife Trail.

In May 2021, wildlife conservation authorities seized Tilek from Arthur “Jack” Schubarth. Schubarth has since pleaded guilty to wildlife trafficking charges, having illegally smuggled genetic material of a wild argali sheep from Kyrgyzstan into the United States, which he then used to create Tilek, whom he called, “Montana Mountain King.” Schubarth and his associates conspired to inseminate other species of wild sheep with argali semen, thereby creating a collection of hybrid sheep. These hybrid sheep that resembled Marco Polo argali would then be sold to other facilities with the intent of creating breeding stock that would ultimately produce larger sheep for captive hunting.

Captive hunting is a lucrative business that involves charging “hunters” to access a restricted area with the animals for the sole purpose of shooting them. After paying for the privilege to enter the area, buyers hunt these captive animals. Their success is practically certain. After a successful “hunt,” the buyers will then use the animals as trophies for display. As one of the largest sheep species in the world, Marco Polo argali sheep are coveted for their exquisite horns, making them desirable to trophy hunters.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, the world’s most comprehensive list of wildlife species and their risk of extinction, deems argali as “Near Threatened,” meaning that without human intervention and deliberate action intended to protect the species, argali might be at risk for eventual extinction. As such, the species is under strict international and national regulations. The rare sheep is protected internationally by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and domestically by the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Montana state law prohibits ownership of argali sheep to protect native sheep from disease and hybridization. Schubarth’s actions violated federal and state wildlife laws, including the Lacey Act and Montana game animal regulations. His scheme potentially posed a significant threat to the integrity of native wildlife populations. “This was an audacious scheme to create massive hybrid sheep species to be sold and hunted as trophies,” said Assistant Attorney General Todd Kim of the Justice Department’s Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD). “In pursuit of this scheme, Schubarth violated international law and the Lacey Act, both of which protect the viability and health of native populations of animals.”

**A version of this story was previously published by Connect, the AZA’s news publication, in the November/December 2025 issue.*

continued on pg. 6



ANIMAL UPDATES

Seahorses Galore!

We recently welcomed three female and four male Northern lined seahorses as part of our participation in their SSP, or Species Survival Plan! Our new seahorses will remain on exhibit in the Seahorse Nursery, located in the USS Antiquities Cave/ Aquarium, until they are large enough to breed. Once the seahorse fry (babies) are fully grown, we will be able to send them to other AZA-accredited institutions who participate in their SSP to teach guests about this incredible species!



CREATURE FEATURE: BARRED OWL

AT THE ROSAMOND GIFFORD
ZOO: 1 FEMALE, LIA



Male Chinese muntjac "Campbell" sent to the Baltimore Zoo on August 28th

Female Amur leopard "Iona" returned to the Toledo Zoo on July 21st

Female caiman lizard arrived from the Jacksonville Zoo on June 4th

Two female colobus monkeys "Dahlia" and "Winifred" arrived from Utah's Hogle Zoo on June 17th. They will be introduced to male colobus monkey "Kito".

Female golden lion tamarin "Elsie" sent to the Lincoln Children's Zoo on July 27th

Male Humboldt penguin "Peru" sent to the Roger Williams Park Zoo on September 30th

Female Chinese muntjac "Rosalyn" passed away on September 22nd

Female Inca tern "Ceviche" sent to the Caldwell Zoo on June 11th

Female Luzon bleeding heart dove arrived from the Santa Barbara Zoo on September 25th

Female meerkat "Ducky" passed away on July 3rd

4 male and 3 female Northern seahorses arrived from the North Carolina Aquarium on October 9th

Female Palawan peacock pheasant "Gertrude" passed away on September 18th. She was over 23 years old, which is very long-lived for this species.

Male prehensile-tailed skink sent to the Central Park Zoo on September 30th

Female San Clemente Island goat "Roulette" passed away on September 29th

Lovely Lia, Barred Owl

With a wingspan between 99-110cm (39-43in), barred owls are a species of large owl native to northeastern regions of the United States and, more recently, northwestern areas of the United States and Canada (Cornell Lab). They thrive in dense forests and wooded swamps. As the "barred" part of the name suggests, they sport a gorgeous, barred (or two-tone) coloring that helps them blend in with their surroundings, especially at night when this nocturnal species is most active.

Like most raptors, barred owls will spend the majority of their time perching in a tree, conserving energy to maximize their chances of success when they hunt. Wild barred owls hunt small rodents (such as mice, shrews, rats, voles, and rabbits), small reptiles, small amphibians, and insects. Barred owls' wing shape and anatomy make them well-suited to hunting from a perch. They silently swoop down from above and fly for a short distance to capture their prey, rather than actively flying in pursuit of prey (Wagner et al, 2017). The barred owl living at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo is a female named Lia. She has lived at the zoo since 2016, though we aren't sure of her exact age. Lia came to the zoo by way of wildlife rehabilitation. She was found by hikers with an injured leg and wing. She received treatment and healed well, though her injury did require one of her wings to be amputated, meaning if released into the wild, she would not be able to hunt well enough to survive. Despite her amputation, Lia navigates her space well. Her habitat is set up so she has access to multiple levels of perching. During the day, Lia can usually be found resting up on her top perch. Thanks to her caretakers' careful observations and monitoring systems, they know Lia engages in a variety of behaviors including interacting with browse left as enrichment, taking a bath, and more during the night. When bird care team members enter her space, sassy Lia will even clack her beak to assert her territory. Lia's diet consists of medium-sized mice, small rats, and (her favorite) rat pups.

