



EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2023



HELLO 2023!

Happy New Year everyone! I hope you had a restful and wonderful holiday season. We are now just a month away from our hybrid Summit and are wrapping up all of the planning. If you are interested in joining us virtually Feb. 8 from 9 AM — 2:30 PM PST (with a lunch break) and Feb. 9 from 9 AM — 12 PM PST, you can [register here](#). We are working to make it as interactive as the in-person option. We will also be recording those sessions, so they will be available shortly afterwards for review.

We also would like to [share a report on the way we have made use of Network Member feedback](#) from the past year. We appreciate your input and we are putting your suggestions to good use!

And finally, just a heads up that we will be offering travel scholarships (up to \$2,000 each) again this year to present about empathy projects at a relevant conference. We will provide more details following the Summit, but if you are considering presenting about your empathy projects, this could be a good source of support! So start thinking about what you might want to share and to what audience.

ARTICLE IDEAS? LET US KNOW!

If you have suggestions for stories, please let us know. You all are working on a wide range of great empathy projects and we want to share your ideas and questions, so feel free to reach out to marta.burnet@zoo.org to suggest an article idea!

EMPATHY IN ACTION: MEMBERSHIP!

Started last year at the Summit, the Membership Committee is our youngest standing committee but has really hit the ground running in getting to work. Tierney Ball from Zoo Boise, Heather Harelson Nutick (Chair) from Red River Zoo, Fernanda Mora from ZooMontana and Marta Burnet from Woodland Park Zoo have set up the Affiliate process for those not employed at Network Partners and reviewed applications throughout the year. We are now up to 46 Affiliates in 19 additional states, the UK, Canada and New Zealand! Affiliates include university professors, consultants, nature center staff and representatives from 19 accredited zoos and aquariums across the country. According to Heather:

“The roll out of Affiliates isn’t just a passive thing, it is laying the groundwork for the future of Network expansion and how ACE for Wildlife will move forward and grow.”

We anticipate the number of Affiliates will continue growing now that we have begun to actively recruit people. If you know of folks who might be interested, please encourage them to complete the [relatively quick Affiliate application](#) for consideration.

The committee is still finalizing its plans for 2023, but is very interested in finding ways to make the Network more accessible and inclusive. They will be leading a session at the Summit on this very topic. If you have suggestions for goals or initiatives for the committee, please email empathy@zoo.org to share those.

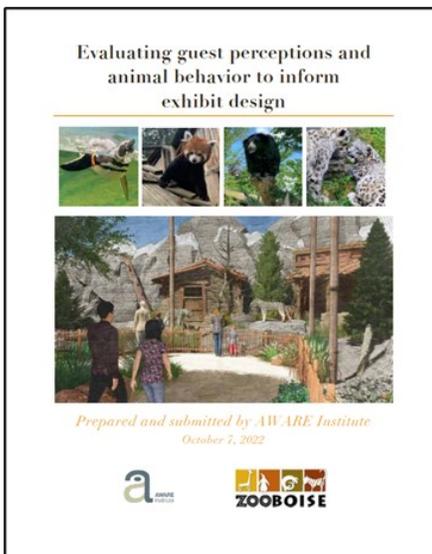
-Marta

EMPATHY AND EXHIBIT DESIGN

As part of a Tier I grant project, Zoo Boise is working with AWARE Institute to evaluate guest perceptions and animal behavior of Magellanic penguins, red pandas, sloth bear and snow leopards. The goals of the project are twofold: “(1) to collect baseline measures for comparison with new exhibits and (2) to develop evaluation tools to specifically support other small zoos.” AWARE developed data collection protocols, trained and supported college students as seasonal temp staff to be observers and surveyors. Observers collected 296 hours of behavior observations during 887 sessions across all four species and surveyed 339 guests. AWARE then analyzed the resulting baseline data. You can access [the full report here](#).

In the report, AWARE made recommendations for ways to promote active natural behaviors and address inactive or undesirable behaviors that they shared with the zoo and the architecture firm to inform the design process. They also hosted a virtual and onsite discussion to consider potential interim changes. For example, it sparked a conversation about feeding schedules and new types of enrichments for their penguins. Tierney Ball, Director of Education, noted:

“Most of the findings were congruent with our expectations based on past observations or animal personalities, but having concrete data to support these ideas allows us to design the best homes possible for our animals.”



For a smaller zoo, Tierney recommended utilizing outside support to assist with the process. With the data collected in the busy season, they would not have been able to analyze results at the same time.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Fernanda Mora, Outreach Education Lead, has jumped into the Network in the year since she started working at ZooMontana. Fernanda is on both the Membership Committee and the DEAI Working Group. She recently spoke at a [Learning Group on ZooMT's DEAI Committee](#) (called IDEA), which she chairs. Fernanda had worked at a chimpanzee sanctuary where a lot of empathy principles were utilized informally, but she didn't know them by name. That made for an easier transition to empathy practices at ZooMontana.

“The Education Department was really imbedded into the Network and so it has been really helpful to be on a team so committed to this work.”

One of the programs she leads at the zoo is in conjunction with the [Indian Education for All Program](#) run by the state. They have been doing programs for 5th graders across Billings, bringing animals to schools and talking about indigenous populations. After going through state training and consultations with experts, they have been careful to incorporate other ways of viewing and connecting with animals in a respectful, accurate and culturally responsive way. If there are state requirements on Native education, there may be resources in other Network states that could be helpful. Otherwise, she would recommend reaching out to local tribal nations to see if there are opportunities to build relationships and foster collaboration.

When asked which animal she would want to be, she thinks it would be cool to be an octopus. “They are so smart, fit anywhere, and they basically die for their babies which is really touching.” Thanks for your work for promoting empathy for animals and humans!



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FEBRUARY 2023



EMPATHY SUMMIT COUNTDOWN!

We look forward to welcoming many of you to Seattle next week. If you are interested in joining us virtually on Feb. 8 from 9 a.m. — 2:30 p.m. PST (with a lunch break) and Feb. 9 from 9 a.m. — 12 p.m. PST, it is not too late!

You can [register here](#).

In addition to Summit planning, we have been wrapping up our Year 2 grant report and working with our funder on planning for future funding. We hope to have some exciting announcements to share at the Summit.

The other news is that there have been a few transitions underway for the empathy team. Our director, Ivel Gontan, left Woodland Park Zoo January 18 to return to the San Diego area. We wish her well in her future endeavors! Marta Burnet has been promoted to Director of Advancing Empathy at WPZ.

We are sad to also report that Kirinne Slaughter, our evaluation specialist, is moving to Indiana. We will greatly miss her insights and humor. If you know of someone interested in an evaluation specialist position at WPZ, please [encourage them to apply](#) and let us know!

ARTICLE IDEAS? LET US KNOW!

If you have suggestions for stories, please let us know. You all are working on a wide range of great empathy projects and we want to share your ideas and questions, so feel free to reach out to marta.burnet@zoo.org to suggest an article idea!

EMPATHY IN ACTION: STRATEGIC LEARNING COMMITTEE

The purpose of one of our original committees, the Strategic Learning Committee (SLC), is to drive the learning priorities of the ACE for Wildlife Network so the Network can collaboratively learn, build skills and share expertise. Currently, Brooke Tucker (ZooMontana) is the chair and Liz Gilles (Minnesota Zoo), Melia Paguirigan (Woodland Park Zoo) and Isabelle Bieser (Zoological Society of Milwaukee) are members.

The committee is thrilled to announce that the 5-part empathy training video series has been completed! Thanks to all who contributed feedback on the scripts and images and to Emily Bernhardt for being our spokesperson. The links will be shared at the Summit next week.

As you may recall, this training series has been the focus of 2022 for the SLC as part of its learning question #1: *How are we sustainably promoting empathy for animals and people within and across our organizations?* As explained by Brooke:

“We hope this toolkit serves as an accessible resource for Members and Affiliates looking for inspiration, or even a kickstart, in their exploration of effective empathy practices!”

If you have feedback on the videos or the empathy training toolkit, please let the committee know through empathy@zoo.org. They are interested in hearing what you think!

EMPATHY AND KEEPER TRAINING

Courtney Cordova, Henry Vilas Zoo's (HVZ) Education Specialist, was looking forward to animal keeper chat trainings, but learned pretty quickly that her initial approach was not working. The recorded training felt long and was missing interactivity. This led to keepers walking away not feeling very happy or very informed, which is the opposite of what Courtney hoped to achieve.

Throughout last summer, Courtney collected baseline data on effective empathy practices used during keeper chats and found that usage varied greatly. Some keepers were really confident with them while others were still learning. Equipped with this knowledge, Courtney was about to create a new training when she attended the Seattle Aquarium's DECO conference and reconnected with Ryann Stacy, who had recently utilized the empathy bridge in a keeper training at Racine Zoo. Courtney had previously shared an empathy training with Ryann, who was happy to return the favor.

