

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE

JANUARY 2024



Happy New Year everyone! A new year brings all sorts of changes and that is true of our Network as well. Our new website is LIVE. A huge thank you to the Communications Committee for their guidance during this process and hours of work by Emily Bernhardt to get the content just right. I am sure you will find it much more intuitive to use. Check it out at [our original website address](#).

Thank you to our 18 grantees who have presented on their projects. It has been great to see the results and impacts of projects ranging from imaginative play spaces to exhibit overhauls to school partnerships. [You can watch presentations here](#) and find grant resources on our website. Stay tuned for more presentations in 2024, including Lake Superior Zoo presenting at the Virtual Summit.

The Advancing Empathy team is also piloting a new empathy training tool called the Empathy Wheel for use at our zoo. It is available in the website resource library if you want to check it out. It places individual learning about zoo animals at the core of our model, which we have found to be a precursor for fostering empathy with guests.

If you haven't already, please respond to [our Social Network Analysis survey](#) by January 12. As we work on our next proposal to our funder, it is crucial for us to understand how we can better connect Network participants, maximize information pathways to disperse tools and resources more effectively, and inform decisions about future Network composition and coordination. Best wishes for an exciting year ahead!

Upcoming Events

January 30 @ 11:30 am - 12:30 pm PST: Empathy Summit Pre-session

This session will be a great opportunity to learn about what empathy means in a zoo and an aquarium setting, the role the Network plays in this work, and a chance to meet other changemakers in this professional community!

February 6 and 7 @ 9 am - 12:30 pm PST: Virtual Empathy Summit

Our 2024 Virtual Empathy Summit is right around the corner! Check out the Featured Event Banner of our website to learn more details about the event.

February 20 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm PST: AZA Empathy Project Panel(s) Brainstorm

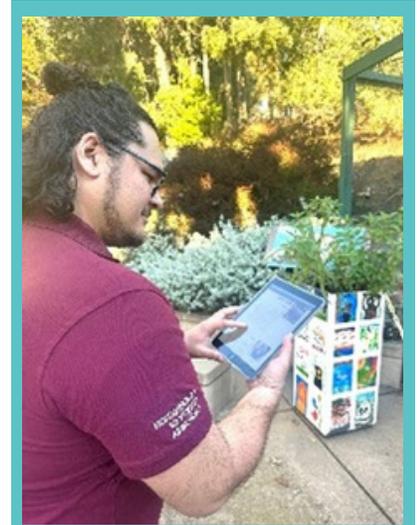
Do you have an empathy related topic that you would love to present at the 2024 AZA Conference? Join other interested individuals in the Network to brainstorm ideas for panels and get the ball rolling on panel proposals. We will be offering \$2,000 scholarships for presenters on empathy content to help cover the costs of attending. Hope to see you there!



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: OAKLAND ZOO

Last year, the Oakland Zoo took big strides in their empathy work with the creation of the “Empathy Guide.” This resource contains a repository of stories about animals in Oakland Zoo’s care, presenting their unique personalities, needs, and preferences. Piloted by Wilson Sherman, their Program Manager for Community Engagement & Belonging, this guide has been instrumental in helping internal staff emphasize empathic messaging with zoo guests.

With a background in animal care, Wilson knew keepers possessed a rich knowledge that was missing across other departments such as how to tell certain animals apart and the steps keepers take to maximize animal well-being through an understanding of the animals’ unique needs. Inspired to bridge the knowledge gap between animal care teams and educators, Wilson began building the Empathy Guide. The process started by generating buy-in and trust from the other zoo departments. Once the departments were familiar with the concept of the empathy guide, animal stories were collected over time from keepers to ensure information would be accurate and respectful to the animals. After the huge lift of gathering animal stories was complete, the Oakland Zoo decided to host these stories on a private Google site available for internal use only. This method made for easy updates and had the bonus of built-in analytics. After a year and a half, the final product is an impressive, personalized guide to the animals at Oakland Zoo that can be searched by species or zoo location. Through framing, storytelling, and informed perspective taking, interpreters now can present the animals in a more personalized light which can help guests strengthen their ability to empathize with wildlife.



Above:
Empathy guide in action.

If your organization is interested in creating this kind of resource, Wilson shared the following advice: Work to break down any apprehension about these kinds of resources across departments by having open conversations about how animal stories are collected and used. When you begin collecting stories, always lead with the concept of your project so other departments understand the purpose and value of personal animal stories. While how to share these stories is up to organizational preference, consider ease of use and searchability.

If you have any questions about this guide or the process of creating it, [contact Wilson](#) directly.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM’S ROLE IN FOSTERING EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE AND ADVANCING CONSERVATION



Lucy the Raccoon rooting for her favorite home team, the Seattle Sounders!

A common concern when encouraging the use of empathy practices with staff and volunteers is whether we are venturing too far into anthropomorphism. To address that unease, the Advancing Empathy staff conducted a comprehensive analysis of research to understand the purpose and potential results of using techniques considered to be anthropomorphic in engaging with audiences. We hope it will help Network Members and Affiliates to explain why critical anthropomorphism is an important and effective tool at increasing connectedness with the being that is anthropomorphized; developing empathy for that being; and changing perceptions of that being in a positive way as well as increasing a willingness to act on that being’s behalf. We hope you find [this analysis](#) in our resource library helpful.

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FEBRUARY 2024



It is February and that means it is Empathy Summit time. We hope you will be able to [join us next week](#) for some great programs. The results from the Network Member and Affiliate survey are in! Please check out the report [here](#). It is exciting to see how much training and use of practices have grown. Relevant committees are reviewing the findings to inform the creation/update of tools moving forward, so thanks for the input. One new change we will be implementing is a monthly share out following all committee meetings, so the Network can stay informed of the [latest happenings](#). We are also happy to announce the release of the [2024 Empathy Training Toolkit](#) with some great new additions.

We are now accepting applications for new Network Partner Organizations. Affiliates interested in pursuing this opportunity can learn more [here](#).

And finally, travel scholarships (up to \$2,000 each) are available again this year for Network Members to present about empathy projects at a relevant conference. [Applications are due](#) at least six weeks before a conference or April 15 for the AZA annual conference. So, start thinking about what you might want to share and join us on February 20 to discuss ideas.

Upcoming Events

We are looking forward to new Capacity Building Grant Presentations in February. Find the schedule of those presentations and [register here](#).

February 20 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm PST: AZA Empathy Project Panel(s) Brainstorm

Do you have an empathy related topic that you would love to present at AZA 2024? Join other interested individuals in the Network to brainstorm ideas for panels and get the ball rolling on panel proposals. Hope to see you there! [Register here](#).

March 7 @ 11:30 am - 12:30 pm PST: Prioritizing Accessibility Actions w/Elizabeth Ralston

This discussion focused session will center on how organizations can get started in prioritizing accessibility, no matter what stage they are at in their accessibility journey. We will be using the following prompts to kick off the discussion: 1) What accessibility efforts are your organization currently engaged in? 2) What are your top three priorities and why? Even if you do not yet have priorities designated, this session will help you start to begin naming those priorities. Please come to this event having thought about those questions and prepared to participate in discussion. This event will not be recorded. [Register here](#).

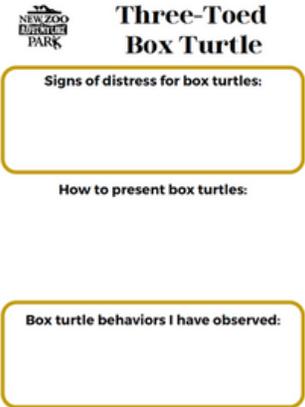


A TWIST ON THE FACT SHEET: DOCUMENTING OBSERVED BEHAVIORS

A good empathy-infused animal fact sheet is one that meets the needs of the individuals who will be relying on it for information. For the Northeast Wisconsin (NEW) Zoo & Adventure Park, this meant adding an interactive aspect to their sheets. On the final page of each species' fact sheet, there are spaces for education staff, volunteers, and interns to write down the animal's signs of distress, the proper way to present the animal to guests during a program, and behaviors that they observe the animal doing during animal interactions.

These fact sheets are part of an effort at the NEW Zoo & Adventure Park to facilitate more interactive staff and volunteer training. In addition to receiving the fact sheets in a training packet, participants are guided through discussions, Q&A sessions, and mock presentations before they are advanced to handling and presenting animals. While animal handlers are required to understand an animal's distress signals before handling, the "behaviors observed" box is meant to be regularly updated during training as familiarity with the animals grows. The animal handlers are then encouraged to continue adding to the "behaviors observed" section when they are actively providing exercise time for the animals and leading informal encounters.

Staff are currently in the process of updating the fact sheets for all their education animal ambassadors. So far, 40% of their ambassador species have new sheets. While creating the new sheets is more time consuming than the previous versions, Zoo Educator Andrea Vahey states that long-time zoo volunteers enjoy using these new packets. The colorful look, easy to read sections, and overall inclusion of comparisons and stories with the facts are some of the positive points staff have received. To learn more, [email Andrea](#) and check out all the fact sheets in the 2024 edition of the Empathy Training Toolkit!