Although barred owls are listed as a species of Least Concern by the IUCN, they still face threats in the wild. You can help wild barred owls by opting to use poison-free rodent control so they (and other predators) do not die from consuming poison when they hunt affected rodents. Visit Lia at the outdoor bird area next to the weathering yard at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo!

FUN FACT:

Barred owls' hoots have a distinct rhythm and tone, often described as sounding like, "Who cooks for you?" That hoot helps barred owls defend their territories, but it also helped support the abolitionist movement within the United States. According to historian Kate Clifford Larson, author of a Harriet Tubman biography titled Bound for the Promised, Tubman most likely used the sound of barred owls' hooting as a signal to coordinate her heroic journeys as she escorted dozens of enslaved people out of Maryland and into free northern states during the night (Keyes, 2020). By mimicking the call of barred owls, Tubman signaled to freedom seekers when it was safe to come out of hiding and continue traveling. The hoot was distinct enough to recognize, but avoided suspicion from slave owners because it was a natural sound.

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Upon discovery of Schubarth’s criminal plot and USFWS’s confiscation of Tilek, it became clear that the argali needed immediate care. USFWS reached out to Wildlife Images Rehabilitation and Education Center, a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation center and wildlife conservation advocate in Grants Pass, Oregon. With an established connection to USFWS Forensics Laboratory and an extensive history caring for a variety of animals, Wildlife Images took on the incredible challenge of giving the animal his temporary home. The team also renamed the argali ram, calling him “Dodge.”

Established in 1981, Wildlife Images now primarily cares for native North American and Pacific Northwest wildlife species, taking in as many as 1,200 animals per year and rehabilitating those animals, ideally for wild release. In addition to its rehabilitation services, Wildlife Images also houses a variety of animal residents on the property, including grizzly bears, Virginian opossums, a wedge-tailed eagle, Cinereous vulture, and more, who serve as ambassadors for their species as guests tour the facility. They do not specialize in ungulate care (that is, hooved mammal care), but that did not stop Wildlife Images from doing everything possible to help Tilek. That included completely revamping and reinforcing a space for him to stay that would be appropriate for an animal of his size and strength, providing him a nutritious diet, and showing an incredible amount of patience while keeping both Tilek and his caretakers safe during his 41-month stay at Wildlife Images.

“He’s really an amazing critter,” remarks Dave Siddon, Executive Director of Wildlife Images. “And his situation is so different from anything else we’ve handled. In some ways, we didn’t really know what to expect, but in others, he was an animal who needed our help, and we’ve got lots of experience helping animals. When it comes to wildlife, we’re not afraid to ask questions to get the best information to provide the best care, to seek out the answers we need from the wildlife conservation community.”

Given his past negative experience with humans, Tilek’s skittishness and anxiety posed an extra challenge for Wildlife Images staff. Due to the staff’s diligent care, led by Kara DeShazo, Animal Care Manager at Wildlife Images, he did begin to show signs of relaxing.

“It’s spooky, to learn about the underworld of wildlife trafficking, captive hunting, and other nefarious activities like this,” warns Siddon. “Everyone here grew very attached to this spectacular animal during his time here. We are glad he made his way to the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, where he’ll have a dream home, a forever home.”

Once the investigation concluded in October 2024, United States Fish and Wildlife Service reached out to AZA’s Caprinae Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) for help arranging Tilek’s move to a permanent home. The TAG selected the Rosamond Gifford Zoo due to its extensive experience with caring for hoofstock species including markhor, mouflon, and others.. “We are thrilled to welcome this Marco Polo argali to our zoo, where he’ll thrive under our specialized care,” said Dan Meates, Rosamond Gifford Zoo Interim Director. “Tilek being here marks a new chapter in his life. His presence helps us educate our guests about his species and the threats wildlife trafficking poses to wildlife everywhere.” Relocating Tilek to Rosamond Gifford Zoo is a true victory for conservation efforts. Tilek’s confiscation is proof of how important it is to enforce laws pertaining to wildlife and conservation. Without these policies in place, Meates emphasizes, Tilek’s story could have had a much darker ending.

Moving Tilek took careful planning and strategy. With the help of its non-profit partner, the Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, the zoo had a special transport crate built to move the argali safely. “The Friends of the Zoo is here to provide our zoo with the resources they need to do the amazing work that they do in whatever form that takes,” described Carrie Large, Executive Director of the Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo. “We were honored to contribute to Tilek’s homecoming.”

Tilek was brought from Oregon to Indianapolis. The Rosamond Gifford Zoo then prepared a special transport team to accompany Tilek home. This included two veterinary professionals, along with members of our animal care team well-versed in animal transportation. Our group met Tilek in Indianapolis and then drove him to Syracuse. Throughout the entire journey, experts were right by Tilek’s side next to his specially made transport crate, monitoring his health and behavior. Rosamond Gifford Zoo would like to thank everyone involved with this unusual case for providing such compassionate care to Tilek for 41 months.



Once Tilek arrived at the zoo, he still had a long road of recovery ahead of him. In addition to caring for his physical health, the hoofstock care specialists provided extensive psychological support to help the argali reach a more peaceful lifestyle that attends to his unique needs. It took an incredible showing of patience, teamwork, and attentive monitoring as the team slowly but surely helped Tilek progress. “Even small things like wind were a big trigger for [Tilek],” recalls Alana Auwae, Hoofstock Collection Manager at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo. “Pretty much everything, was new and different for him, so we followed his schedule as to what he could handle and adjusted as needed. Considering the circumstances, he’s done really well.”