Merging these two trainings together has been successful at HVZ: “[Ryann’s version] helped tell more of a story and felt a little more relatable to keepers who already have the context.” The trainings are also now in-person, with intentional small groups of people who work and already feel comfortable together. This has led to them approaching the training with a good attitude, which has meant better conversations and “a lot more learning.”

Since Courtney’s team is small, leaning on Network Members ensures she is not reinventing the wheel:

“Keeper chats include similar concepts, whether you're in Madison or Seattle.”

She is always pleasantly surprised to receive an email from someone in the Network asking for advice or collaboration. “We're getting there collectively—it can't just happen overnight. We have to do the work and make the changes over time that are going to get us to where we eventually want to be.”



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

At Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium (PDZA), Suzanne Akerman works as a staff biologist in their Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater. You can see her here with Dumbledog, played by Rocket. The current show focuses on the specialized needs of animals and the high-quality care they get at the zoo with a wizarding theme. Using animal names, personalities, likes and dislikes, these shows do a wonderful job of connecting guests to animals at the zoo.

“Having our dog as the main character and treating him like a fellow wizard opens the door for the audience that animals can have ideas, preferences and agency.”

For those considering developing scripts, she recommends hammering home one clear message multiple times rather than trying to touch on multiple themes. It makes it easier for guests to leave with one thing they can do to help wildlife. For other suggestions, check out [her 2019 article](#) in the Journal of Museum Education. Her take on educational anthropomorphism is particularly interesting and has been helpful in the development of training tools. She will be at the Empathy Summit, so bring questions for her!

When asked which animal she would want to be, she would be a beaver because they are planners and always have a project to keep them busy, but they also like to just spend cozy time with their families. Sounds great to me!





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MARCH 2023



HAPPY ALMOST SPRING

Greetings from Seattle! It was wonderful having so many of you join us last month for the Empathy Summit, both in-person and virtually. For those who weren't able to join us or if you want to rewatch any of the sessions, you can [access recordings, session notes and graphic illustrations here](#). Committee meetings are underway to incorporate input into the development of additional resources for Network Members and Affiliates. Stay tuned for more information in the coming months.

We also encourage you to check out the [Empathy Training Toolkit – ACE for Wildlife](#), which includes a series of five videos created by Network staff you can use to train staff and volunteers about empathy and a wide array of training resources from across the ACE for Wildlife Network. Let us know what you think and if you have any ideas for improvement!

As conference season rolls around, we are pleased to offer travel scholarships for ACE for Wildlife Members who are presenting on an empathy-related project at the 2023 AZA annual or other relevant conference. [You can learn more and fill out an application here!](#)

We are heading back on the road next week with site visits to NEW Zoo & Adventure Park and Zoological Society of Milwaukee. Looking forward to seeing their empathy work in action and sharing out next month!

EMPATHY IN ACTION: BEAR BURROW

Since 2004, Racine Zoo has taken great pride in being home to Andean bears, a species many community members are unfamiliar with. However, the location of the habitat and the lack of empathy messaging in its signage meant it was due for an upgrade. Their Empathy Programs Evaluator, Ryann Stacy, says that given the need for an overlook building, and the staff's love and empathy for these bears, pursuing this project through a Capacity Building Grant was a no-brainer!

The zoo's 31-year-old Andean Bear, Diamond, sadly passed away in June 2022 which pushed back the exhibit opening, though they still used the space for preschool classes in December. "The excitement on the kiddos' faces was obvious—this was a brand-new space for people like them!" The children walked and jumped across mini "log" cushions and "rock" pillows and loved storytime inside the bear cave, perfectly sized for preschoolers to crawl into like little bears and flex their perspective-taking muscles!

Ryann admits that it can be overwhelming when considering new project ideas, but "don't be afraid to reach out to other Network Members. Building off each other's work is one of the most valuable things provided by the Network." Ryann says it helps "cross those invisible barriers between institutions to offer different perspectives, ask questions, streamline approaches and increase our impact."

PRACTICING EMPATHY: THE CARING COVE

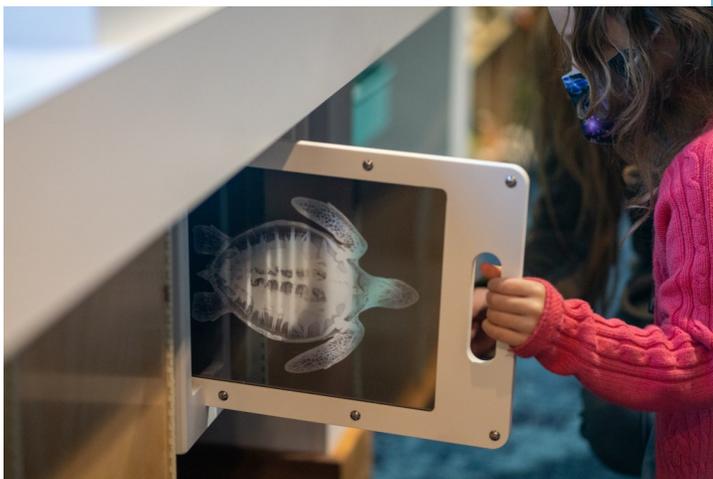
In January, the Seattle Aquarium launched an exciting new play space called Caring Cove, focused on providing children a place to practice caring for animals in a range of ways deeply influenced by the empathy practices. Children can don staff costumes, pick out a marine (stuffed) animal to care for and then get right to work utilizing their imagination to name their animal, think about what the animal might need and provide food, enrichment, medical care, and even a resting spot!

Nicole Killebrew, Seattle Aquarium's Interpretation Coordinator who oversaw this project, noted, "Even on our slower days, Caring Cove is a buzz of activity. Many children remain in the space for an extended period of time. I often hear children asking to stay when a caregiver suggests seeing the aquarium animals." Children jump right into the shoes of an animal care specialist or veterinarian, taking caring of the (stuffed) animals very seriously.

"We wanted to design a space for our younger guests and families. Infused with empathy best practices, Caring Cove is exceeding all our original goals. And we continue to learn something new every day!"

There is even an artificial tide pool area just 14 inches high that is perfect for tiny hands to practice caring actions with all sorts of faux sea creatures.

You can learn more about this partially grant-funded project and see more pictures [at this blog post](#). If you have questions about this project, please contact Nicole at n.killebrew@seattleaquarium.org.



SUPPORTING CHAMPIONS ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

Strategies to engagement

- Pizza
- Asking, not telling
- Needs of the other departments vs. our needs
- Mini surveys to get anonymous feedback
- Supportive management
 - Who is the empathy lead for the organization
- Continuing to support the champions once they are identified
 - Trainings & continued conversation
 - Have their back when they have questions
- Some training and dedication given to volunteers
- Integrating empathy into the organization's culture
 - Making empathy a standard of operation so it will continue, even with staff/management turnover
- Self evaluate (rubric) & identify places for improvement
- Integration into hiring process

COMMITTEE SPOTLIGHT

This month we spotlight the Communications Committee, which focuses on nurturing connection and collaboration within the Network. Meagan Ashton from the Seattle Aquarium is the Committee Chair. Other members include Jennifer Kleen (Roosevelt Park Zoo), Heather Harelson Nutick (Red River Zoo), Ryan Retzke (Racine Zoo) and Paul Vandermeuse (Zoological Society of Milwaukee). Current projects include revising the discussion board to increase usability and figuring out ways to support empathy champions in different departments and with volunteers. This latter project was a topic during the Summit's World Café discussions, with tables hosted by Meagan and Ryan, who noted:

"One of the biggest takeaways was that we need to really build trust [with potential empathy champions]. We need to reassure them that what they say is great, encourage them to share stories and open the door for more of these conversations."

Suggestions included identifying an empathy champion (or liaison) in each department; tailoring trainings to different roles; and offering pizza (or another treat) is always a good idea. Stay tuned for more details about what is next for developing empathy champions!

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APRIL 2023



SPRINGING INTO EMPATHY

In March, the Network approved bylaw revisions and so we would like to welcome two Affiliates, Aszya Summers from Lincoln Park Zoo and Chris Berg from Shedd Aquarium to the Steering and Membership Committees, respectively! This is an exciting development for the Network, moving us one step closer to expanding to additional partners. We look forward to their contributions and are happy to add Affiliates to the Strategic Learning and Communications Committees as well. We also would like to thank Craig Standridge and Laurel Abbotts for their service on our Strategic Learning and Steering Committees. They have been involved since the beginning and we appreciate all of their contributions!