DIVING DEEP INTO EMPATHY THROUGH SUMMER CAMPS



With summer camp season approaching, we are excited to showcase the Alaska SeaLife Center's (ASLC) "Fostering Empathy through Experiential Learning" empathy project, funded by a Capacity Building Grant. This initiative was born out of ASLC's commitment to enhancing their mission of empathy, conservation themes and educational outreach. Their project goal was to develop and test new curriculum while reaching out to underserved communities. The outcome of this endeavor was a modular program offered seven days a week focusing on a different topic each day. Topics are repeated weekly, allowing guests the flexibility to build their own experience.

The camp's daily agenda commenced with pro-conservation development, delving into individual animal profiles and encouraging critical thinking about the needs of animals in the world. Each day also highlighted a different conservation topic, such as "Travel Tails: We Wish You Whale," featuring a whale obstacle course where children navigated decisions about safety, journey length, and food sources, putting themselves in the flippers of a whale.

Another integral part of camp was the empathy exercises. For example, one activity prompted kids to draw their favorite animals, list their needs for safety, and then apply the same considerations to themselves. A unique aspect of the camp allowed students to make a conservation pledge at the end of each day, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to environmentalism.

Despite the challenges posed by a diverse age range and that many campers were from out-of-town, the program exhibited remarkable adaptability. It accommodated different ages and learning levels, offered scholarships and hosted a sensory-inclusive quiet zone. Notably, the program enjoyed a high rate of repeat campers, signaling its success. Voting buckets provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of knowledge development games.

Beyond the success of the camp itself, 32 programs covering seven topics emerged from the initiative and will be integrated into the education department's offerings. Furthermore, 48 staff members received improved empathy training between March and August 2023. For further inquiries about this project, please [email the team](#), or watch their grant project presentation [here](#).

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MARCH 2024



Despite a mild winter for many of us, the anticipation of spring is palpable here in Seattle – we’re looking forward to longer days, and maybe even some extra sunshine. We extend our gratitude to all who participated in the Summit – it was a pleasure to reconnect and delve into the exciting projects unfolding within our Network. For those unable to attend, you can catch up on all the insightful sessions [here](#).

During the Summit, Evaluation Specialist Theo shared out [our learnings from the 2022-23 Partner site visits](#). Additionally, we also have the [Executive Summary](#) from our three-year external evaluation partnership with Catalyze available for review. For those interested in the full report, please reach out to [Theo](#).

As conference season approaches, we are pleased to offer travel scholarships for ACE for Wildlife Members who are presenting on an empathy-related project at the 2024 AZA annual conference or other relevant conferences. You can learn more and fill out an [application here!](#)

Our committees are working on exciting new projects. [Click here](#) to see what they’ve been up to. And finally, as we prepare to spring forward with daylight savings time, we wish everyone a seamless adjustment.

Upcoming Events

We are looking forward to new Capacity Building Grant Presentations in March. Find the schedule of those presentations and [register here](#).

Mar 7 @ 11:30 am - 12:30 pm PST: Prioritizing Accessibility Actions w/Elizabeth Ralston

This discussion focused session will center on how organizations can get started in prioritizing accessibility, no matter what stage they are at in their accessibility journey. After a brief introduction that will frame what prioritization looks like, attendees will participate in a discussion with each other and Elizabeth about how accessibility is or can be prioritized at their organizations. [Register here](#). This event will not be recorded.

Mar 27 @ 12:30 pm - 1:30 pm PST: Learning Group: Applying Empathy Practices to Biofact Collections & Related Programming

In this learning group, hear from staff at the Minnesota Zoo, Woodland Park Zoo, and the Zoological Society of Milwaukee as they share how they are using empathy practices to inform their biofact-focused programming and evaluations. [Register here](#).



DEAI INITIATIVES AT ALEXANDRIA ZOO

We are delighted to introduce two innovative projects from Alexandria Zoo aimed at reducing barriers to visiting the zoo. The first initiative, the Zoo Membership Library Loans, emerged from a collaboration with the Rapides Parish Library System in Alexandria. Through this program, 10 local libraries have been provided with two zoo memberships each, enabling two adults and four children to enjoy complimentary access to the zoo. This initiative ensures that 20 zoo memberships remain consistently available to the community, with high demand leading to immediate re-issuance upon return.

Additionally, Alexandria Zoo proudly sponsors SNAP Family Days, an event offering free zoo entry to residents holding a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) card after 2 pm on the first Thursday of every month. This initiative is made possible through a valuable partnership with the LSU AgCenter, a group dedicated to agricultural nutrition in the state, which also provides nutritional activities and food tastings during these SNAP Days.



Entry for both programs is fully funded by Alexandria Zoo, underscoring their commitment to advancing Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) initiatives. These initiatives have garnered widespread community support, providing residents with enhanced opportunities to experience the zoo, thereby mitigating economic barriers often associated with such visits. Zoos serve as important hubs for promoting empathy for wildlife, but these messages risk going unheard without inclusive programs facilitating meaningful connections between people and animals. This highlights the importance of creating inclusive programs like the ones offered at Alexandria Zoo.

For organizations interested in similar endeavors, Catie recommends fostering partnerships with local entities and emphasizing the importance of creative outreach strategies. For further inquiries about these initiatives, please contact [Catie Hirsch](#).

NAVIGATING HOSPICE CARE AT ROOSEVELT PARK ZOO

In the realm of zoo management, addressing end-of-life care presents significant challenges. This month, we had the privilege of learning from Dr. Logan Wood, a veterinarian at Roosevelt Park Zoo, who shared insights into their approach to this sensitive topic.



Above: Animal Care Provider Chelsea providing laser therapy to help with arthritis and muscle soreness on Roosevelt Park Zoo's older Amur leopard Clover.

Roosevelt Park Zoo has adopted a unique approach to evaluating the quality of life of animals by transitioning from traditional animal welfare assessments to quality-of-life evaluations. These assessments, crafted collaboratively by keepers and grounded in scientific expertise, evaluate a variety of factors such as an animal's physical, psychological and physiological state to generate a standardized grading scale that informs the well-being of that animal. They also offer a more tailored approach for the variety of taxa versus a one size fits all assessment. These evaluations have empowered animal care staff to make informed decisions aimed at maximizing the animal's comfort, while helping to keep everyone involved in these decisions on the same page.

Conversations surrounding end-of-life care are inherently emotional and complex. Dr. Wood emphasizes the importance of vulnerability in these discussions. Initiating dialogues about therapies like laser therapy for geriatric animals can foster empathy and offer understanding among the public. It is a chance to highlight the parallels between animal and human care, while showcasing the dedication of care that zoos devote to their residents.

Reflecting on their experience, Dr. Wood underscores the significance of recognizing and respecting diverse viewpoints when assessing an animal's quality of life. Encouraging open communication and providing a platform for all voices ensures that decisions are approached with empathy and solidarity. For those interested in delving deeper into Roosevelt Park Zoo's approach to end-of-life care or exploring other intriguing topics such as animal bereavement, Dr. Logan Wood welcomes [inquiries](#).

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We are thrilled to officially say happy spring to you all. We hope that the April showers not only bring flowers but a renewed sense of appreciation for the incredible wildlife around us. Our committees sure have jumped right into spring with a burst of activities. [Learn more here](#) about what they are working on.

Last year, we introduced Cameron Whitley's [NSF grant](#) that focuses on assessing if and how strategic anthropomorphic animal imagery (animal portraits) can be used to enhance empathy for animals, empathy for humans and promote conservation. The winter 2024 meeting of that project can be viewed [here](#).

We've noticed some folks attending events that were not yet Network participants. If you haven't yet officially joined, please [submit an application or create an account](#) **10 days prior to the event date** so we can be sure to add you. That way you can be sure to access any resources mentioned and reach out to other participants. Please email any questions to empathy@zoo.org.

Upcoming Events

April 10 @ 10:00 - 11:00 am PST: Learning Group: Infusing Empathy Practices into Animal Fact Sheets

Hear from both new and familiar voices as they share their processes of creation and learnings from the use of empathy-infused animal fact sheets at their organization.

[Register here.](#)

April 16 @ 10:30 - 11:30 am PST: Open Meeting: Steering Committee

Join the Steering Committee for their annual open meeting. In this meeting, the committee will be discussing potential changes to our Network's mission, vision, purpose, and values and they'd love to hear your input. If you are unable to attend but still want to contribute feedback, do so [here](#) by Monday, April 15. [Register here.](#)

April 22 @ 1:00 - 2:30 pm PST: Spring 2024 ACE for Wildlife Network Introduction Session

This session is geared towards Members and Affiliates who have recently joined the Network but is open to anyone in the Network to attend. We will be introducing what empathy is, featuring guest speakers from Racine Zoo, Zoo Boise, and the Zoological Society of Milwaukee who will talk about their empathy projects, introducing Network resources and navigation of the website/discussion board, and giving attendees time to meet, discuss and connect with each other. [Register and learn more here.](#)



PRIORITIZING EMPATHY IN ADULT PROGRAMMING

The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens (JAX), in collaboration with the Osher Lifetime Learning Institute (OLLI), a senior learning outreach group, embarked on a journey to integrate empathy into two recently piloted adult programs. Sharon Spencer, Adult Education Specialist at the zoo, shared how their organization made empathy a priority in these programs.