Meates notes in agreement, “We had to learn and adjust at every point.” Despite the alarming number of variables and surprises that arose as Tilek settled into his new home, the zoo’s top priority remained constant: providing Tilek with the best quality of life possible. Although cloning is an atypical addition present in this case, there is nothing atypical about wildlife trafficking and the great threat it poses to conservation. With the continued support of our community, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo is dedicated to ensuring that we will always fulfill our mission to be a leading force of wildlife conservation.

After months of incremental progress, Tilek’s behavior informed the team that he was ready to begin slow introductions with other animals. Marco Polo argali sheep are social animals. They are biologically wired to live in groups. Unfortunately, there are no Marco Polo argali sheep available in North America to be companions for him. To fill that need for positive social interaction, Tilek will share a habitat space with three male Tadjik markhor as a bachelor herd. Bachelor herds, or groups of non-breeding males, naturally form in the wild because they offer young animals a range of advantages. By banding together, members of a bachelor herd are more protected from predators or dominance battles from older, breeding males. They look out for each other, serving as extra eyes and ears as they graze and travel together. In the wild, markhor and argali share the mountainous ranges of Central Asia. This blended-species bachelor herd arrangement is unusual, but it closely mimics the natural experience of herd solidarity and provides these four males with positive socialization as they coexist together at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.

“Because of effective legislation, we’ve turned a criminal act against wildlife into a positive outcome not only for Tilek, but for his species as a whole,” affirms Meates.

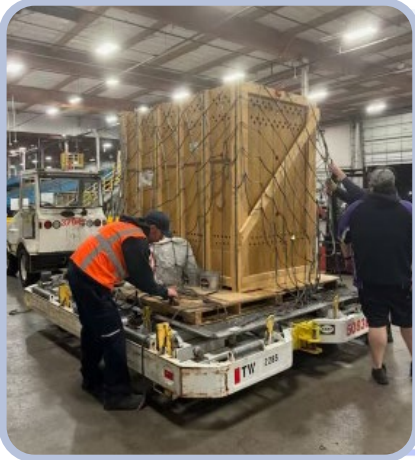
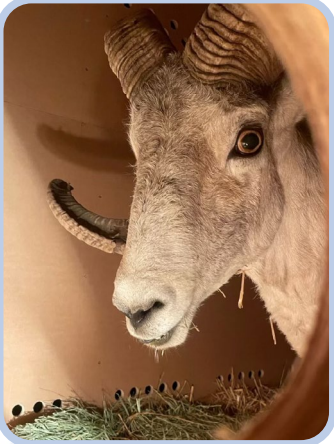
Please join us in welcoming this incredible creature to the Rosamond Gifford Zoo family!

To learn more about Wildlife Images and to support their wildlife conservation efforts, please visit <https://wildlifeimages.org/> or scan the QR code.



Tilek's Journey Home

Photos of transporting Tilek to his new home at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.



AZA SAFE Asian Elephant

2025 is a big year for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

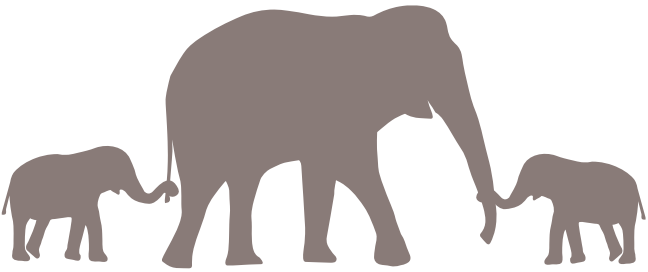
This year, the AZA celebrates the milestone 10th anniversary of its groundbreaking Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) program. To date, there are now over 50 SAFE species, ranging from the Wyoming toad to African painted dog to black-footed ferrets, and more (AZA SAFE). The ultimate goal of SAFE is as simple and straight-forward as the name: to save animals from becoming extinct.

The means of achieving that ambitious, but imperative goal, however, is much more comprehensive, relying on collaboration between zoos, communication with conservation organizations across the globe, amplifying stories to a public audience, coordinating advocacy efforts, measuring impact of its recovery efforts, and more. SAFE represents a beacon of hope for wildlife by focusing the collective expertise within AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums and leveraging their massive audiences to save species.



As an institution accredited by the AZA, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo proudly participates in SAFE programs for multiple species, including red wolf, North American songbirds, and Asian elephant. In fact, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo’s Elephant Collection Manager, Seth Groesbeck, sits on the SAFE Asian Elephant Steering Committee, actively helping to shape the vital work SAFE Asian Elephant has helmed to save wild Asian elephant populations from extinction, to support local communities thrive while coexisting with wildlife, and to protect the habitats both humans and elephants need to survive.

“When it comes to the animals living here [at the zoo], a lot of the work we do is pretty public facing,” Groesbeck explains. “You can see the habitat designs provide the animals with the space and terrain they need. You can see the food they get is nutritious. You can see the animals are offered enrichment, training opportunities, medical care...” he lists. “What you don’t automatically see is how the work we do at the zoo translates to conservation work abroad. SAFE helps us tell the rest of the story, and there’s a lot to tell.”