The Conservation Action Working Group issued a report, ["The Use of Empathy in Conservation Action Social Media Posts"](#), which includes recommendations for ways to integrate empathy into this type of posts. Finally, the Empathy team enjoyed our visits to NEW Zoo and Milwaukee County Zoo/Zoological Society of Milwaukee. They were gracious hosts and had wonderful empathy work to showcase (see articles in this issue!).

EMPATHY IN ACTION: GIRAFFES!

At NEW Zoo and Adventure Park, wintertime giraffe feeding has received an exciting improvement! They lowered the fencing so that Zuri and Nigel can now bend their heads to munch on lettuce and browse while giving guests a much closer encounter. The fence redesign has received great feedback from guests and the Giraffe Ambassadors who supervise their feeding experience. When we were there, a volunteer said that while staffing the station, she noticed Nigel leaning over trying to reach the lettuce pile and was delighted. Nigel and Zuri were carefully monitored following the renovation and have responded well.

NEW Zoo Curator of Animals, Drew Dinehart, said "[the change] makes such a big difference for our guests. Everyone has the chance now to get up-close and personal with the giraffes, and this change has been great for them, too. Zuri especially wasted no time in immediately lowering her head across the fence to explore and, of course, to ask for treats!"



UPCOMING EVENT

Demystifying the Grants Process and Finding DEAI Funding,
April 13, at 1:00 pm Pacific. [Register Here!](#)



EVALUATING EMPATHY

A major objective of the Zoological Society of Milwaukee's (ZSM) Capacity Building Grant was to increase their internal capacity for evaluation. In 2022, they hired Shanna Hillard as their new Evaluator and Empathy Project Coordinator to help integrate evaluation across programs and guide operations towards community-relevant empathy practices. Tools Shanna is creating will be used not only to measure empathetic responses to animals, but also for parents, teachers and staff to chart the growth of students' Social Emotional Learning skills.

She is also working on creating evaluative tools to measure guest interactions with taxidermy, biofacts and other conservation-themed interpretive items.

Throughout this project, ZSM has utilized a variety of evaluative methods, including: pre/post empathy workshop surveys, an observational study at their hippo habitat, cultural sensitivity training reports and listening session focus groups. The resulting data has impacted their work in a variety of ways, including informing next steps for integrating empathy zoo wide and using guests' interactions with signage and habitats to plan for future exhibits. Shanna says, "These evaluation tools have proved to be essential to our understanding of how guests perceive animal welfare, zoos in general and their own role in conservation".

ZSM has also formed local conservation-based networks, increased their community partnerships from 29 to 56, and reached nearly 2,000 individuals at community events! They've also had some unexpected evaluation questions emerge, including what impact empathy-focused interpretation has on empathic reactions to biofacts/taxidermy, and to what degree social media outreach can influence conservation efforts. They look forward to sharing what results from these questions!

WORKING GROUP SPOTLIGHT

This month we spotlight the Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI) Working Group, which strives to responsibly promote an inclusive environment within the Network and facilitate conversations that help Members feel supported to incorporate DEAI initiatives into their organizations. They will likely convert to a standing committee in the coming months, now that they have had an initial year to determine their group's mission and goals. The six Members are Fernanda Mora (ZooMontana), Shanna Hillard (Zoological Society of Milwaukee), Andrea Tronson (Roosevelt Park Zoo), Camoya Evans (Woodland Park Zoo), Adam Winegarten (Racine Zoo) and Crystal Fox (Lake Superior Zoo). As voiced by Andrea:

"DEAI can mean something different to everyone, but it means something, and we are striving to help everyone find their meaning and their voice in this journey."

Current projects include creating a document with DEAI terminology and language; finding a way to support/introduce DEAI concepts for those who work in more resistant communities or surroundings; and developing a rubric focused on DEAI adoption to complement the empathy rubric. The working group will announce the next steps toward kickstarting the terminology project later this month.



(From left to right) Members: Camoya, Adam, Fernanda, and Shanna at the Summit (missing Andrea and Crystal)

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MAY 2023



HURRAY FOR MAY!

Hopefully by now you have heard, but if not, it is our pleasure to announce that we have been given a one-year extension by our generous funder, so we will be able to award up to an additional \$1 million in Building Organizational Capacity to Foster Empathy for Wildlife grants for projects lasting up to one year and up to \$60,000. Applications will be due August 1 for projects starting January 2024. You can register for the webinar [here](#) on May 12 at 10 am Pacific.

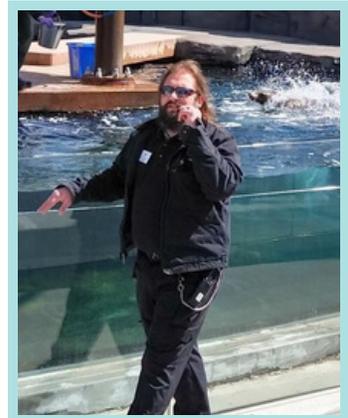
In other exciting news, the Conservation Action Working Group is proud to present a [Joint Pollinator Initiative Toolkit](#) to support you in promoting pollinators this spring! The toolkit includes potential signage for No Mow May which you can share with your audiences (a version with each Partner's logo was provided to your Network Representative). The QR code links to Zoological Society of Milwaukee's resource page, but feel free to replace the link to a QR code of your choosing (we can help replace that and/or adjust logos if needed).

And finally, thanks Jennifer Kleen (Roosevelt Park Zoo) for your years of service on the Communications Committee. We appreciate all your contributions in shaping the way we communicate within the Network!

COMO PARK ZOO AND CONSERVATORY

As part of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory's Tier 1 grant "ROADMAP to Empathy," they overhauled their delivery of guest engagement talks. Frank Kermes, Interpretive Specialist, was one of the staff trained in empathy-based visitor interaction strategies and worked to infuse empathy into guest programs. One great example was during his talk about the zoo's big cats; he explained why the cats need to sleep so much stating, "In the wild, they can't just go to a grocery store for food, they have to catch their prey and on average they are unsuccessful 90% of the time. So, it's like making 10 sandwiches, but having the first nine taken away right when you finish making them."

In an interview, Frank explained that the previous format was very natural history based and comments from guests were typically, "Thank you, very informational." With this new format, audience feedback is more nuanced. He hears more, "I never knew that before" or "I never thought of them in that way." The types of questions guests ask indicate more curiosity about behavior rather than basic facts like size, weight, diet. Frank said, "If they see an animal doing something during the talk that I don't bring up, they'll now ask afterwards. And sometimes that'll become part of a later talk." There has been some resistance to the pendulum swing toward anthropomorphism, but "a lot of our response to that is that we are now treating them as individuals, which also is a part of their care as well". In terms of advice, Frank said, "It can look daunting at first, but it doesn't require a complete overhaul of talks all at once. You can actually approach it in bite-size pieces."



UPCOMING EVENT

Learning Group: Using Empathy in the Human-Wildlife-Conflict Conversation, May 25 at 10:30 am PT. [Register here!](#)



EMPATHY IN FILM

The International Crane Foundation’s (ICF) new film, *Where Cranes Dance*, will inspire guests to take conservation action through the power of storytelling, beautiful imagery, and empathy when it premieres this month. This grant-funded project allowed ICF the opportunity to create something fresh, empathy-infused, and able to be updated in-house. It also allowed ICF to support artists across the globe, and build their capacity, by featuring content filmed by videographers in various countries. Hannah Jones, ICF’s Graphics and Video Production Specialist, highlighted a few exciting empathy tools used in the film: “Introducing our resident flock

members onscreen with 'nametags' like our staff, carrying the storyline of a crane chick in a marsh throughout the film, and using language such as 'wetland homes' and 'safe places to sleep' rather than habitat.” She also said that ICF’s involvement with the ACE for Wildlife Network allowed them to approach the film with a different lens and begin production with empathy in mind, which steered them away from dry scientific facts and instead towards having their “resident cranes tell the stories of their wild cousins.”

In addition, ICF has five new 4-minute films that will premiere throughout the year and be accessible at each exhibit. These films take a deeper dive into different projects and feature unique conservation actions related to each species. To evaluate these videos, ICF will implement an in-person and online post-film survey for guests to gauge takeaways and the film’s accessibility. They plan to continue these surveys throughout the season, make any necessary changes to the film, and then reevaluate changes.

When asked what advice she would give, Hannah said to work with external consultants, if possible: “They provided different perspectives, kept us on track with empathy practices, and helped us invest in digital storytelling to allow for another layer of accessibility and reach that we have already seen pay off.”