Recognizing their role as one of five critical care centers for manatees in the state, JAX seized the opportunity to weave an adult program around manatee conservation. When developing the program, Sharon employed the [Empathy Wheel](#) as a cornerstone for curriculum. The program includes a visit to the Manatee Critical Care Center at the zoo where participants learn about the anthropogenic events that impacted manatees while witnessing the high level of care provided for these animals. These encounters serve as catalysts for meaningful conversations about human impact on manatee habitats, empowering individuals to effect positive change in their own lives and communities. Participants are also encouraged to immerse themselves in the perspective of manatees and are offered a deeper understanding of their biology to develop a more emotional connection with these gentle giants.



Applejax (momma), Cider (larger adopted calf), and Tini (youngest patient) currently at JAX.

Photo by: Denise Donar

Reflecting on the program's impact, Sharon underscores the profound role empathy plays in inciting behavioral change. The anecdote of one participant who transitioned from casual learner to dedicated manatee volunteer at JAX epitomizes the program's success in nurturing emotional connections that inspire tangible action. Sharon also emphasized the importance of fostering open discussions among adult participants, shifting the focus away from her role as the primary instructor and towards facilitating connections between individuals, thereby departing from the conventional teacher-student dynamic. Looking ahead, JAX aims to expand its adult programming, inviting individuals from all walks of life to participate in experiences that connect them with wildlife in their own backyard, to across the globe. If you're interested in learning more about JAX's adult programming or want to hear about the other program they piloted, you can reach Sharon [here](#).

PROMOTING EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

In an interview with Chris Schmitz, Director of Education at Utah's Hogle Zoo, we gained insights into Utah's Hogle Zoo's exciting new project, "Wild Utah." This multiple exhibit space is not just about showcasing animals, but about bridging the gap between the familiar and the feared. Through up-close encounters with species like cougars, badgers, and bobcats, guests will gain a deeper understanding of native wildlife and the importance of their conservation.



Above: Worker on site for "Wild Utah"

The exhibit features several interactive elements designed to engage and educate visitors. An Education Animal Center will house more than 100 ambassador animals for outreach programs and showcase an interactive kitchen that provides insights into diverse animal diets and food preparation. There will also be an Outdoor Classroom offering hands-on conservation activities such as creating birdhouses, planting for pollinators, and introducing interested parties to conservation partners to provide opportunities for community action and awareness. Additionally, there will be an Interpretive Campsite, where guests can learn how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly and become "Wild Aware" to better understand their role in preserving natural habitats.

When engaging visitors with species that may be less charismatic, Schmitz stresses the importance of highlighting the similarities between humans and animals, showcasing behaviors like parental care to illustrate that, despite physical differences, we share common ground with our animal counterparts. She also noted that it is important to be sympathetic to guests' points of view on "controversial" species, and instead of blaming them for their hostility towards these animals, engage in difficult conversations and try to meet people halfway. By providing context and fostering understanding, the exhibit aims to bridge divides and promote coexistence between humans and wildlife. Wild Utah prepares to open its doors later this year, and if you are interested in learning more about this incredible new space, you can reach out to Chris [here](#).

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MAY 2024



Happy May everyone! We are thrilled to announce our newest addition to our team, Michele Kahrs. She is our new Empathy Grants Specialist and started in late April and will be managing the day-to-day operations for the Advancing Empathy Grant Program. With over a decade of experience in program development and grants, Michele is dedicated to building opportunities to explore and improve our world through collaborative partnerships. Outside work and family, she can be found with her equine companions, exploring fiber arts or “chaos gardening.” Grantees can reach out to her with any questions or just say hi at empathygrants@zoo.org. Once she gets settled, Michele will host some virtual office hours where grantees can get to know her a bit better.

We currently have open seats on our Communications, DEAI, Membership, Steering and Strategic Learning committees. Network Members or Affiliates are eligible to join! Email empathy@zoo.org to learn more and get involved.

Our committees have been working on great things this past month—learn more [here!](#)

Empathy Photo Contest

Are you passionate about photography as an art form? Already have hundreds of zoo animal photos on your phone? Come be a part of our Empathy Photo Contest Working Group! This group will create a Network photography contest and be the initial reviewers of submitted photos. Our first meeting will be on **July 11 at 11 am PST**. Meetings will be 60 minutes once a month from July-October, with 1-2 more meetings in December/January to review submitted photos. This working group will dissolve after the contest concludes. Email empathy@zoo.org to learn more and get involved!

Land Acknowledgment Survey

Our Network is currently made up of professionals from all over the world. Because of this, the Network's DEAI Committee has moved away from a place-based land acknowledgment and will be creating a call-to-action statement intended to aid those working to support Indigenous communities. As a first step of this work, the committee wants to understand the landscape of land acknowledgments and accompanying accountability actions throughout our Network. Please consider filling out this survey to help the committee craft this statement. [This survey](#) will be open through Friday, June 28.



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO CONSERVATION: “HOPE FOR THE WILD” VIDEO SERIES

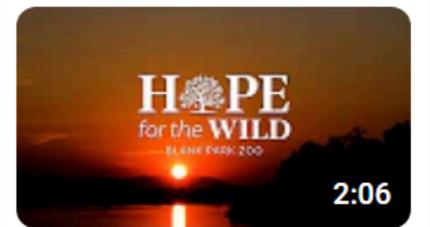
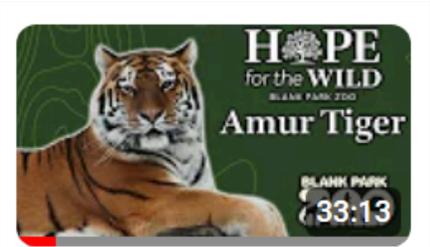
Many of us endeavor to share the stories of the individual animals in our care and highlight the crucial conservation work being done for them. Blank Park Zoo (BPZ) achieves this through their impactful speaker series, "Hope for the Wild," which has been running for over four years.

Guided by the themes of “discover, connect and take action,” the Hope for the Wild series showcases one species at BPZ in each video, offering an in-depth exploration of their stories. Each segment delves into the species' natural history, the unique traits of the animals under the zoo's care and their welfare. Additionally, the videos feature BPZ's global conservation partners, highlighting efforts to conserve the featured species both in the wild and locally so viewers can be inspired to take action in their own communities. This project is highly collaborative with contributions from multiple departments, fostering a sense of ownership among staff members and volunteers and reinforcing the idea that everyone at the zoo plays an active role in conservation.

To ensure widespread access, BPZ offers live premieres of the videos on YouTube, facilitating real-time interaction and Q&A sessions. The series is also archived for viewing at any time, promoting ongoing engagement with their conservation message.

A key insight from the Hope for the Wild team underscores the importance of adaptability and continuous learning. They stress the necessity of involving all stakeholders from the project's inception, ensuring alignment on storytelling and the capacity for participation throughout the year.

The overarching message of "Hope for the Wild" is that everyone can contribute to conservation efforts, fostering collective responsibility for wildlife and habitat preservation. Serving as a beacon of hope and education, the series strengthens the connection between the zoo and the community, advocating for conservation at both local and global levels. If you are interested in learning more about this project, you can reach out to the [team here](#).



Click [here](#) to view the hope for the wild series.

EFFECTIVE EMPATHY PRACTICES

This month, we are kicking off a new addition to the Empathy Matters newsletter. Once a quarter, the Communications Committee will spotlight an effective empathy practice and share ways you can utilize it at your organization. We chose to start with **Framing** for May, focusing on the verbal form of framing in particular (other forms will be covered in future issues). For our purposes, verbal framing refers to the way we talk about wildlife and the specific words we use with audiences. Verbal examples of framing include referring to animals as “he” or “she” or their names as opposed to “it.” Because of its ubiquity, framing is important to consider and incorporate when thinking about following effective practices (continued on next page).



VERBAL FRAMING EXAMPLES

The terms we use, although synonyms, can have different emotional impacts on guests. In our words, we need to be sure that we are orchestrating a positive experience and connection between guests and wildlife.