Safeguarding wild Asian elephants is no easy feat. Habitat loss, human-elephant conflict (HEC), and illegal trade have resulted in significant declines of Asian elephant populations. With an estimated total population ranging between approximately 40,000-50,000 elephants across fourteen countries in the southeast region of Asia, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently lists Asian elephants as endangered. According to the AZA’s SAFE Asian Elephant Program Plan 2024-2026, the SAFE framework has produced viable, encouraging progress for Asian elephant recovery efforts. It has also provided much-needed data regarding Asian elephants’ numbers, habitat ranges, and movement patterns, all of which help inform the next moves of SAFE Asian Elephants as the group continues to mobilize its resources effectively to help elephants in human care as well as wild elephants. Between the years of 2020-2022, 69 AZA members gave more than \$6.2 million to African and Asian elephant conservation (AZA Elephant TAG/SSP).

The more we know about wild Asian elephants, the better we can protect them. That’s why one of SAFE Asian Elephant’s priorities is to develop a distribution map of elephants living in all wild range regions. By knowing where elephants live and where they move to find food, conservationists can develop corridors and infrastructure to aid elephants’ movements safely away from dangerous roads, farmers’ croplands, and other potential spaces that make human-elephant conflict (HEC) more likely to occur. Even though elephants living in human care are not subject to HEC, however, they greatly contribute to these field research operations.



Because elephants in zoos establish close and trusted relationships with their caretakers, researchers are able to learn more about elephants’ physiology, cognitive abilities, and other important factors that help maximize research outcomes in the field. Elephants in human care even help engineer the technological devices researchers use to monitor wild elephant herds’ movements. Prototyping geographic tracking devices with elephants in human care helps designers refine the device so they are comfortable, unobtrusive, safe to use, and perform accurately before they are used on wild Asian elephants to collect the data that leads to new discoveries about the species. Collaborating with zoos to perfect designs helps researchers limit risk of losing or breaking costly devices.

The strength of SAFE comes from the banding together of multiple zoos and conservation partners. All of these trained experts strive for the same goal: to protect Asian elephants. To achieve that goal, everyone’s expertise is needed. No one zoo or one research project can eradicate extinction alone. It’s a team effort that draws on the experience and knowledge of Asian elephants cultivated every day across the globe. “Being able to share what we do and how we do it with each other is one of the most important benefits [of participating in] of SAFE Asian Elephant,” explains Groesbeck. “Collaboration means we all get to benefit and grow with each other. Having that collective resource means that one organization’s success is all our success and ultimately, Asian elephants’ success.”

Unified, transparent communication is key for both intra-organizational collaboration and effective public outreach. Both in range countries and abroad, SAFE Asian Elephant helps elephant conservationists establish effective and consistent messaging that galvanizes the public to join the fight for Asian elephants’ survival. According to the program plan, “[We] need to educate the public not only about the plight of Asian elephants but also the AZA-accredited organizations have supported conservation of elephants for many decades. The public needs to know these stories to strengthen their trust in these zoos and SAEP [the SAFE Asian Elephant Program.] As SAEP explores ways to garner funding for Asian elephant conservation, this trust is critical” (20). Part of SAFE Asian Elephant’s public outreach objective has focused on centralizing Asian Elephant Awareness Month social media campaign throughout August. Prior to August, SAFE Asian Elephant participants create a social media toolkit that contains digital materials (memes, elephant photos, profile picture frames, logos), educational resources, and messaging that each zoo can use or adapt for their own social media.





The Rosamond Gifford Zoo is an avid participant in Asian Elephant Awareness Month, taking the opportunity to connect our community to the beloved herd living at the zoo and their wild counterparts throughout the month of August. In addition to Asian Elephant Extravaganza, the celebratory event held at the zoo each year to honor our elephants and the cultures of their native ranges, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo shared many informative Asian elephant-themed posts, reaching people around the world across the zoo's social media platforms. The zoo's blog article about beehive fencing to prevent human-elephant conflict was reshared by the International Elephant Foundation, amplifying its impact and sharing our zoo's work beyond our immediate community. Transparency about ongoing conservation projects motivates people to take part in these efforts, whether through financial support, legislative advocacy, or even simply visiting the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.

Cohesive messaging that promotes Asian elephant awareness and conservation engages the public, but it also inspires the public to understand the plight the species faces in the wild and inspires their support. The public's actions can and do absolutely make a positive difference in the wild. "Public support is critical for conservation success," Groesbeck notes. "That's why SAFE Asian Elephant dedicates efforts to reach as many people as possible. And that's both within North America but also within the communities who share space with elephants." As SAFE looks to the future, one of its goals is to ensure that documents and written materials are translated into range countries' native languages and to disseminate that information to as many people as possible. To save Asian elephants from extinction, it'll take a whole herd of conservationists from around the world.

The Rosamond Gifford Zoo is proud to be part of that herd as we fight to prevent the extinction of wildlife. As SAFE moves into its next decade, it will continue to grow, change, and suit the needs of each species.



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EleTwins Turn Three!

Three years ago, our Asian elephant Mali made history when she successfully birthed twins.



Due to the complexity of elephant ultrasounds and the rarity of elephant twin births (less than 1%), the team never anticipated Mali was pregnant with twins. Elephant twin births are rare and dangerous for both the calves and the mother, so you can imagine our surprise when after ten hours of waiting for Mali's placenta to drop after the birth of a healthy baby boy, a second, weak but alive calf dropped instead. It took an hour of life-saving care, including the use of a ventilator, to get the second calf stabilized.

Dubbed our Miracle Twins due to the sheer improbability of their birth, the two growing calves, firstborn Yaad and second born Tukada, continue to capture the hearts of all who meet them and have become a fundamental part of our zoo's history.