STEERING COMMITTEE SPOTLIGHT

This month, we are spotlighting the Steering Committee, which guides the overall structure and direction of the Network as well as our priorities and goals. Shana Kent from Alaska SeaLife Center is the 2023 committee chair, and members include Jess Thompson (Henry Vilas Zoo), Liz Hines (Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium), Hannah Tilden (Woodland Park Zoo), and Aszya Summers (Lincoln Park Zoo). At the Summit, Jess and Liz presented the first draft of the Empathy Adoption Self-Assessment Rubric for Network consideration and feedback. Since then, the committee has been hard at work, with guidance from Catalyze Evaluation and Mary Jackson at WPZ, reviewing and incorporating your feedback into a tool that better suits the diverse needs of the Network. As noted by Shana:

“The Steering Committee works to provide structure and support; the Empathy Adoption Self-Assessment Rubric is a tool for organizations and departments to use as a framework for analyzing and setting goals for both understanding and implementation of best practices for empathy infusion throughout institutions. Network collaboration has been key in development and will continue to be vital in the evolution and utilization of the rubric.”



From left to right: Jess, Hannah, and Liz (not pictured, Shana and Aszya)

If you are a Network Point of Contact, you should have received a copy of the [updated rubric](#) in your inbox with [instructions](#) from the empathy@zoo.org email address. If you have any questions about the rubric or instructions, please email us at empathy@zoo.org.

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JUNE 2023



Hopefully by now, you have had a chance to interact with Theo Bamberger (they/them), the Network Evaluation Specialist. They have been a fantastic addition to the team, bringing fresh insights to our work. You can connect with Theo at theo.bamberger@zoo.org with any of your empathy evaluation questions.

In May, the Network staff had wonderful visits to the Grizzly and Wolf Discover Center, Idaho Falls Zoo and Alaska SeaLife Center. The first two are featured in this issue and Alaska SeaLife will be highlighted next month. These three visits completed our Network Partner visits we started last year. Theo is now hard at work analyzing all the data collected and will be sharing out a report later this summer.

Thank you to all of you who held discussions on the Empathy Self-Assessment Rubric. The feedback has been incredibly helpful as we finalize this tool.

WILD WAGON: EMPATHY ANIMAL CART

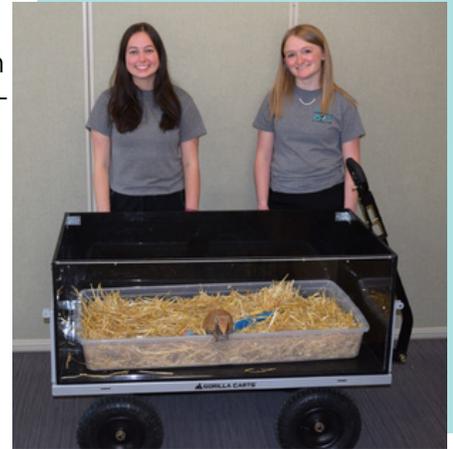
Idaho Falls Zoo (IFZ) currently employs two undergraduate interns, Bailey and Alyssa, who both study biology with an emphasis in zoology at Brigham Young University - Idaho. Bailey always knew she wanted to work at an AZA-accredited zoo, and Alyssa was drawn to this internship because she was excited to learn about empathy practices and contribute to research.

Over the past year, one of their tasks has been creating new animal ambassador carts, thanks to a Capacity Building Grant and their engagement with the ACE for Wildlife Network. Being able to display IFZ's ambassador animals in mobile carts allows their guests to view the animals demonstrating natural behaviors, helps transition away from the image of zoo animals as handheld pets, and helps education staff focus on empathy practices while highlighting the animals' individuality.

They have two carts, the Wild Wagon (pictured) and the Critter Cart. The Critter Cart is for animals whose habitats are terrariums or displayed up high. The Wild Wagon is a home away from home for many animals, including their armadillo Pickles (pictured).

When asked about the most unexpected thing they have learned through the internship experience, they both touched on the variety of possible roles at a zoo. Alyssa said: "I never thought I would be interested in zoo education, but I've learned that I'm passionate about teaching and creating lasting connections between people and animals." Bailey added, "I've fallen in love with research. This internship has shown me that there's so much that I can do for animals outside of animal care."

The interns added that others interested in this type of project should "be prepared for guests to be confused why you are displaying the animals in a new way that doesn't allow for them to touch the animals. These are great teaching opportunities!" They also encouraged Partners to take a chance on undergraduate interns: "We are capable of more than you think, plus we are fiercely committed to any task you give us." If you come to Idaho, be sure to visit. Perhaps you'll meet Alyssa, Bailey, and Pickles!





EMPATHY IN ACTION: KEEPER KIDS



During our visit to the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center (GWDC), we were able to participate in their Keeper Kids program. For just \$5 per child, kids ages 5 - 12 are able to help with enrichment for the bears, learn a little bit about animal keeping and learn a lot about bear behavior. Kids and families are encouraged to work through a 10-question scavenger hunt by exploring exhibits and signage, listening to naturalist presentations and asking questions of staff. When the program begins, naturalists cover the essentials of bear foraging behavior, how keepers encourage foraging for the bears at the GWDC and some simple rules for the program. Then the kids and keepers work together to hide food for the bears in the bear habitat (when the bears are not there).

After kids safely exit the habitat (with lots of double counting of kids), everyone gets to watch the bears find food in a natural way, while learning about the story of the bears they helped take care of. Naturalists emphasize the importance of securing food sources in residential and recreational areas, so other wild bears get to stay wild. The participants get to select a pin featuring a picture of one of the animals at the GWDC to take home and remember their experience.

The GWDC offers the program once per day in the winter, and twice per day throughout the summer, with as many as 30 kids per program. In 2022, 4,750 kids participated in the program. The GWDC has been running the program for nearly 20 years, and in recent years, many young adults who did the program as youth have brought kids of their own.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Round 2 Grant Webinar: Seattle Aquarium. "Marine Science Club: Building Empathy for Animals in Teens through Effective Instruction Techniques." June 20, 2023 10:00 AM Pacific. Register [here](#).

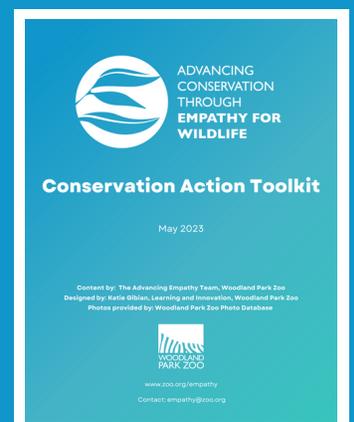
Round 2 Grants Webinar: Como Park Zoo & Conservatory. "Integrated Strategic Planning for Empathy Action" and "Empathy-Focused Volunteer Interpretation Project." June 26, 2023 12:30 PM Pacific. Register [here](#).

Seeking reviewers for **Round 4 Capacity Building Grants** by June 12, \$250 stipend. [Review guidelines and apply here](#).

CONSERVATION ACTION WORKING GROUP SPOTLIGHT

The Conservation Action Working Group is the newest of the Network Committees, but it has gotten straight to work. Members include Alanna Dassoff (ZooMontana), Kelsey Raffel (Como Park Zoo), Sunny Katseanes (Idaho Falls Zoo) and Toby Seegert (Zoological Society of Milwaukee). Melanie Michaels (Lake Superior Zoo) was a founding member but has accepted a job with the Timber Wolf Alliance. We wish her well!

The mission of the group is to share a common vision to promote Partner conservation missions and motivate visitors to take conservation action. In mid-May, they followed up the launch of the Joint Pollinators Initiative with the [Conservation Action Toolkit](#). Their next area of focus will be to engage in some Network conversations about the relationship between caring and conservation action as the goals of fostering empathy for wildlife. Stay tuned for an event this fall.



EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE

JULY 2023



Summer is in full swing, and we hope that all is going well. The exciting news we must share is that we are piloting the expansion of our Network to additional zoos and aquariums this fall! We have offered this opportunity to our Affiliates that work at U.S.-based AZA accredited zoos and aquariums with support from the Membership Committee. We then look forward to launching a more open process to AZA accredited organizations in 2024.

In other news, initial results from our site visits are in. The Advancing Empathy team completed a total of 1,481 observations—833 signs, 552 visitors, 57 presenters and 39 presentation audiences! As you can imagine, there is a lot to analyze so stay tuned for more information later this summer.

NEW NETWORK RESOURCES

[Network Welcome Guide](#) created by the Communications Committee: A one-stop-shop reference document for how to utilize the website, discussion board and other Network resources.

[How to Start a DEAI Committee at your Zoo or Aquarium](#) document by the DEAI Working Group: Key takeaways and advice from last year's event. Our hope is that the contents of this document will help folks kickstart the creation of DEAI committees at their organization if one is not already in place.