Instead of...	Consider...
Cage/enclosure	Habitat/home
Bars/fencing	Boundary/barrier/mesh
It/the animal	Pronouns/animal name
Bringing out an ambassador animal	Ambassador animal is joining us
Captivity	In human care
Indoor holding	Behind-the-scenes space/den/nighttime space
Tricks	Trained behaviors
Toys	Enrichment/enriching experiences
Diet	Nutrition
Caught/captured	Rescued/wild born/received
Put down	Humanely euthanized

Here is an example of a conversation you can have with guests about individual animals to foster an empathetic connection:

“This beautiful snake is our friend Monty; she is an ambassador animal and joins us to meet guests. She is a 29-year-old Ball Python. She gets the name ball python from this cool defensive pose that she does. When threatened, she forms a little ball with her body and peeks her head out of the middle like a submarine periscope and can protect her whole body from predators. What is your instinct when you feel frightened, do you also curl up?”

Using an animal’s name, age, and relating their behaviors to the way people feel helps to create a deeper understanding of the individual animal, and in turn that species and wildlife in general.

Another great way to frame empathetic conversations with guests is to highlight the individual personalities of different animals:

“Our two capybaras Poppy and Antonio have different favorite foods. While Poppy loves to eat green beans, they aren’t Antonio’s favorite and he always eats them last. Do you like green beans like Poppy or are you more like Antonio?”

If you want to learn more about framing, check out these resources here:

[Seattle Aquarium Best Practices](#)

[Empathy Wheel](#)

[Best Practices for Building Empathy Through Live Animal Encounters](#)

[Words that Matter](#)

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JUNE 2024



As the days grow longer and the warmth of June is palpable, we are excited to welcome the vibrant season of summer across our Network.

You asked for more small group interactions and specialized empathy content, so we are launching Special Interest Groups (SIGs) on the discussion board! The Communications Committee will be leading the restructuring of the discussion board **June 25 - 26** and is offering a new leadership opportunity to Network participants as a part of this rollout. As a SIG Channel Host, you will help cultivate smaller communities within our larger Network with support from the Advancing Empathy team. The current estimated time commitment is less than 1 hour a month. [Click here to learn more about this new leadership opportunity and the channels being created!](#)

Another project we have underway is an effort to ensure our resources are accessible to all members of our Network. To further this goal, we're excited to announce our initiative to translate key documents into other languages.

We invite you to participate in this process by letting us know which empathy-related documents – from the Network or your own organization – you find would benefit from being translated. Please send your requests for document translations to empathy@zoo.org and please include the document of interest, language(s) requested and reason for translation by June 28.

Our committees have been working on great things this past month—learn more [here!](#)

Empathy Photo Contest

Are you passionate about photography as an art form? Come be a part of our Empathy Photo Contest Working Group! This group will create a Network photography contest and be the initial reviewers of submitted photos. Email empathy@zoo.org to learn more and get involved!

Land Acknowledgment Survey

It's not too late to complete the land acknowledgement survey! The Network's DEAI Committee wants to understand the landscape of land acknowledgments and accompanying accountability actions throughout our Network. Please consider filling out [this survey](#) to help the committee craft a new statement that reflects our more global landscape. This survey will be open through Friday, June 28.



CELEBRATING PRIDE WITH THE RAINBOAS

Happy Pride Month, everyone! This month, we sat down with Hannah Tilden (business and operations manager) to learn more about the “Rainboas,” Woodland Park Zoo’s first employee resource group (ERG). Established to formalize connections among employees and champion LGBTQIA+ representation, Rainboas operates on two fronts: building a strong community for employees and advocating for LGBTQIA+ visibility and initiatives.

Co-led by Hannah and Al Kennedy (animal keeper), the Rainboas play an integral role in organizing WPZ Pride Month, and this year they have an exciting lineup of events. The celebrations kick off with a staff-only event featuring ice cream, music, and camaraderie, creating an inclusive atmosphere for all employees. A significant highlight this year is the zoo's inaugural participation in Seattle’s local Pride Parade. Rainboa members, staff, volunteers, and community members will march together with a pollinator-themed display. Instead of a traditional float, they will use wagons decorated with flamboyantly colored pollinators, symbolizing both wildlife conservation and pride. Additionally, the group is hosting a community event called "Bee Yourself." In collaboration with the PR and horticulture teams, they will partner with [Lambert House](#) to plant a pollinator garden. This initiative not only supports the environment but also strengthens community bonds.

Within the zoo, Pride-themed activities include rainbow ice pops for animals, Pride-themed story times featuring LGBTQIA+ representation, and educational resources on queerness in nature that will be available in our volunteer resource hub.

Beyond seeing these incredible initiatives come to life, the most rewarding aspect of leading Rainboas, according to Hannah, has been the opportunity to connect with colleagues across departments. This fellowship has enriched their experience, fostering lasting friendships and a more inclusive work environment.

Hannah’s advice to others looking to engage with Pride is to leverage the existing resources available through the ACE for Wildlife Network community, emphasizing the wealth of knowledge and support available. If you’re interested in learning more about the Rainboas, you can reach out to Hannah [here](#).





BRINGING THE ZOO COMMUNITY TOGETHER: VOICES FOR CONSERVATION PODCAST

In both small and large organizations, it's often challenging to interact with every team member. Recognizing this, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium devised an innovative solution: an internal podcast project aimed at enhancing engagement, building empathy, and strengthening community among the team (employees and volunteers).

Stacey Luhring, Volunteer Engagement Coordinator, and Philina Richardson, Volunteer Engagement Specialist, decided to launch a podcast to connect volunteers with employees. Motivated by the zoo's strategic plan pillars of One Team and Community, they wanted to provide more accessible opportunities that would reach a wider audience than what was typical for in person or virtual volunteer events.

The Voices for Conservation podcast consists of two segments: Staff Chat and Breaks for Conservation. The Staff Chat segment features informal conversations with employees or volunteers, allowing listeners to get to know their colleagues better. These episodes, typically 20 to 30 minutes long, explore how individuals got into their roles, their daily responsibilities, and their conservation passions. The Breaks for Conservation segment delves into the zoo's conservation efforts, providing detailed insights into various projects and issues the zoo is addressing. Each episode also includes relevant resources to enhance understanding of the topics discussed.

Though the podcast is currently shared internally only, the team hopes to make it public for increased accessibility in the future. Besides learning about the people, these podcasts feature topics like sustainability, climate conversations, and polar bear conservation. The latest Breaks for Conservation series focuses on empathy, exploring how it is fostered at the zoo and its significance in their work. You can hear that episode and others [here](#).

While the idea of creating a podcast can seem daunting, Stacey assured us that the project was designed to be approachable, requiring minimal equipment: a microphone, mic stand, foam board for noise cancellation, and editing software. Careful planning, management support and a streamlined interview process ensured team buy-in and the successful launch of the podcast. After almost a year since its inception, Voices for Conservation has helped the zoo feel more connected by spotlighting the diverse roles and individuals within the organization. This initiative not only fosters community but also builds empathy among employees and volunteers, ultimately creating a more cohesive and supportive environment. If you're interested in learning more about this project, you can contact Stacey [here](#).





2024 NEW MEMBERS & AFFILIATES

Introducing our 2024 new Members and Affiliates! We are excited to share this new feature: each quarter, we will highlight the latest additions to our Network. For now, we are starting with up to May. We look forward to collaborating with these new members and affiliates and hope you give them a warm welcome when you meet them at an upcoming event!