At three years old, our "little" bull calves are not so little anymore, weighing over 2,000 pounds each. Just last year Yaad and Tukada would run between the members of their herd, eager to stay within a trunk's reach of the adults. Now, the boys venture the entire length of the exhibit on their own, chasing birds, playing with sticks, and swimming in their pool. They've started play-sparring with each other and the presence of their tiny (but pointy) tusks means they sport occasional scraped faces, a rite of passage for little bull elephants. But their bond with each other, with their herd, and with their care team is stronger than ever.

The elephant care team has described them as "little sponges," soaking up everything they're taught with a speed even our most senior staff has never seen before. They can open their mouths, present their shoulders, sides, ears, feet, blow sterile saline solution from their trunks, stand still for regular blood draws, all things that make their medical care as stress free and easy as possible. Already, they know many different commands designed to enhance their husbandry. The elephant team has a theory that sibling rivalry is one of the main reasons for their expedited learning curve.



But one of their biggest, and most important experiences, not just for the twins, but for the survival of elephants worldwide has been their participation in a crucial vaccine against EEHV, or Elephant Endotheliotropic Herpes Virus. This devastating and deadly virus affects elephants in the wild and in human care. Our twins were among the first elephants to receive the groundbreaking, first of its kind mRNA vaccine targeting the specific 1A strain.

Being selected to be part of the vaccine trial has been a huge opportunity for Yaad and Tukada to develop protective antibodies to the virus. Even more excitingly, the calves are contributing important data to Baylor College of Medicine's research. This collaborative endeavor underscores the vital role zoos play in wildlife conservation and scientific research.

These vaccines and blood draws are just a regular part of Yaad and Tukada's day-to-day life. They receive high reward treats that make the split-second needle poke worth it, and well-deserved praise and affection from their care team. Afterwards, the little three-year-olds run and play, unaware of the crucial role they play in the survival of their species.

The future for the global population of Asian elephants looks brighter every day. Elephants are matriarchal, and female elephants stay together for life in a family group. Once male Asian elephants reach maturity, between 8 and 13 years of age, they, like typical teenagers, start craving independence. They begin sparring with their ever-growing tusks, and the females are typically intolerant of their aggressive behavior, however playful it may seem. As a result, the females will push the young males to the outskirts until they leave to form their own herd.



Still not big enough to compete with older, larger bull elephants, the younger bulls band together for protection and socialization in bachelor herds. Together they spar, learning how to fight and defend themselves to compete for breeding rights and territory. In Accredited zoos, we can mimic this natural behavior and grant our bull elephants more independence by strategically transferring them to other AZA-Accredited institutions. The Rosamond Gifford Zoo has always been, and will remain, dedicated to the conservation of Asian elephants. We have always had plans to expand and improve upon our elephant habitat – but now we have a new, and ambitious, goal – expand soon enough to allow our little miracles, Yaad and Tukada, to remain in Syracuse.

We are still very much in the "planning period" of our elephant expansion, and cannot make any promises, but we want to assure our community that we are working to make Yaad and Tukada's permanent home in Syracuse a possibility. But building a barn for two future 9,000-pound giants is no small (or cheap) feat. In the meantime, our boys will continue growing and learning under the watchful and loving eye of their family in Syracuse, both elephant and human. They will continue nursing from their mother for another year and contribute invaluable research to protecting their species from EEHV.

If you would like to donate directly to the care of our elephants, please include "Elephants" in the comment section of our donate page.

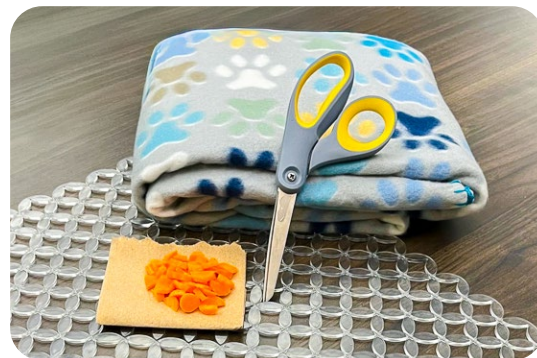


MAKE YOUR OWN ENRICHMENT AT HOME!

At the Rosamond Gifford Zoo our Animal Care Team knows how important it is to give our animals enrichment. But what is enrichment and why is it so important for animals? Can it be helpful for your animals at home too? Well, enrichment is an opportunity for animals to practice and express natural behaviors they would normally do in the wild. There are five types of enrichment: sensory (smells, new textures, sounds), cognitive (toys, puzzles), social (interactions with others), physical (new bed, substrate) and food (frozen treats, slow feeders). And yes, you can do this for your animals at home too!

MAKE YOUR OWN SNUFFLE MAT:

Snuffle Mats are a type of cognitive and food enrichment. These mats challenge your pet's ability to use their natural behaviors to find food rewards. While there are many snuffle mats you can purchase, see if you can do some enrichment for yourself and exercise your mental and physical abilities by making your own snuffle mat for your pet!



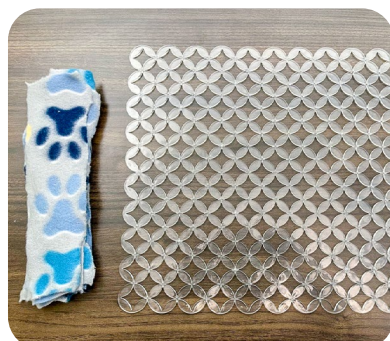
WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- 1 plastic sink protector grid or 1 rub anti-fatigue mat with holes in it
- Fleece fabric, the more colors the better
- Scissors
- Your pet's favorite treat!