EMPATHY AND INCLUSION: BUG CART

Accompanying the remodel of Bug World and the launch of a temporary exhibit, A Bug's Eye View, Woodland Park Zoo (WPZ) staff recently designed a [highly interactive bug cart](#) utilizing universal design for learning principles to improve access for all staff, volunteers and guests. Funded by an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant called the Guest Inclusion Project, the cart was built on site with staff from multiple teams including Volunteer Engagement, Guest Engagement, Exhibits, as well as our docent leadership. Alexander Jones, WPZ Inclusion Specialist, noted, "This cart provides guests and volunteers with a more accessible experience. Guests can utilize multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression."

Features include: a tow hitch and brake allowing volunteers and staff to tow the cart with a mobility device and secure it with a hand assisted brake; large solid rubber casters that improve movability; a mount for large print signage or an interactive tablet; plexiglass borders and a lower supplemental platform to help guests at all heights see what is on display; and sliding rails that allow for updating graphics for use with multiple programs. Docents love the inclusivity of the cart and are making great use of these added features. If you would like to learn more, you can [contact Alexander directly!](#)





PROVIDING EXPERIENCES: THE AVIARY

The Alaska Sealife Center (ASLC) has been a Seward mainstay for over 25 years. One unique habitat is their immersive, open-air seabird aviary, which feels like an extension of the surrounding environment. You see different colors, sounds and species, and observe the behaviors and personalities that emerge. The puffins' very strong pair bonds lead to what ASLC's Avian Curator, Kristen Pelo, calls "the soap opera of the aviary." One male horned puffin, Rain, found a yearslong mate in Copper, but he wasn't the best partner. He'd help incubate, but when it came to raising chicks, Copper did most of the work. When they'd court, he'd get lazy about it. This summer, Copper finally picked another mate.

Thankfully, Rain has now bonded with another bird, and seems to be doing better exploring new burrows and romancing a partner again. Keepers and guests love his story because it's relatable and "a fun little story to tell."

The blending of facts and stories also helps connect out-of-town guests with the greater Alaskan ecosystem. Kristen sees the story of seabird migration as a unique opportunity to continue that conversation: "A lot of waterfowl species that we have [in Alaska], people can find in their backyard throughout North America. Telling that ecosystem story, and utilizing facts and individual stories, can help keep people connected to Alaska and the Arctic when they're not present."

While relatively new to the Network, Kristen has always been excited about using empathy as a tool. However, "Not everybody is ready to jump in. I think that's where the Network is a really valuable tool. There's a reason we're on this journey together, and there is fact-based evidence that empathy is an important piece of trying to connect people to the world around them." Kristen says that for her, empathy comes down to storytelling: "It's not so much trying to anthropomorphize the animals...it's [moving from] fact-based, 'Here's your information,' to, 'Here's the story of this animal and how they exist in their world and in their environment.' You can go as shallow or as deep as you want with that."

MINDFUL ZOO, MINDFUL YOU

Autumn Russell is the Senior Director of Education and Communication at Akron Zoo and an ACE for Wildlife Network Affiliate. In 2019, she partnered with Heart-to-Heart Leadership, a local organization who offers leadership training through mindful practices. They co-developed a program called "Mindful Zoo, Mindful You" for community leaders that integrates mindfulness, leadership, resiliency and well-being through the lens of animals.

Leaders often face challenges where they think they must react immediately. However, if they take a moment to recognize their feelings and slow down, they can start to lead with more compassion. One activity involves two animal encounters that demonstrate the power of slowing down to increase compassion. First, they start with a visit with a "cute" animal. Folks write down their thoughts and feelings, which are generally positive. Then, Autumn brings out a tarantula. Saying nothing, she walks around the room while the audience jots down how they are feeling. As expected, most reactions are visceral, negative and fearful. At that point, Autumn uses the framing practice to tell Ocho the tarantula's story, share her preferences and her nature. The group notes their feelings again, which often have changed significantly. "When I started, I knew all tarantulas bite and jump, now I realize I didn't know anything." Autumn encourages participants to think about a co-worker who they may struggle with. What assumptions might they be making? What about understanding that co-worker's story might change how they react and feel? Then they visualize interacting with that individual, noticing how they feel, what they are telling themselves and how they can reframe those thoughts. It's great to highlight how fostering empathy for animals can translate to empathy for people, while providing a different way for the community to think about the role of zoos in their lives.



If you would like to learn more about this program or discuss mindfulness and empathy, you can [email Autumn](mailto:empathy@zoo.org) or hear her talk at the AZA Conference in Columbus.

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE
AUGUST 2023



Summer is more than halfway over and it's time to gear up for AZA! This year, the ACE for Wildlife Network will have a booth in the Exhibit Hall in addition to panel presentations featuring Network Members and Affiliates. At our booth, attendees can learn about who we are and what we do as a Network – and if they're interested, individuals can join as an Affiliate on the spot! Do you have handouts, literature reviews, fact sheets, etc., that you want to share with a wider audience? Let us know at empathy@zoo.org and we will happily share them at our booth!

Are you going to be at AZA and want to connect with other Members and Affiliates? Add your phone number to [this Google Sheet](#) so we can make a conference group chat. We did this at AZA last year and it is back by popular demand!

If you're interested in attending a presentation that highlights the work of your fellow Members and Affiliates, we encourage you to attend either of the following sessions:

Sunday, September 10 @ 3:00-4:30 pm

Using Empathy to Inform your Conservation Mission: ACE for Wildlife Network Info Session

In this pre-conference session, we will provide attendees with an entry level foundation of what it means to foster empathy in a zoo or aquarium setting, introduce the Network, and provide resources to further their engagement with empathy practices and the Network as a whole.

Presenters: Tierney Ball, Emily Bernhardt, Isabelle Bieser, Marta Burnet & Brooke Tucker

Wednesday, September 13 @ 2:00-3:30 pm Exploring Empathy (it's not just for Education)

With an introduction to empathy practices, this interactive session explores how to incorporate empathy building skills across departments, within diverse staff groups, and on an individual level. This session will help lessen the cognitive load for integrating empathy techniques into programs, empower staff to better engage visitors and practice tools for self-care and empathy on an introspective level.

Panelists: Marta Burnet, Austin Reich, Kelsey Raffel, Daniel Rother, Autumn Russell & Sarah Bowser

EMPATHY IN ACTION: AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Tacoma Public Schools' Beyond the Bell afterschool program provides elementary school students from 36 schools (plus one online school) access to various cultural, artistic, recreational and science-based programs. When Beyond the Bell looked to expand their STEM-related offerings, they tapped Northwest Trek Wildlife Park to put together 16 75-minute episodes. The episodes connect kids to local wildlife they may see at Northwest Trek, in wilderness areas of Washington state, and in Tacoma, while integrating empathy for wildlife and leveraging the power of their online Wildlife Academy and Naturalists like Nicole Hennigan.





Craig Standridge, Northwest Trek's Nature Engagement Curator, is excited to see the program begin and for "the next generation of wildlife champions" to learn about Northwest Trek's mission of empathy, environmental education and connection to nature. Twice a week for eight weeks, students watch a pre-recorded episode with a classroom facilitator. The facilitator will email students' questions to the team at Northwest Trek, who will respond in a video to be shown the following week. The final episode, "Ask a Trexpert" will be a live, interactive broadcast from the studio, where kids can ask questions, interact with staff, and share what they've learned.

Craig's years long involvement with empathy work and the ACE for Wildlife Network "influences every single thing that we do... [using empathy] in a program like Beyond the Bell is a great connection point. It's easy to integrate because [the schools] have a huge focus on social emotional learning. Being able to incorporate that and extend it to wildlife and wild places is just a perfect, natural fit."

In working with an external partner, Craig encourages other institutions to ensure they're using an empathy lens to truly fulfill the needs of the community: "It's harder work because it takes more time to develop...but I think that [it] leads to sustainability, value, and impact." Integrating empathy programming into Beyond the Bell, with the potential to reach thousands of students, is "a win-win for everyone."

OBSERVING EMPATHY THROUGH NON-SPEAKING CUES



When Minnesota Zoo returned to offsite programs, they shifted their Zoomobile program to focus on communities with barriers coming to the zoo, such as those in hospitals, homes for seniors in memory care or for adults with disabilities within a 90-mile radius of the zoo. Programs are free at cost for these groups.

Funded by a capacity building grant, this revamp project started by looking at existing empathy tools. As noted by Liz Gilles, Education Curator at Minnesota Zoo, "So far, the tools are almost all based on documenting what guests say, which does not always make sense with these groups. Many may not be speaking, so how do we know if we are connecting?" They worked with Sara Konrath, Associate Professor of Philanthropic Studies and Director of the Interdisciplinary Program on Empathy and Altruism Research at Indiana University, who had supported their culturally responsive empathy grant. Dr. Konrath did a deep dive into empathy for humans and helped Minnesota Zoo develop a checklist of non-verbal cues that demonstrate lack of and increased empathy. "This [checklist] has been so important to our learning as we reach out to audiences who communicate in different ways."