Name	Job Title	Organization	Email address: if shared
Michael Nance	Senior Zoo Veterinarian	Abilene Zoo	michael.nance@abilenex.gov
Deb Brady	Education Mission Coordinator	Akron Zoo	d.brady@akronzoo.org
Shelley Orloski	Career Pathways Manager	Akron Zoo	s.orloski@akronzoo.org
Michelle Hanenburg	Curator of Mammals	Alaska Sealife Center	michelleh@alaskasealife.org
Kelsie Gering	Guest Engagement Supervisor	Audubon Nature Institute	kgering@auduboninstitute.org
Katherine Burkman	Animal Keeper	Boonshoft Museum of Discovery	kburkman@boonshoftmuseum.org
Christopher Conner	Manager, King Conservation Science Scholars	Brookfield Zoo	chris.conner@brookfieldzoo.org
Lynn Kirkland	Science Instructional Assistant/Instructor	Cayuga Community College	lkirklandzippel@gmail.com
Kelly McAdams	VP Conservation Education	Clearwater Marine Aquarium	kmcadams@cmaquarium.org
Mari-Joan McGovern	Docent Volunteer	Cleveland Metroparks Zoo	mjzoogirl@aol.com
Bekah Hanes	Education & Conservation Curator	Como Park Zoo & Conservatory	bekah.hanes@ci.stpaul.mn.us
Melanie Kuse	Ambassador Animal Program Coordinator	Cook County Forest Preserves	melanie.kuse@cookcountyl.gov
Kelly Golbeck	Education Specialist	Cosley Zoo	golbeckk@gmail.com
Sarah Tulicki	Education Supervisor		stulicki@wheatonparks.org
Tamra Romejko	Education & Guest Experiences Manager		tromejko@wheatonparks.org
Jalene Keliiki	Exotics Zookeeper	Dakota Zoo	jalenetpk3@gmail.com
Jennifer Chapman	Education Manager	Disney World	jennifer.a.chapman@disney.com
Kathleen Hart	Trails Educator		KATHLEEN.HART@DISNEY.COM
Meredith Bradshaw	Guest Animal and Engagement Team		meredithbradshaw@gmail.com
Lindsey Olimpio	Education Manager	Endangered Wolf Center	lolimpio@endangeredwolfcenter.org
Allison Gould	Education Specialist	Great Plains Zoo (Sioux Falls)	agould@gpzoo.org
Julianne Turner	Interpretation Specialist	Indianapolis Zoo	julianne.turnerm@gmail.com
Brittney Palode	Whooping Crane Outreach Program Assistant	International Crane Foundation	bpalode@savingcranes.org
Irvin Louque	Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator		ilouque@savingcranes.org
Laurel Shanks	Interpretive Program Evaluator		lshanks@savingcranes.org
Quinn Brownell	Interpretative Programs Coordinator		qbrownell@savingcranes.org
Jamie Lynn Lankenau	Community Engagement Supervisor	Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens	lankenauj@jacksonvillezoo.org
Nichole Ashley	Animal Care Manager	Museum of Discovery	nashley@museumofdiscovery.org
Tim Tetzlaff	Director of Conservation	Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens	ttetzlaff@napleszoo.org
Courtney Snyder	Associate Curator of Animals	Oglebay Good Zoo	csnyder@oglebay.com
Decklyn Scott	Assistant Curator of Conservation Education		dscott@oglebay.com
Houstan Vassel	Youth Leadership Development Specialist	Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium	houstan.vassel@pdza.org
Rin Adame	Customer Service Assistant		carin.adame@pdza.org
Jess Ryans	Education Specialist	Red River Zoo	jryans@reddriverzoo.org
Sarah Winch	Guest Experience Manager		swinch@reddriverzoo.org
Jason Theuman	Manager of Interpretation	Roger Williams Park Zoo	jasontheuman@rwpzoo.org
Michael Gates	Education Coordinator – School and Community Engagement	San Antonio Zoo	michael.gates@sazoo.org
Jaimee Lafleur	Senior Wildlife Care Specialist		jlafleur@sdzwa.org
Kate Jirik	Research Specialist, Library		kjirik@sdzwa.org



Name	Job Title	Organization	Email address: if shared
Nicki Boyd	Curator of Mammals, Ambassadors, and Applied Behavior	San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance	nboyd@sdzwa.org
Sasha Stallard	Associate Director of Education		sstallard@sdzwa.org
Shane Adams	Wildlife Care Specialist		shadams@sdzwa.org
Tanya Binuya	Senior Wildlife Care Specialist		tbinuya@sdzwa.org
Tegan Noel	Wildlife Care Specialist		tnoel@sdzwa.org
Linda Bissett	Volunteer	Science North	lbissett@gmail.com
Paul Decker	Snr Marine Science Educator	Seattle Aquarium	p.decker@seattleaquarium.org
Mary Krupa	Conservation Interpreter	Shaver's Creek Environmental Center	mik5213@psu.edu
Connor Murray	Guest Experience Supervisor	St. Louis Aquarium	angelhair1090@gmail.com
Corey Romberg	Director of Guest Engagement	The Florida Aquarium	cromberg@flaquarium.org
Ashley Krueger	Education and Community Engagement Coordinator	The Gardens on Spring Creek	Ashleymartelyoung@gmail.com
Kenzie Duncan	Education Specialist	Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center	kduncan@topekazoo.org
Audrey Dayton	Outreach Educator	Utah's Hogle Zoo	adayton@hoglezoo.org
Olivia Livingston	Education Instructor		olivingston@hoglezoo.org
Reina Gibson	Immersive Engagement Coordinator		rgibson@hoglezoo.org
TJ Jones	School and Community Outreach Instructor		tjones@hoglezoo.org
George Gurgis	Conservation Educator	Wildlife Conservation Society	gurgisgeorge@gmail.com
Alyssa Ryser	Animal Keeper	Woodland Park Zoo	alyssa.ryser@zoo.org
Amanda Dale	Learning Coordinator		amanda.dale@zoo.org
Laura Baumwall	Senior Major Gifts Officer		laura.baumwall@zoo.org
Makenzie Stewart	Zoomazium Instructor		makenzie.stewart@zoo.org
Shannon Sprayberry	Animal Keeper		shannon.sprayberry@zoo.org
Diane Tyk	Volunteer	Zoological Society of Milwaukee	diatyk@att.net
Faith Benassi	Registrar		faith.benassi@milwaukeecountywi.gov

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE™

JULY 2024



As the warm weather of July sets in, we hope you're enjoying the beauty of nature and that your summer camp adventures are going wonderfully. We are excited to announce the date of this year's annual fall Network meeting. Please join us on [October 15 from 9:30-11:30 am PST](#) to learn about what empathy initiatives are happening throughout our Network.

Interested in hearing what our committees have been working on? Find out more [here](#).

New Network Communications Resource

Over the past six months the Advancing Empathy team has been developing a new communications toolkit for Network participants. Many of us are asked by colleagues at our institutions, or by others within our field, to communicate about our experiences in advancing conservation through empathy for wildlife, to share our "why" behind the work, or even respond to people who are resistant to using empathy practices. To support these types of communications needs, we've developed a toolkit that can be accessed and used by anyone who participates in the Network.

The toolkit contains the following resources:

- **Key messages:** talking points about the core benefits and rationale behind advancing conservation through empathy for wildlife.
- **Boilerplate:** blocks of text that can be used for specific communications needs such as press releases, website blogs, grant applications and more.
- **Frequently asked questions:** answers to some of the most frequently asked questions we receive about advancing empathy and about the Network.
- **Presentation template:** a set of editable slides for presentations about empathy and/or about the Network.

These resources are for internal use by Network members only and should not be shared in public-facing ways. We invite you to download and review them from the [Resource Library today](#). We welcome your feedback on this toolkit as you use it – and your ongoing input on other communications support or materials that you might find helpful for the Network to develop in the future.



SIMPSON'S JOURNEY: CONNECTING WITH WILDLIFE

Meet Simpson, a gray wolf at ZooMontana with a story that has touched hearts nationwide. Found abandoned by his pack at around five weeks old, Simpson was brought to ZooMontana in June 2020. Initially thriving, his caregivers soon noticed unusual behavior. A CT scan revealed Simpson had congenital hydrocephalus, a condition where fluid accumulates on the brain, causing pressure that can lead to severe illness or death.

In March 2021, Simpson was taken to Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine for surgery to implant a shunt in his brain. This shunt helped drain the excess fluid into his abdomen, allowing him to live a more active life. Despite his challenges, Simpson has adapted well. However, after four years of normal wolf behavior, the shunt became dislodged, necessitating a second surgery.

In a recent update, ZooMontana's Director Jeff Ewelt shared, "After weighing all the options with our vet team, we felt Simpson still had years of life in him, so he returned to the surgery suite to have a new shunt implanted." The surgery, performed closer to home at Bridger Veterinary Specialists in Bozeman, Mont. was a success, and Simpson is now recovering, reunited with his companion Onyx and his dedicated caregivers.

Simpson's story exemplifies the importance of connection to animals in fostering empathy for wildlife. His journey has not only drawn attention to his resilience but also created a space for people to share their own experiences. Social media posts about Simpson have garnered heartfelt responses, like one from someone sharing Simpson's condition: "As a fellow hydrocephalus warrior, I love seeing people find out about hydrocephalus and how it's not an automatic death sentence, for human nor animal. May you have an easy, complication-free recovery, friend!"

Such comments highlight how Simpson's story resonates with individuals facing similar health issues, making them feel less alone. Jeff Ewelt noted, "One of the best things we get is not only the love and support from the community but also the photos and stories from community members impacted by hydrocephalus themselves. Simpson has incredible fans who understand what he's going through."

Simpson's journey continues to inspire and connect people, fostering a deeper sense of empathy and understanding for wildlife. By sharing his story, ZooMontana underscores the powerful bond between humans and animals, paving the way for a more empathetic and engaged community. You can learn more about Simpson's story from this [Facebook post](#) and be sure to check out all of the touching comments.



Above: Gray wolf Simpson looking handsome as ever.



BUILDING EMPATHY AT HENRY VILAS ZOO: A COLLABORATIVE JOURNEY

In a recent interview with Jess Thompson and Courtney Cordova from Henry Vilas Zoo, we explored their innovative approach to integrating empathy into the many facets of zoo operations. With a close-knit team of 42 full-time staff, the zoo leverages its size to foster collaboration and alignment on this mission.

At Henry Vilas Zoo, empathy permeates every department through various projects. Central to this effort is their interpretive master plan, ensuring that all zoo communications incorporate empathy best practices. This plan guides their interpretation training, a cornerstone of their approach. Staff members who interact with visitors, including educators and keepers, undergo empathy and interpretation training, equipping over three-quarters of the staff with these essential skills.