HOW TO ASSEMBLE:



1. Cut your fleece fabric into 7-inch by 1-inch strips.



2. You will need as many strips as there are holes in your mat or sink protector grid.



3. Tie fleece fabric through the holes in the grid. Start by tying in rows across the top of your mat, stringing one side of the fleece through one hole and the other side through the next hole and tying the two ends together.



4. After you finish all the rows start tying in the other direction, up and down.



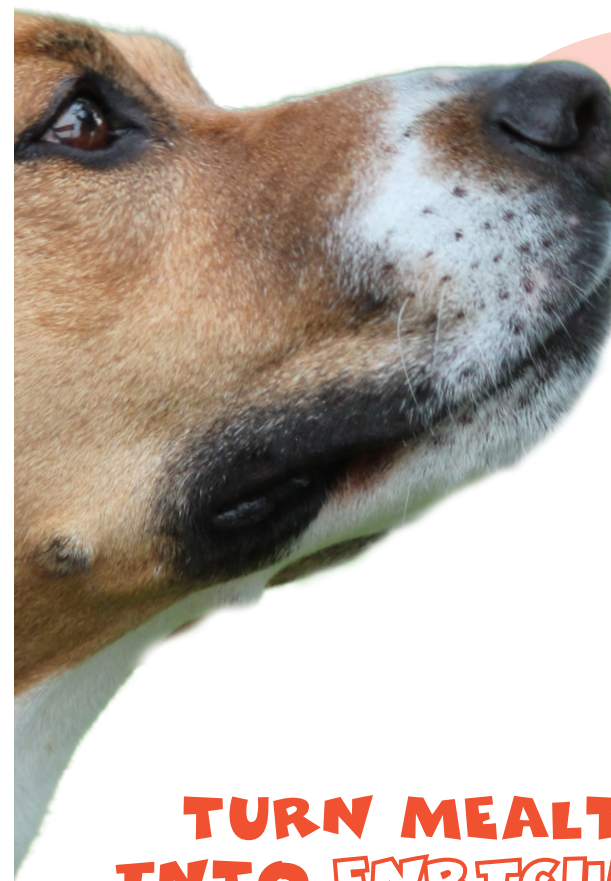
5. When you are finished, it should look like many vertical and horizontal lines on the back of your mat.



Note: It may be easier to weave the fabric through the grid/mat by flipping it upside down, then flipping back over to tie the two ends of the fabric strip together.

After the mat/grid is covered with fleece it is time for your pet to have a turn using their new enrichment toy!

Add some of their favorite treats, ruffle them around into the snuffle mat, and let your pet use their nose to dig around and find some treats!



TURN MEALTIME INTO ENRICHMENT!

Don't want to make a snuffle mat or maybe you don't have the materials at home? That is okay because you can turn a simple mealtime into an enrichment for your pet. All you need is your pet's food, their food bowl, and some water!

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- Your pet's food
- A freezer safe pet food bowl
- Water

HOW TO ASSEMBLE:

1. Add your pet's food to a freezer safe pet food bowl.
2. Add enough water into the bowl to cover most of your pet's food but allow some food to stick out above the water.
3. Put the bowl in the freezer and allow to freeze, time will vary depending on the amount of water and the size of the bowl.
4. Take out of the freezer and serve to your pet! This will help them slow their feeding down if your pet is a fast eater and it gives all pets a fun way to problem-solve, while enjoying a tasty reward.



MYZOO JR. MEETS ECONOTES

Don't Have a Pet? You can still make enrichment for your local native wildlife!

MAKE A BIRD FEEDER ENRICHMENT FOR WINTER!

Lots of birds travel south for the winter, but some birds do stay here in the winter and others from even farther north may pass through. One of the challenges that these birds face is finding food during the winter, but you can help! All you need to do is make a bird feeder pinecone to put outside, and the best part is you can set it up so you can view visiting birds from the comfort of your own home!

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- Pinecone
- String
- Peanut Butter (No artificial sweeteners and it will work better if the oils are not separated)
- Bird seed mix
- Optional* Butter Knife, for spreading peanut butter

HOW TO ASSEMBLE:

1. Tie a string with a loop to the top of your pinecone.
2. Roll the pinecone in peanut butter, or if you are using a butter knife, with adult supervision, spread the peanut butter all over the pinecone.
3. Sprinkle and press bird seeds into the peanut butter, covering the whole surface of the pinecone with bird seed.
4. Place it in the fridge to firm up, then hang it outside using the string. If you are able, you can place it in a spot where you can view it from an inside window and watch all the visitors to your bird feeder.



These fun projects brought to you by the *Friends of the Zoo* Education Team!

Sign up for a class to experience more!

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Wild Beginnings!

Ages 1-3 | Mondays | 9:15-10 a.m. or 10:30-11:15 a.m.

Join the education team for a special program tailored just for the little ones, ages 12 months to 3 years. Each themed class includes animal biofacts, nature-themed sensory play, a story, and hands-on learning! Young ones will explore with their senses as they develop language and motor skills in this early-learning adventure.

This program is designed for one child/one caregiver pair.

2026

January 12 | February 9 | March 9 | April 13



Guided Tours

Want to know more about conservation practices at the zoo, how to tell the elephants apart, or what the porcupine's favorite treat is? Add a guided tour to your visit!

For questions or to reserve a Guided Tour: Contact (315) 435-8511 x8531 or e-mail zoosafari@rosamondgiffordzoo.org.

Non-Members:

\$12 per person ages 11+

\$8 per child 3-10 years

Free for ages 0-2 years

Members:

\$5 per person ages 3 & up

Kids' Night Out

Ages 6-12 | Fridays | 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Looking for a night out? Drop your kids off at the zoo to party like an animal! Kids will enjoy pizza upon arrival, learn about animals, tour the zoo after hours, make crafts, and play games all night long.