In addition, the Minnesota Zoo partnered with the Alzheimer's Foundation for training on the best practices for interacting with individuals with dementia and Alzheimer's. Recommendations included providing a visual schedule and pictures of the animal with his/her name, so guests know what is coming. They also suggested engaging all five senses and repeating very specific instructions. Zoo staff also received training from the Autism Society of Minnesota and a blind/vision loss group to enhance their understanding of working with these communities.

Liz was a bit skeptical at first, "Would we really be able to use [the checklist] and be able to tell how they were reacting? It turns out you can see very easily. People provide tons of clues, like crossing their arms, looking away, or putting out their hand to stop on the negative side and even mirroring the movements of the animal or naturalist on the positive side." Now they are in the data collection phase, refining their checklist to determine what is most important. Later this month, they'll analyze the data and share their results with the Network this fall.

"It feels right to be looking at this. We had been concentrating on curiosity and question asking but were missing the richness of folks who weren't able to engage in that way." Liz encourages others interested in working with these audiences to slow down, utilize all five senses, pay attention to body language, and try to figure out different ways to get reactions." For more information or to see the draft checklist, you are welcome to reach out to Liz over email or attend the webinar on the project later this fall.



EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE
SEPTEMBER 2023



Happy September, everyone! It is our pleasure to announce the newest addition to our team, Sarah Pancioli. She is our new Advancing Empathy Coordinator, supporting the work of our grants, network and evaluation specialists. She received her bachelor's in marine biology from the University of Washington and then worked as an Environmental Educator, where she discovered her passion for connecting people to nature, and motivating communities to become environmental stewards. She is also a volunteer at the Seattle Aquarium!

The Advancing Empathy team has also begun to work with web designers to help us upgrade the ACE for Wildlife website. We should have a new website in place by December. Stay tuned for opportunities to provide feedback on design and user testing.

Are you going to be at AZA and want to connect with other Members and Affiliates? Add your phone number to [this Google Sheet](#) so we can have a conference group chat. Also, make sure to [RSVP](#) for our Network dinner at Goodwood Brewing & Spirits on Sept. 10th.

Upcoming Events

September 27th @ 11:00a-12:00p PST: We're on the same side: How to talk to those who are anti-zoo

Controversial opinion: anyone who is anti-zoo is on the same "side" as zoo professionals. Find out why, and let's build some empathy for these individuals and discuss how to redirect their empathy for animals in a more positive way. Presented by Aszya Summers, ACE for Wildlife Steering Committee member.

October 11th @ 10:00a-12:30p PST: Fall All-Network meeting

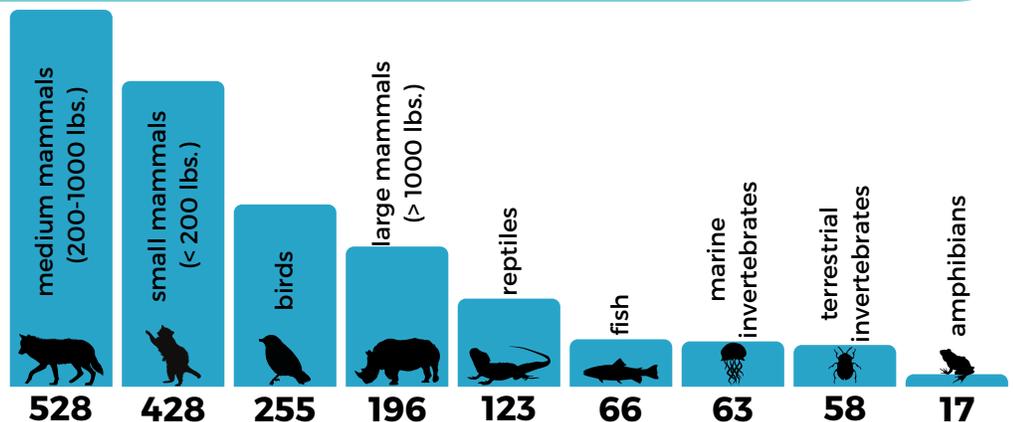
Join us for our annual fall Network meeting! This is a great chance to engage in learnings from Network Members, Affiliates and hear from our guest speaker, Curtis Bennett, Director of Equity & Community Engagement at the National Aquarium.

October 11th @ 3:00-4:00p PST: Trivia hour

Join fellow Network Members and Affiliates for some friendly competition in our post-meeting trivia hour!

SITE VISIT DATA SNAPSHOT

Which animals did the
Advancing Empathy team's
1,481 observations include?





AFFILIATE SPOTLIGHT



Chris Berg is an ACE for Wildlife Affiliate and educator at Shedd Aquarium in Chicago. He also serves on our Membership Committee, helping to bring the Affiliate perspective to expansion and membership discussions. He first learned about empathy work in 2020 as the AmeriCorps Ambassador Animal Programs Coordinator at Racine Zoo, where his team created, delivered and evaluated the [Empathy Explorers Program](#) by an ACE for Wildlife pilot grant. Chris has been an enthusiastic supporter ever since: “Educating through empathy allows people to see wildlife through a new lens. As we continue to reach out to new audiences, empathy is a crucial tool in helping people find meaning in the natural world.”

In his free time, he is pursuing a master’s degree through Project Dragonfly. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he focused on a recent inquiry project—“The Effects of Individualizing Animals on Conservation

Action.” While the research did take place at Shedd Aquarium, the project was unaffiliated with the organization. His research investigated the correlation between conservation action and individualization by comparing the number of petitions signed for the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act when guests were prompted using either individual names, “...to help turtles like Nickel”, or species name, “...to help green sea turtles.” The study found that individualizing the subject animal led to guests taking direct conservation action by signing a petition. However, when stating the animal’s name was the only empathy technique used, the results did not show a significant difference between using a common or individual name. The lack of difference may be because the study focused on a charismatic megafauna species (green sea turtles) and a well-known individual animal (Nickel the turtle’s personal rescue story is popular with guests), had a small sample size (n=35), and/or perhaps demonstrated the need to use a broader range of effective empathy practices than just mentioning an animal’s name. For more information about this research project, you can contact [Chris via email](#).

DAKOTA ZOO



Dakota Zoo’s dedication towards creating more empathy-based programming led to their new weeklong Conservation Camp for 8-12-year-olds. Their previous iteration, Junior Zookeeper Camp, invited campers to experience a day in the life of a zookeeper. Although that model was successful, they felt that it did not do enough to foster empathy for animals or educate about the natural world. With Capacity Building Grant funding, they revamped their camp program to focus on their animals and how campers can contribute to conservation efforts. These new camps include more personal encounters with animals, conservation-focused messaging, and an emphasis on creating defining moments that stick with campers.

Brent Weston, Dakota Zoo’s Education and Volunteer Coordinator, says that it’s easy to forget how exciting animal interactions can be when you’re around animals every day, “but something as simple as letting a camper feed a carrot to one of our horses will make their whole week, which is a great reminder of how awesome this job is.”

Brent says that attending the Network’s 2023 Empathy Summit was a defining factor in moving their empathy work forward: “Just about every idea we implemented into this new camp came from what we learned at the Summit. It went further than the program creation, it changed how we interacted with the kids in the camp and with guests during spontaneous interactions. There is no doubt that being a part of this Network has helped build empathy for animals among our guests.”

Brent encourages Network Members to reach out to others for advice or with questions, as Dakota Zoo could not have created this program without other Members’ insights and ideas. Evaluations done for their new camp have shown that campers who attended both iterations of camp preferred this summer’s Conservation Camp. So, not only is Dakota Zoo building empathy for animals and encouraging conservation action, but they feel confident that they’re also providing a really fun experience!

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE

OCTOBER 2023



Greetings to you with this lovely start to October, arguably the best month of the year! Celebrating bats, carving pumpkins, crunching leaves under your feet and sneaking my kids' candy. What more do you need?

It was great seeing so many of you last month at AZA's annual conference. Thanks to those who worked the booth and presented on empathy topics. We talked to tons of people about the Network and already have 37 new Affiliates! And congrats to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium for their Significant Achievement in Volunteer Engagement for their Underwater Connections - Volunteer Dive Team.

Finally, have any new training resources to share? The Strategic Learning Committee welcomes any resources and tools to be included in the 2024 edition of the [Empathy Training Toolkit](#). If you have any additions or questions, please send them to empathy@zoo.org by **Friday, October 27**.