An exciting element of the zoo's empathy work is that it extends beyond typical stakeholders. Their horticulturist receives empathy training, equipping them to engage visitors with talks about their pollinator garden and how the zoo grows food for its animals. They've also developed a sensory garden, designed to engage visitors through multisensory experiences, showcasing how empathy is woven into visitor interactions. Even the social media team participates in empathy training, ensuring that all communications connect people to wildlife empathetically.

Reflecting on their journey, the team highlights the importance of patience and continuous evaluation in embedding empathy into the zoo's culture. It's not just about initial training but also about ongoing assessment and adjustment. For example, their volunteer newsletter features stories that build connections with guests, aligning with their broader strategy to reflect empathy best practices in every interaction. They regularly ask their team, "How is this going? How are people perceiving empathy? How do we check if volunteers are implementing it?"



Above: The crew—volunteer coordinator, horticulturist, and gardening volunteers—celebrating their browse garden's 1st birthday party complete with a cake!

Looking ahead, Henry Vilas Zoo aims to expand their impact by refining their approach to involve more inclusive and accessible conservation actions. This collaborative effort underscores the zoo's commitment to empathy-driven conservation, paving the way for a more empathetic and engaged community. If you're interested in any of their initiatives, you can reach out to the team [here](#).

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE™

AUGUST 2024



Greetings friends, we can't believe it's already August! Thank you to everyone who provided feedback on our Network statements through the open Steering Committee meetings or discussion board surveys. Based on your feedback, the Steering Committee has updated our Network mission, vision, and values to reflect the growth and changes we've undergone as a Network in the past five years. They are as follows:

Mission: The Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife (ACE for Wildlife) Network facilitates the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and data to drive conservation change through fostering empathy for animals and the environment that sustains them.

Vision: We envision a conservation minded community, motivated by empathy for animals and the environment that sustains them.

Values: Our values are that all wildlife is worthy of respect and empathy, conservation action and animal wellbeing are the priorities that drive our work, empathy is a leading pathway to behavior change, and using multiple ways of communication, learning, and knowing ensures our work is innovative and iterative.

Committee Updates: Our committees are hard at work this summer, find out what they have been up to [here](#).

October Meeting Announcement and Call for Speakers

Due to popular demand, we are bringing our Network Showcase to our virtual October All-Network meeting! In the showcase, five speakers will each have five minutes to highlight an empathy project they have worked on. Learn more about the showcase and [submit a proposal](#) here by Friday, August 30.

Upcoming Events

September 12 @ 12:00 - 1:00 pm PST: Infusing Empathy Into Early Childhood Programs

Hear from Bethanie West at Idaho Falls Zoo, Travis Heil at Roosevelt Park Zoo, and Terra Herrmann at Woodland Park Zoo as they discuss their early childhood programs that employ empathy practices – helping children and their caretakers connect with animals and nature.

September 30 @ 1:00 - 2:00 pm PST & October 10 from 9:00-10:00 am PST: Wildlife Trafficking Toolkit Listening Session

The Conservation Action Committee's joint initiative for 2024 is messaging around wildlife trafficking. Before creating resources, the committee wants to hear from you! Provide your input on what resources would be helpful, what topics are top of mind, what challenges you currently have in discussions of wildlife trafficking, and more at these listening sessions. Both listening sessions will be recorded.

October 15 @ 9:30 am - 12:00 pm PST: October All-Network Meeting

Join us this fall for our annual October All-Network meeting! Together we'll brainstorm key questions for a Network Learning Agenda to collaboratively investigate in the next five years and learn about invigorating projects happening across the Network.



SPOTLIGHT ON INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION'S NEW PROGRAM INITIATIVES

This month, we spoke with Quinn Brownell, Interpretive Programs Coordinator at the International Crane Foundation (ICF), about two exciting new grant programs designed to enhance learning opportunities and foster empathy for cranes worldwide.

The first initiative involves developing keeper chats led by ICF's aviculturist apprentices. These discussions explore crane behaviors, biology, and personalities, fostering a deeper sense of empathy and respect for these remarkable birds. This program not only enriches guest experiences but also offers apprentices valuable professional development as they prepare for future roles. Apprentices undergo extensive pre-season training in interpretive skills, followed by monthly check-ins to ensure ongoing success. Although they are only two months into the program, the chats have received enthusiastic feedback, with some sessions lasting nearly 50 minutes, demonstrating an impressive amount of guest engagement.

The second initiative targets K-8 school audiences through on-site programming. The general public, adult groups, and school field trips visiting the ICF are welcomed with an [introductory video](#) about the cranes of the world and the global work the ICF implements. To make this content more accessible to younger audiences, a new version of the video is being produced for school field trip groups that will feature a child narrator and conservation actions that are more attainable for children.

Additionally, a "Cranes of the World Trunk" is being developed, filled with educational activities and lesson plans covering all the 15 species of cranes that are showcased at ICF.

Across these projects, Quinn emphasizes the importance of building connections within the organization and working as a cohesive team. Understanding different roles and responsibilities of coworkers and creating a sense of interconnectedness are crucial for achieving common goals. Evaluation has also been a crucial component of these programs. If this is something your organization is interested in exploring further, you can get started by watching the ACE for Wildlife's [intro to evaluation learning group](#). For further information about ICF's initiatives, [Quinn welcomes inquiries here](#).



Above: International Crane Foundation interpreter giving a signature crane talk



CLARITY IN WILDLIFE COEXISTENCE MESSAGING

At our 2023 Empathy Summit, a question was raised during a panel asking how zoos can do a better job of engaging groups that aren't traditionally seen by the industry as conservationists, such as hunters and ranchers. The undercurrent of this question focused on the social stigma, polarization, and cultural discourse associated with large carnivores in North America. As climate change, habitat conversion, and reintroduction initiatives continue to bring carnivores into more regular contact with people, whether it's urban black bears or a reintroduced wolf pack attacking livestock, it's important that conservation organizations like zoos are appropriately engaging with and informing all audiences and have the tools to do so effectively.



Above: Grey wolves Kaluha (left) and Kali (right) play in their habitat at ZooMontana in 2020. Both wolves have since passed away (in 2022 and 2023 respectively). Photo taken Emily Bernhardt.

To help address this need, I am currently working on a report for the ACE for Wildlife Network. This report includes a review of the literature examining definitions of coexistence with nature in the context of living alongside large carnivores, psychological phenomena and sociological systems that influence willingness to live alongside wildlife. Additionally, it will include a discussion of effective educational techniques and the role effective empathy practices can play in conversations about carnivores and coexistence. I have over seven years of experience studying, educating about, and

monitoring carnivores between my time with the Michigan State University Mara Hyena Project, ZooMontana, and volunteering with the Seattle Urban Carnivore Project, respectively. I am incredibly excited to talk with others in the Network about this topic.

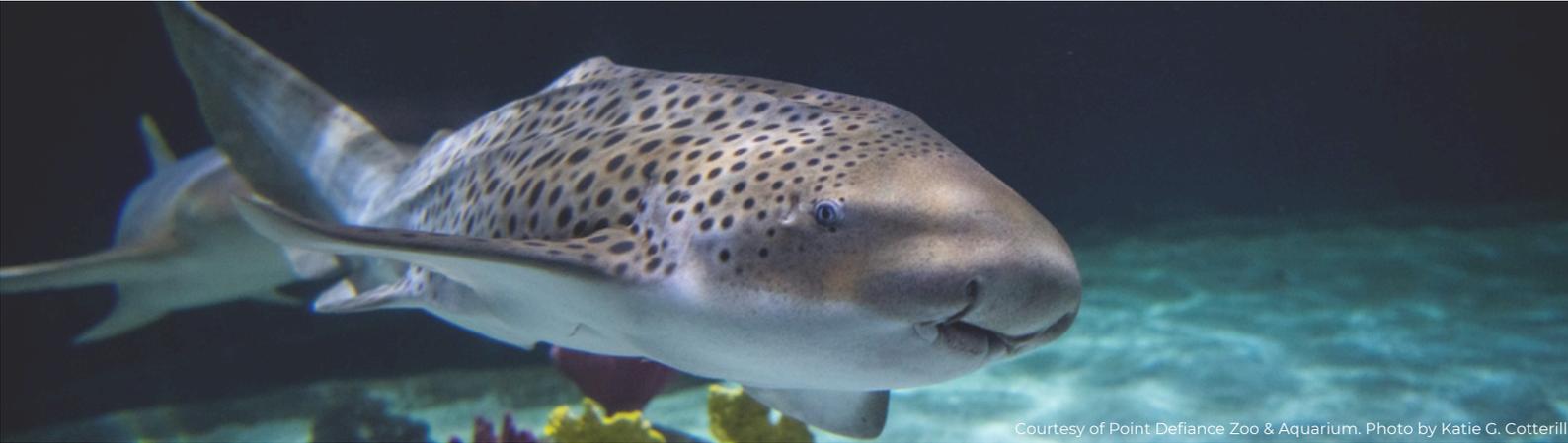
I want to include your perspectives in this final report and learn from your experiences. If you are interested in having an informal conversation to share your knowledge, experiences, concerns, and areas of inquiry around conservation and/or coexistence messaging for large and meso-carnivores, [you can schedule a time to meet with me here](#). If you cannot find a time that works for your schedule, reach out to me at emily.bernhardt@zoo.org and we can find an alternate time.