2026

April 17



One-Day Zoo Camp

Ages 6-12 | 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Join us for a deep-dive into the incredible world of animals for a full day of Zoo Camp! Each camp day is different, allowing your child to explore something new about the animal world through hands-on science, artistry, technology, and engineering projects – whether they're registered for just one or multiple days!

For your convenience, you can select to pre-order lunch from the HoneyBee Café during registration.

2025

December 22, 23, 29-31

2026

January 2, 19 | February 16-20

March 20, 30, 31 | April 1, 2, 3

Stay tuned for summer camp details!



Questions?

Call the education department at (315) 435-8511 x8506

or email education@rosamondgiffordzoo.org.

Register online at rosamondgiffordzoo.org/learn/education



Scan for more information about each class!

Sessions fill fast, sign up today!

Give a Little Bit

Our community has always been the driving force behind our conservation efforts.

Back in 1982 the community rallied around Siri, pushing the zoo to expand and improve, in order to keep her here, and keep her happy. Your support has turned the Rosamond Gifford Zoo into Central New York's center for nature conservation. And the support of our community never ceases to amaze us. Just this last year, more local businesses, individuals, and families than ever have come together to fundraise for the zoo, providing fundamental financial support for projects that will continue to improve animal care, guest experience, and education.



On August 6, Friends of the Rosamond Gifford board member Zoo Suzie Lobdell and her husband Vinny hosted an unforgettable "Barn Party" at their home in support of our mission. This night of friends, family, food (catered by our very own Catering at the Zoo executive Chef Allison Walts and team), included a special guest appearance from our summer Canine Champions for Conservation dog show.



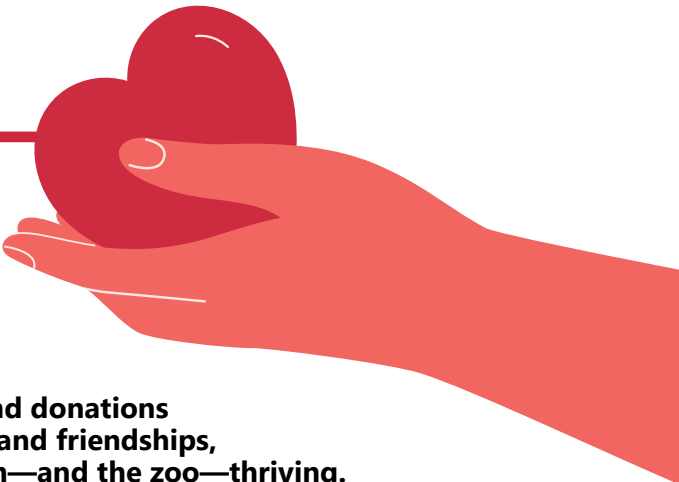
On November 23, longtime supporter of the zoo and author of Rosamond Gifford Zoo at Burnet Park, Barbara Shelkin Davis, hosted a "Tiger Pool Party" to raise the funds needed for a larger, more spacious swimming hole for our majestic, and critically endangered, Amur tigers.



On September 15, Vice President and Wealth Advisor at Tompkins Financial Advisors, Kevin Joy, hosted the Rosamond Cup, a charity golf tournament to benefit the zoo at the Tuscarora Golf Club in Marcellus. According to Joy, Tompkins Community Bank is an institution that takes the "community" part of its name seriously. "We're engrained in the communities we serve," he explained to us in a previous blog post, "And committed to finding those opportunities to do good. The zoo is such an important resource for our CNY area, so it only made sense to find a way to partner with the Friends of the Zoo so we can deepen the positive impact both our organizations have on our community."



On October 8, we installed new interactive and educational signage up at the elephant exhibit, provided by the Marsellus family in the memory and celebration of the late John Marsellus, a longtime supporter and advocate for the zoo. Over the last several decades, John, along with his wife, Candace, supported a variety of initiatives, programs, and improvements throughout the zoo.



All of these events and donations help raise the funds, and friendships, that keep our mission—and the zoo—thriving.

If you would like to hear more about upcoming projects, like our garden expansion, or how to get involved with your own fundraising event, please contact our Director of Philanthropy, Gina Rapasadi, at grapasadi@rosamondgiffordzoo.org

Memories Made at the Zoo

Thank You To Our Sponsors

Penguin Palooza

Tops Friendly Markets, New York Life, and administered by CNY Arts

Brew at the Zoo

Hayden Jewelers, AmeriCu Credit Union, Construction Associates, LLC, Melo Roofing, Hancock Estabrook, Usherwood Office Technology, T.J. Sheehan Distributing, Community Bank, Grossman St. Amour, RLK General Insurance Agency, Tops Friendly Markets, Syracuse Haulers, Anheuser-Busch, Cumulus Media

Canine Champions for Conservation

Coca-Cola, Oneida Shores

Asian Elephant Extravaganza

Kapoor & Coyle Law Firm, untangled mental health counseling & creative arts therapy, New York Life, and administered by CNY Arts

Fall Conservation Bash

Constellation, OneGroup, Geddes Federal Savings, Scicchitano Law, PLLC., Rockbridge Investment Managment, The Gifford Foundation, Cumulus Media, Visual Technologies, Syracuse Orthopedic Specialists