Upcoming Events

October 11 @ 10:00 am - 12:30 pm PST: Fall All-Network meeting

Join us for our annual fall Network meeting! This is a great chance to engage in learnings from Network Members, Affiliates and hear from our guest speaker, Curtis Bennett, Director of Equity & Community Engagement at the National Aquarium.

October 11 @ 3:00 - 4:00 pm PST: Trivia hour

Join fellow Network Members and Affiliates for some friendly competition in our post-meeting trivia hour!

October 24 @ 11:00am - 12:00 pm PST: Climate anxiety article discussion

Led by Isabelle Bieser, Manager of Innovation & Community Engagement at the Zoological Society of Milwaukee and a member of the ACE for Wildlife Strategic Learning Committee, join us for a discussion around Sarah Jaquette Ray's article, "[Climate Anxiety is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon](#)"

October 30 @ 10:00 - 11:00 am PST: Integrating accessibility into your organization: Getting started, with Elizabeth Ralston, Part 1

This presentation examines barriers to accessibility and how efforts get sidetracked by the assumptions, stereotypes, and mindsets we have about whom we are addressing. We will talk through practical, simple ways to integrate accessibility practices into your everyday work. To learn more about Elizabeth and her work, [click here](#).

October 31 @ 10:00 - 10:30 am PST: Integrating accessibility into your organization: Getting started, with Elizabeth Ralston, Part 2

This is a conversational follow-up with Elizabeth to Part 1.



BRIDGING THE LANGUAGE DIVIDE

In today's globalized world, fostering empathy and understanding across diverse cultures and languages is more important than ever. This is especially true when it comes to conservation efforts, where connection is the key to action. Red River Zoo is excited to share a project that seeks to bridge the language barrier and bring vital information to a broader audience, thus advancing empathy and encouraging conservation action.

Over the past year, their team has been diligently working on a project that will enhance the visitor experience at their institution. They have created apps featuring QR codes that will be placed alongside exhibit signs. When scanned, these QR codes will provide translations of the information on those signs into multiple languages, including Spanish, French, German, Arabic, Swahili and Nepalese. Why these languages, you might wonder? Their choice was based on careful consideration of

the demographics in their community. They believe that every visitor should have the opportunity to understand and connect with the animals, their habitats and their needs, regardless of the language they speak.

The language barrier within Red River Zoo has long been a challenge, hindering many visitors from fully engaging with the valuable information they offer. This project builds upon a year of dedicated work, creating apps for each exhibit sign with translations into the selected languages. These languages were chosen in collaboration with Cultural Diversity Resource, ensuring Red River Zoo reaches those who need it most. The success of this project has been measured by the number of exhibits that have scannable QR codes accessible to the public after undergoing translation. Just over 70 percent of their exhibits now have these translations available.

DEEPENING EMPATHY PRACTICES WITH INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES



In Round 3 of the Building Capacity grants, Lake Superior Zoo was awarded a grant for a Community of Practice (CoP). Guided by the Natural Curiosity: Four Branches and Indigenous Lenses professional learning program and an Indigenous mentor, Thelma Nayquonabe, they engaged a cohort of early childhood professionals in the co-creation of practices that weave empathy with wildlife and people into their programming, deepened by Indigenous perspectives. Next month, they will be sharing their learnings with the Network through a toolkit and recommendations to inspire others to create meaningful professional learning around empathy in their context. For now,

here is a personal story from one of the participants:

"In the winter, we're kind of the only ones in the woods, and it's easy to yell and be super loud... But as the leaves started to come in, and the birds started to come in this spring, the children's volume started to bother me. And from our time together [in the CoP], I started realizing that the other beings in the forest are probably bothered by their sound too. So I started talking about the work that the birds have to do and the way that they need to communicate with each other and that this is their forest as much as our forest. And so it's been really neat to watch how the children have responded to this idea that the bird calls need space..."

Today we were in the white pines playing...the children were so excited to be there, they were very loud. And my co-teacher brought everyone together and said, 'I can't hear the Ovenbird anymore. When it was here, it was calling out 'Teacher, Teacher, Teacher,' and I love to hear it because it's singing my work, and I can't hear it, it stopped talking.' And the children started getting quieter and quieter. And then we could hear the bird call again...these teachings have kind of gone through the filter of what we are doing and starting to come out in lessons that are connected to this learning."

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE

NOVEMBER 2023



November is upon us and there is a ton to share! We have awarded another \$1 million in grants in Round 4 and the Steering Committee officially launched the self-assessment rubric tool to help organizations determine their progress in empathy implementation (see page 2 for more information about both). The DEAI Committee has created an [Inclusive Conservation Resource List](#) that we hope will help provide Network Members and Affiliates with tools to learn both individually and collectively to advance their organization's conservation mission through a more holistic lens. This list includes books, podcasts, documentaries and links to other resources.

We want to be able to remove monetary barriers to promote Network Member engagement with these resources, so we are offering each ACE for Wildlife Network Partner a one-time reimbursement of up to \$250 to purchase books from this list to further your zoo's or aquarium's conservation mission and staff learning. You can find [instructions for the resource reimbursement here](#). Please submit requests by December 31, 2023.

If you haven't already, please complete the [Network Member Survey](#) by **November 8**. Optional raffle for \$50 for eight lucky submissions!

Upcoming Events

November 8 @ 12:45 pm - 2 pm PST: Capacity Building Grant Presentations: Racine Zoo

Racine Zoo will present on their projects: "Increasing Capacity for Choice and Control in Ambassador Animals," "Becoming Bear - Bear Burrow Interpretive Exhibit," and "Advancing Empathy-Focused Animal Behavioral Programming."

November 14 @ 1:30 pm - 2:30 pm PST: Learning Group: What's in a Name? Caring vs. Conservation Action

Bekah Hanes, who worked at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory as their Learning Experiences Coordinator, will explain a Theory of Change that led them to differentiate between conservation actions and caring actions, including defining characteristics and how (and to what extent) empathy-based programming can influence these types of behavioral change. Afterward, we hope to open up a productive conversation around this Theory of Change. This event was coordinated by the ACE for Wildlife Network Conservation Action Committee.

November 17 @ 11:30 am - 12:30 pm PST: Capacity Building Grant Presentation: Northwest Trek Wildlife Park and Lake Superior Zoo

Northwest Trek will present on their project, "Discovery Tram Tour: A Vehicle for Increasing Empathy Outcomes," and Lake Superior Zoo will present on their project, "Deepening Empathy Practices with Indigenous Perspectives through a Community of Practice Approach."

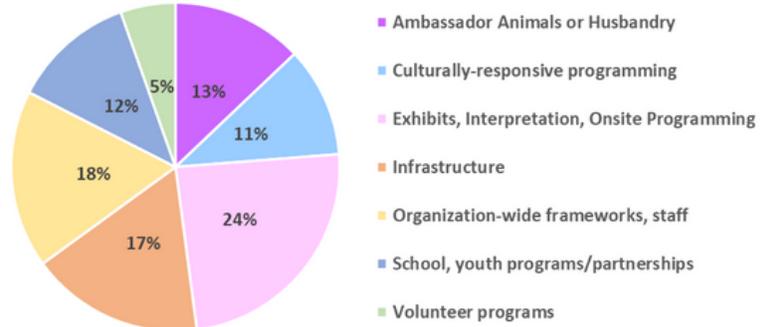


CAPACITY BUILDING GRANTS: ROUND 4

We are thrilled to share that we have funded 18 projects in the fourth round of our Building Organizational Capacity to Foster Empathy for Wildlife Grant Program! This was our largest and most competitive funding round yet. We received 40% more proposals this round than in Round 3, and this round's total request for funding exceeded our funding capabilities by almost 20%. This meant making some difficult decisions, but we are proud to have funded 14 organizations' projects.

Many Round 4 projects will build on work that began during prior rounds of Capacity Building Grants, which shows the progression of empathy initiatives at our Partners and within the broader Network. Some projects to look forward to include those: creating new empathy-focused curriculum guides and guided tours for school groups, refurbishing and expanding play spaces that incorporate empathy, developing best practices for biofacts use to increase empathy and conservation action, incorporating Indigenous perspectives into a Partner's culture via a fellowship program and more! We can't wait to see how these exciting projects will add to our grant program's already impressive body of work.

Program Area Percentages: R1 - R3



Speaking of our grantees' amazing work, don't forget to tune into the many upcoming Round 1-3 final presentations! You can register for those on page one of the newsletter. All presentations will be recorded and sent to registrants, so please register even if you are not sure if you can attend live.

Round 4 grantees will begin their funded work in January 2024. You can learn more and see which Partners were funded by reading [the Round 4 Press Release](#). Do you have any questions, or want to connect with any of the project teams? If so, reach out to Sydney Dratel, Grants Specialist at Woodland Park Zoo, at sydney.dratel@zoo.org.