~ Emily Bernhardt, Empathy Network Specialist

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE™

SEPTEMBER 2024



Courtesy of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Photo by Katie G. Cotterill

And just like that, summer season came and went! We hope you all had a season of successful programs and are settling into fall. We can't wait to see some of you at the 2024 AZA conference—make sure to visit the ACE for Wildlife Network booth and say hello! We also hope you'll join us for a dinner on Sunday, September 15. Fill out an RSVP form and learn more [here](#).

Looking for more ways to engage with the ACE for Wildlife Network? Check out our [LinkedIn page](#). This page will be used to highlight job postings from across our Network and serve as a way for current participants to encourage others to join us. We encourage you to follow the page and include it in your own professional profiles to highlight your participation in our Network.

Our committees have been hard at work this summer—you can learn more about their projects [here](#).

Upcoming Events

September 12 @ 12:00 - 1:00 pm PST: Infusing Empathy Into Early Childhood Programs

Hear from Bethanie West at Idaho Falls Zoo, Travis Heil at Roosevelt Park Zoo, and Terra Herrmann at Woodland Park Zoo as they discuss their early childhood programs that employ empathy practices – helping children and their caretakers connect with animals and nature.

September 30 @ 1:00 - 2:00 pm PST & October 10 @ 9:00-10:00 am PST: Wildlife Trafficking Toolkit Listening Session

The Conservation Action Committee's joint initiative for 2024 is messaging around wildlife trafficking. Before creating resources, the committee wants to hear from you! Provide your input on what resources would be helpful, what topics are top of mind, what challenges you currently have in discussions of wildlife trafficking and more at these listening sessions. Both listening sessions will be recorded.

If you're unable to attend the listening sessions, but still want to provide your input, you can do so through this [Google Form](#).

October 15 @ 9:30 am - 12:00 pm PST: October All-Network Meeting

Join us this fall for our annual October All-Network meeting! Together we'll brainstorm key questions for a Network Learning Agenda to collaboratively investigate in the next five years and learn about invigorating projects happening across the Network.

October 29 @ 10 - 11:30 am PST: Respectful Engagement - Exploring Language and Sovereignty in Native Communities

We are excited to invite you to an enlightening four-part series with the [Native Governance Center](#). This first session explores language and terminology with a foundational understanding of Tribal sovereignty and governance. Participants learn how to appropriately discuss Native nations and individuals and understand more about the diverse perspectives on language within Indian Country. Stay tuned for more information about the three subsequent sessions in the next months.



SEATTLE AQUARIUM'S NEW OCEAN PAVILION: A HUB OF CONSERVATION AND CONNECTION

We are excited to announce the opening of Seattle Aquarium's highly anticipated "Ocean Pavilion," a transformative building addition that extends beyond the traditional aquarium experience. A decade in the making, this new building underscores the Aquarium's commitment to global ocean conservation by spotlighting the Coral Triangle, one of the most biodiverse and threatened marine regions located between the Pacific and Indian oceans.



Above: Divers inside the new Reef Habitat.

The Ocean Pavilion is designed around the theme of interconnectedness, emphasizing that "there's only one world ocean." The exhibits forge a direct connection between the Salish Sea—a central focus of the existing buildings—and the Coral Triangle, helping visitors grasp the global scope of marine conservation challenges. The Ocean Pavilion seeks to instill a deep ocean ethic, guiding visitors to see themselves as guardians of marine health. As they explore this immersive space, they will encounter a vibrant underwater reef from various viewpoints, teeming with lush

corals, schools of brilliantly colored fish, graceful spotted eagle rays, Indo-Pacific leopard sharks and more.

A significant highlight of the Ocean Pavilion is the At Home in the Ocean gallery, which offers a close-up view of marine life, focusing on the animals' perspectives by acquainting visitors with their unique habitats and the challenges they face. This gallery, along with other exhibits, subtly weaves empathy into the visitor experience, inviting people to engage deeply with the ocean and its inhabitants.

The conservation efforts tied to the Ocean Pavilion are equally impressive. The Seattle Aquarium has partnered with the Coral Triangle Center in Bali, contributing to coral restoration, marine protected area management and species translocation programs. These initiatives reflect a respectful and collaborative approach, as the Aquarium continues to listen and see where the two organizations can work together.

As the Ocean Pavilion opens its doors, the Aquarium team eagerly awaits how visitors will engage with this innovative space, which promises to evolve and inspire ocean stewardship for years to come.



Above: A spotted eagle ray swimming in the Reef.



EXPLORE MINNESOTA ZOO'S JOURNEY: DEIA AND EMPATHY IN EDUCATION

Over the past five years, the Minnesota Zoo has been at the forefront of integrating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) principles with empathy in their educational programs. Their work has particularly focused on culturally responsive teaching, aiming to weave empathy into every interaction, whether virtual or in-person.

One of their significant achievements was piloting empathy-based virtual programs for schools with high cultural diversity. This initiative not only assessed the effectiveness of the programs but also delved into the relationship between culture and empathy through a [comprehensive literature review](#). Alongside this, the Zoo launched a project aimed at bringing empathy for animals to traditionally underserved audiences. Through this project, they crafted off-site educational programs designed for community groups with barriers to visiting the zoo, such as hospital residents, senior citizens, and adults with disabilities, ensuring these audiences could connect with animals in meaningful ways. This particular initiative led to the development of a tool that is now integral in evaluating [nonverbal signs of empathy](#).

Building on these initiatives that began as an Advancing Empathy Grant funded project, the Minnesota Zoo is excited to offer two upcoming free webinars that will dive deeper into their DEIA and empathy work. The first webinar will spotlight "Literature and Practice: A DEIA Journey in Empathy Programs at the Minnesota Zoo" where attendees will gain insights from the zoo's literature reviews and firsthand experiences, discovering the key takeaways that have shaped their approach.



Above: Bringing the zoo to you! Minnesota Zoo's ZooMobile Outreach Team with their vehicle.

The second webinar will explore "Non-Speaking Cues for Empathy for Animals," focusing on how to recognize and measure empathy in non-speaking audiences. Participants will learn about that innovative evaluation tool created to address this topic, and how to further apply this work in multiple settings.

Both sessions will be recorded, allowing participants to revisit the content and further hone their skills. Minnesota Zoo hopes that these webinars will not only provide new insights but also encourage ongoing conversations around the intersection of DEIA and empathy in educational settings. They welcome the opportunity to chat with other zoos about their journeys with these kinds of initiatives.

Don't miss this opportunity to join the Minnesota Zoo and fellow educators in these important discussions. [Sign up here to attend](#), and for any inquiries about Minnesota Zoo's initiatives, feel free to reach out [here](#).



NEW MEMBERS & AFFILIATES: AUGUST

Introducing our new Members and Affiliates! Please give them a warm welcome to the network.

Name	Job Title	Organization	Email address: if shared
Bailey Cole	Senior Keeper	Boonshoft Museum of Discovery	bcole@boonshoftmuseum.org
Evin Luehr	Senior Humane Education Specialist	Detroit Zoological Society	eluehr@dzs.org
Brian Priesman	Outreach Coordinator (Education Department)	Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium	brian.priesman@omahazoo.com
Darah Spar	Guest Experience and Engagement Coordinator	Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum	dspar@naturemuseum.org



Mommy cuddles!

New snow leopard mom, Marai, cuddles and receives licks from one of her three cubs (Lenny, Phyllis, and Raya) at Woodland Park Zoo.



EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE™ NETWORK

OCTOBER 2024



Greetings everyone, and happy October! It was so nice to see so many of you at this year's AZA conference, and we were inspired to hear about all the ways empathy is being implemented in organizations across North America and beyond. By now, you have probably read our announcement about the renewal grant we just received from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies. We are excited to start working with all of you on the projects and resources development we have planned in our next grant.

Speaking of resources, do you ever find yourself being asked questions about empathy practices or the Network that you aren't sure how to answer? Or do you have lingering questions? We have a resource for you! [This newly launched primer](#) tells you all you need to know about the ACE for Wildlife Network, the case for empathy, and what tools you can use to effectively infuse this work into your organization. Feel free to share these resources within and beyond the Network.

In other news, we're excited to launch our first-ever ACE for Wildlife Network Photo Contest, and we want you to share what empathy in action looks like at your organization. All zoos, aquariums and conservation organizations across the Network are welcome to participate! This contest is an opportunity to showcase your unique perspective on empathy between animals and people, and how it plays a role in conservation. Click [here](#) to learn more about the competition, prizes and rules.

Interested in learning about what our committees are working on? Click [here](#) to learn more.