STEAM Day

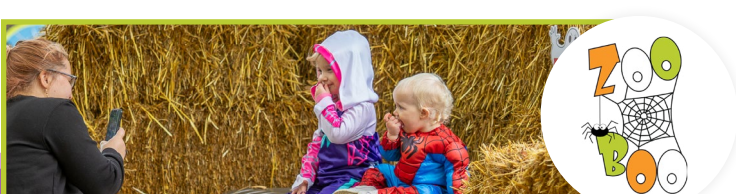
Technology Alliance of Central New York and King+King Architects

Fall Fest

New York Life, McClurg Remodeling

Zoo Boo

Community Bank, Countryside Credit Union, Tops Friendly Markets, Bankers Life, EnergySavors, Everdry Waterproofing, New York Life, The Pumpkin Hollow

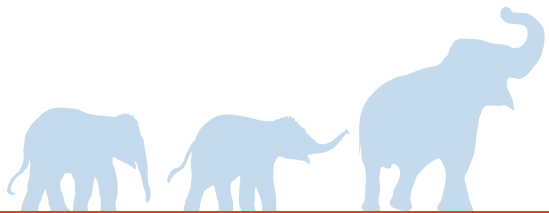




HAPPY RETIREMENT TO CORA!

We are thrilled to share that Cora, the elephant barn dog, has officially retired! Her zoo family hosted a little retirement PAW-ty to celebrate. Cora and her staff are so thankful for everyone's support. Originally a rescue from Helping Hounds, Cora served as a training assistant for our elephant team so they could practice their training techniques before working with the elephants.

At her paw-ty, guests signed her card, saw her open a gift basket from Tamara Chilson, and watched a training demonstration with the elephants. While we know guests (and staff) will miss seeing her on zoo grounds, we are so excited to see this sweet girl enjoying endless R&R with her loving family. Cora's mom, Elephant Care Specialist Alinda, has promised to share updates on her retirement, so stay tuned for news about her fun future adventures!



MEMBER NOTES



A member tradition, and a nod to nostalgia!



A Rosamond Gifford Zoo membership includes a **FREE, limited-edition T-shirt every year when you join or renew**. Designed annually by our marketing team, each shirt features a new animal and unique color, making it a fun, exclusive tradition for zoo families.

Did You Know?

Our members voted on the 2018 T-shirt design. Out of three choices, Gray Wolves came out as the winner!

Our rarest member T-shirt is the Moon Jellyfish from 2020. Fewer were claimed due to the pandemic, making this turquoise design a true collector's item and a staff favorite!

Our most popular member T-shirt design was our 2023 Elephant Twins. This design saw the highest number of redemptions, as well as additional shirts purchased. A special shirt design, to highlight a very special occurrence!



Our 2026 member T-shirt will feature Bjorn, our Andean Bear! This new design will be available bear-y soon.

This exciting benefit has been around for more than 25 years!

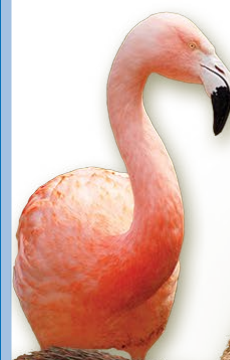
Give the gift that lasts all year! 🎁🎁

Memberships make the perfect gift of experience, that families can enjoy together and share special moments.

GUARANTEED TO BE A GIFT THEY'LL LOVE

In a 2025 survey, 90% of current Rosamond Gifford zoo members reported the highest-level of satisfaction!

Best of all, your gift membership purchase directly supports the precious creatures at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.



SPECIAL HOLIDAY OFFER

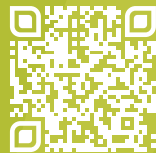
Purchase a gift membership and your recipients will be valid for the FULL 2026 year PLUS we'll include 2 single-use guest passes!

- 🎁 Unlimited Free admission to the zoo 362 days a year!
- 🎁 Discounted admission to reciprocal zoos and aquariums nationwide.
- 🎁 Exclusive, FREE limited-edition member T-shirt and subscription to MyZoo Magazine.
- 🎁 Discounts at The Curious Cub Gift Shop and HoneyBee Cafe.
- 🎁 Discounts on education programs, tours, and zoo camps for all ages.
- 🎁 Discounted prices for birthday parties and special event tickets.

...and even more!



Look for the logo in the gift shop,
your purchases benefit animal care at
the zoo and conservation in the wild.



Can't come to the zoo?
Scan the QR code to
visit our online store



Give a Gift that Gives Back!

When you make a purchase you're making a direct impact
on wildlife conservation and environmental sustainability.
These specially marked items help fund local and global
efforts to protect endangered species, restore habitats,
and support community-based conservation initiatives.

'Tis the Season to Gift a Buddy Box!

Best of all, your purchases
benefit animal care at the zoo
and conservation in the wild.

Order in store or online today!



The Curious Cub
GIFT SHOP

Members Receive
10% OFF!



SAY "I DO" AT THE ZOO

Make every season
one to remember.

Plan your
winter wonderland
wedding today!



Scan to
Learn More

photo by Andrew Armani

CELEBRATE YOUR BIRTHDAY WITH A ZOO PARTY!



MEMBERS
RECEIVE A
DISCOUNT!



CELEBRATE WITH CATERING AT THE ZOO!



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SyracuseZoo



RosamondGiffordZoo

Upcoming Events!



**WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER 31**



**SATURDAY
APRIL 25**



**SATURDAY
JUNE 20**

READY, SET, RUN!

Get out and get moving on behalf of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo at our annual 5k Zoo Run Run!



REGISTER AND START FUNDRAISING TODAY!