EMPATHY ADOPTION SELF ASSESSMENT RUBRIC



The ACE for Wildlife Network Empathy Self-Assessment Rubric, developed by the Steering Committee, is a tool that organizations can use to reflect on the progress of their organizational empathy infusion. Created within a growth mindset, the goal of this tool is to provide individuals and organizations with a framework to support internal, reflective discussions amongst teams to better understand areas of progress and areas for improvement. This document includes all appropriate feedback gathered from Network Members and Affiliates during our 2023 Empathy Summit in February. We hope that this tool will help enhance our collective

understanding of how empathy practices are currently implemented throughout our Network. While this tool was developed for Network Partners, the content within the rubric can still be helpful to Affiliates interested in tracking empathy infusion at their organizations.

The Steering Committee recommends utilizing the rubric annually, or before and after a significant organizational change. Any time an organization utilizes the rubric, it would be incredibly helpful if the reflections could be submitted via the Google Form linked at the end of the document. You can start submitting reflections right away and any 2023 reflections should be submitted by December 31, 2023. Submitting these reflections will help us all understand the Network's collective impact. However, sharing back reflections is not required. The content within, and results from using, this rubric should not be used to assess other zoos and aquariums within the Network and will not be used to determine Capacity Building Grant funding allocations.

If you have any questions for the Network Support Staff or Steering Committee about this tool, please email us at empathy@zoo.org.

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE

DECEMBER 2023



Happy holidays everyone! We hope that you have been able to make use of the [World Wildlife Conservation Day Joint Toolkit](#) and the [Greenwashing](#) supporting resource. Our new website will be coming soon! If you would like to be a part of the pilot testing process, email empathy@zoo.org for more information. The deadline to submit feedback is **December 15**.

And don't forget to save the date for our 2024 Virtual Empathy Summit on February 6 and 7: [register now](#). We will also be hosting a general empathy information and Network orientation session on January 30 for those newer to the Network or those who would like a refresher: [register here](#).

Starting January 2024, we will utilize a new [ACE for Wildlife Network Outcome Map](#) to measure the progress we as a community are making toward a set of shared goals. The Outcome Map was developed through a collaborative process beginning at the 2022 Empathy Summit during which attendees identified the focal audiences and relevant progress markers for each. Since then, Woodland Park Zoo's Advancing Empathy (AE) staff have reviewed these audiences and progress markers and synthesized them into five overarching outcome areas: Perception of Empathy, Perception of Network, Personal & Organizational Practices, Network Participation & Contribution, and Expanding the Network & the Use of Empathy. In addition, we developed a thorough monitoring plan detailing how we plan to track progress toward these outcomes using new and existing data sources. Stay tuned for more information coming early next year. If you have any questions in the meantime, please contact

Upcoming Events

December 12 @ 12:45 - 2 pm PST: Round 3 Capacity Building Grant Presentations: Como Park Zoo, Red River Zoo and ZooMontana

Red River Zoo will present on their project, "Fostering Empathy through Enriched Experiences," Como Park Zoo & Conservatory will present on their project, "Wolves & Large Cat Outdoor Signage Upgrades," and ZooMontana will present on their project, "Caring for Our Care Staff."

January 12 @ 1 pm PST: Learning Group – Influencing Factors of Exotic Pet Ownership Literature Review Discussion

Do close interactions with animals during animal encounters, does seeing staff interact with animals during programs, or does the use of effective empathy practices influence guests to engage in the exotic pet trade? Dr. Jeffrey Skibins from East Carolina University will discuss the takeaways from his recent literature review that parses this question, the drivers of the exotic pet trade, and how zoos and aquariums can promote responsible pet ownership.

January 30 @ 11:30am - 12:30 pm PST: Empathy Summit Pre-Session: Introduction to Empathy and the ACE for Wildlife Network

If the 2024 Empathy Summit is your first ACE for Wildlife Network event, if you're new to the Network or just want a refresher and a time to chat with fellow conservation professionals, this is for you! In this hour, we will give a brief overview of what empathy means, what it can look like in practice in a zoo or aquarium setting, and the role of the ACE for Wildlife Network in this work. We'll talk about ways to get involved with the Network, where to find foundational resources and have time for discussion, questions and connection.



ADVICE FOR FINDING DEAI GRANT FUNDING

The work of the ACE for Wildlife Network's Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI) Committee, alongside DEAI efforts we have seen through the Capacity Building Grant Program, show that empathy and DEAI work can (and should) go hand in hand. However, as we all know, securing funding can be a big barrier to getting a project started. Shifting our mindset and understanding that equity should not be a siloed goal can help us approach this issue; funding for DEAI initiatives can be as expansive as professional development, training or even general operating support. Introducing a more holistic approach may also help incorporate DEAI initiatives more deeply across and within your institution. As many folks within the Network have expressed, when you work in an entry or mid-level position, it can be difficult to implement a new initiative. Finding broader grants can help elevate DEAI projects and initiatives to more of a priority while supporting additional work at your zoo or aquarium.

Grant research software can make a big difference in narrowing down opportunities. Consider purchasing a deeply discounted GrantStation membership on [TechSoup](#); if it helps you find just one new source of funding, its worth exceeds its price. No money in the budget for a purchase? Subscribe to [GrantStation's newsletter](#), which often includes funding opportunities, and access Foundation Directory Online for free through a public library (ask your local librarian!). Instrumentl also offers a free [diversity grant guide](#) to get you started.

Another great resource, which was shared in April's Grants and DEAI Learning Group, is this compilation of [seven DEI-focused toolkits](#) from Training Resources for the Environmental Community. Hopefully, these resources can help you move further along in your DEAI journey and support the amazing work you're doing at your institutions.



INFLUENCING FACTORS OF EXOTIC PET OWNERSHIP LITERATURE REVIEW



Fierca is a Canada lynx who lives at ZooMontana. Before her time living at the zoo, Fierca was a privately owned pet and is very people-oriented as a result.

As zoo and aquarium professionals, we are always mindful of the kind of impressions we leave on our guests. One of the impressions we're careful to avoid is that any of the animals we care for would make good pets. However, do close interactions with animals during animal encounters, does seeing staff interact with animals during programs, or does using effective empathy practices influence guests to engage in the exotic pet trade? To attempt to answer this question, we worked with Dr. Jeffrey Skibins and his research assistant Kelly White-Singleton from East Carolina University to delve into the research on the subject.

Defining an exotic pet as any personally owned animal, either native or non-native, that is not traditionally domesticated (e.g., cat, dog, equids), his literature review synthesizes relevant literature and outlines existing research on factors that have been shown to be relevant to exotic pet ownership. The reviewed literature provides empirical support for attitudes toward animals, sociocultural factors, and media impact as primary drivers of desirability of exotic pet ownership. The literature does not support a correlation between zoo patronage and increased motivation for exotic pet ownership. This study also identified a gap in the literature regarding how zoos can seek to proactively reduce the desire for exotic pets through interpretation. **[Review Here.](#)**



NEW PARTNER INFORMATION

We are excited to welcome our seven new Network Partners! They have helped us to pilot a process to expand the Network. As new Partners, they have organizational voting rights, and their staff are eligible to be Network Members. Please join us in welcoming these new, amazing organizations into the Network! Starting in January 2024, any U.S. based, AZA-accredited zoo or aquarium can apply to be a Network Partner on our new website.



Akron Zoo

Location: Akron, Ohio

Primary Contact: Autumn Russell, Sr. Director of Communication & Education

Secondary Contact: Todd Boerner, Engagement Supervisor



Alexandria Zoo

Location: Alexandria, Louisiana

Primary Contact: Catie Hirsh, Curator of Education

Secondary Contact: Max Lakes, Director



IOWA'S WILDEST ADVENTURE

Blank Park Zoo

Location: Des Moines, Iowa

Primary Contact: Christine Eckles, Chief Engagement Officer

Secondary Contact: Jessica Schellhorn, Education Manager



OAKLAND ZOO

Conservation Society of California, Oakland Zoo

Location: Oakland, California

Primary Contact: Wilson Sherman, Program Manager, Community Engagement & Belonging

Secondary Contact: Sarah Bowser, Program Manager of Ambassador Animal Programs



Jacksonville Zoo

Location: Jacksonville, Florida

Primary Contact: Sharon Spencer, Adult Education Specialist

Secondary Contact: Leanne White, Director of Learning and Conservation Engagement



San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance

Location: San Diego, California

Primary Contact: Lisa Biasillo, VP of Education

Secondary Contact: Stephanie Alexander, VP of Education



Utah's Hogle Zoo

Location: Salt Lake City, Utah

Primary Contact: Natalie Stier, School Outreach Coordinator

Secondary Contact: Chris Schmitz, Director of Education