Upcoming Events

October 10 @ 9:00 - 10:00 am PST: Wildlife Trafficking Toolkit Listening Session

The Conservation Action Committee's joint initiative for 2024 is messaging around wildlife trafficking. Before creating resources, the committee wants to hear from you! Provide your input on what resources would be helpful to be included in this toolkit at this listening session. If you're unable to attend the listening sessions, you can provide your insight through [this Google Form](#).

October 14 @ 1 - 2:30 pm PST: Fall Network Onboarding Session

This event is designed for Members and Affiliates who are new to the ACE for Wildlife Network or would like to learn more about our Network.

October 15 @ 9:30 am - 12:00 pm PST: October All-Network Meeting

Join us this fall for our annual October All-Network meeting! Together we'll brainstorm key questions for a Network Learning Agenda to collaboratively investigate in the next five years and learn about invigorating projects happening across the Network.

October 29 @ 10 - 11:30 am PST: Respectful Engagement - Exploring Language and Sovereignty in Native Communities

We are excited to invite you to an enlightening four-part series with the [Native Governance Center](#). This first session explores language and terminology with a foundational understanding of Tribal sovereignty and governance. Participants will learn how to appropriately discuss Native nations and individuals and understand more about the diverse perspectives on language within Indian Country. You can view and sign up for the additional webinars [here](#).



INFORMAL EVALUATION CAN BE EASIER THAN YOU THINK: (INFORMAL) OBSERVATIONS AT NEW ZOO & ADVENTURE PARK

By **Marta Burnet**

Michele, Theo, and I had the great pleasure of visiting (Northeastern Wisconsin) NEW Zoo & Adventure Park a few weeks ago to check out their newly opened Discovery Zone which was funded in large part by an Advancing Empathy (AE) grant. To learn more about the project, you can watch their webinar from last spring [here](#).

One topic that rose to the surface on this visit was the informal ways that NEW Zoo staff had been evaluating the Discovery Zone without consciously doing so. When I asked if anything had surprised them about how folks were using the space, they shared many things they had learned and changes they had made as a result. They learned that it wasn't a good idea to have the balance scale next to the pebble harp (pebbles are fun to weigh!), the dino dig needed a higher edging (sand everywhere!) and during camps different age groups tended to cluster around different areas (though everyone loved the webbed tunnel!).



Photos Above: NEW Zoo & Adventure Parks' new Discovery Zone (left). The balance scale in Discovery Zone (right).

Then later in our conversation, they talked about wanting to evaluate the space but struggled to find the time. I think most of us can relate to the challenge of figuring out evaluation. How do we get it right and when is there time to even do it? I mean is it really evaluation if it isn't a multistep process with piles of data to process? Yes, it can be! Andrea and Angela had been doing evaluation informally all along – they observed the space during camp recess and various programs, and they discussed challenges and have been making iterative changes as they go. We are happy to help talk through ways you can embed evaluation into your activities with guests in simple yet impactful ways. If you'd like to discuss creative approaches to evaluating empathy, you can [schedule an appointment with Theo](#) or attend the learning group on this topic we will be hosting mid-November.

Are you working on an empathy project at your organization that you'd like to be featured in the newsletter? Submit a short description of your project to sarah.panciroli@zoo.org—we would love to showcase your work!



ACTIVATING IMAGINATION EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Once a quarter, the Communications Committee will spotlight an effective empathy practice and share ways you can utilize it at your organization. This month, we are diving into the practice of activating imagination, and it's not just for kids! Activating one's imagination can help individuals better understand the perspectives of other people and animals. When we take the perspective of an animal, we increase our awareness of and desire for sustained well-being. There are many ways to activate imagination. Some of the more common practices are storytelling, role-playing and mimicry.

An example of highlighting the animal's perspective could be in a sign that explains why an animal has an injury, such as:

"Hi! My name is Nugget and I was born here on September 13, 2012. As I started growing, my keepers noticed my toes were growing in the wrong direction! After some visits to the veterinary hospital, they decided the best thing to do would be to amputate my toes. And that is why I get to wear this super cool boot! If you would like to know more about me and my boot, please ask one of my keepers if you see them!"



Role-playing can even take place in conversations, such as: "Lions live in groups called 'prides', made up of their family and friends. If you were a lion, who would be in your pride? Individuals within a pride take on different roles too. What would your role be? Would you be a hunter or protector? What do you think that would look like?"

Activating imagination is an incredibly useful tool to inspire empathy in our organizations without requiring a huge lift. Is your zoo using creative ways to activate imagination? We'd love to hear about it-- feel free to tell us about your experience on our ACE for **Wildlife Network**

Discussion board!



NEW MEMBERS & AFFILIATES: OCTOBER

Introducing our new Members and Affiliates! Please give them a warm welcome to the network.

Organization	Name	Email address: if shared
Aquarium of Niagara	Autumn Syracuse	autumn.syracuse@gmail.com
Blank Park Zoo	Rachel Shaffer	rjshaffer@blankparkzoo.net
Boonshoft Museum of Discovery	Sophia Blessing	sblessing@boonshoftmuseum.org
Buttonwood Park Zoological Society	Sara Van Wormer	svanwormer@bpzoo.org
Cal state university Fullerton	Amy Cox-Petersen	acox@fullerton.edu
Calgary Zoo	Chris White	chrisw@calgaryzoo.com
Central Florida Zoo and Botanical Gardens	Michelle Vaughn	Michelllevaughn329@gmail.com
Cheyenne Mountain Zoo	Kaylie Adams	kaylie.adams24@gmail.com
Cincinnati Zoo	Shae Burns	shae.burns@cincinnati.org
Dakota Zoo	Shannon Chaussee	schaus21@gmail.com
Edmonton Valley Zoo	Justin Williams	justin.williams@edmonton.ca
Edmonton Valley Zoo	Dallis Grove	dallis.cartwright@edmonton.ca
Edmonton Valley Zoo	Kelley Polowy	marketing@buildingourzoo.com
Edmonton Valley Zoo	Tiana Busch	tianadawnb@gmail.com
Hattiesburg Zoo	Elliott Fackler	efackler@hattiesburg.org
Lake Superior Zoo	Hannah Higgins	HHiggins@lszoo.org
Loveland Living Planet Aquarium	Ody Flores	ody.f@livingplanetaquarium.org
Loveland Living Planet Aquarium	Blair Williams	blair.w@livingplanetaquarium.org
Marineland Dolphin Adventure	Kelly Fischbach	krfischbach@gmail.com
Milwaukee County Zoo	Jody Allen	jawisrwa@gmail.com
Milwaukee County Zoo	Jennifer Lewis	jcmartell78@hotmail.com
NJ Audubon Scherman Hoffman Wildlife Sanctuary	Annette Baker	
Oklahoma City Zoo	Jennifer Dagostino	Jdagostino@okczoo.org
Oregon Zoo	Ariel Segura	
Pet Pantry of Lancaster County	Ashley Etue	
Phoenix Zoo	Bill Lombardi	lombardiwilliam4@gmail.com
Progressive Animal Welfare Society	Ian Gadbow	igadbow@paws.org



NEW MEMBERS & AFFILIATES: OCTOBER

Introducing our new Members and Affiliates! Please give them a warm welcome to the network.

Organization	Name	Email address: if shared
Racine Zoo	Kylie Holmquist	kholmquist@racinezoo.org
Rawry & Pohly	Jamie Mason	jamiem_18@hotmail.com
Rolling Hills Zoo	Teagan Miller	teagan@rollinghillszoo.org
Saint Louis Zoo	Taylor woods	twoods@stlzoo.org
Saint Louis Zoo	Emily Bowling	bowling@stlzoo.org
San Diego Zoo	Jennifer Tobey	jensjunk13@mac.com
Shedd Aquarium	Jae Murphy	emurphy@sheddaquarium.org
Shedd Aquarium	Aloha Rasmussen	arasmussen@sheddaquarium.org
Shedd Aquarium	Rachel Berey-Wingate	rbereywingate@gmail.com
Shedd Aquarium	Timothy Sullivan	tsullivan@sheddaquarium.org
Shedd Aquarium	Zach Sabitt	zsabitt@sheddaquarium.org
Staten Island Zoo	Pearl Cales	harm0ny6281@gmail.com
The Living Desert Zoo & Gardens	Katie Shaw	kshaw@livingdesert.org
The Walt Disney Company	Allison Weatherly	aweatherly@outlook.com
Utah's Hogle Zoo	Erika Berry	eberry@hoglezoo.org
Western Carolina University	Anne (AJ) Junttila	junttila.a.m@gmail.com
Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo	Cannice Houle	canniceh@calgaryzoo.com
Wildlife Institute of India	Dr. Nishigandha M	drnishie07@gmail.com
Woodland Park Zoo	Jeannine Alexander	alexan54@miamioh.edu
Zoo Atlanta	Rebecca Young	ryoung@zooatlanta.org

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE™ NETWORK

NOVEMBER 2024

Photo courtesy of Seattle Aquarium



Hello Everyone!

We hope you are all enjoying all the beauty that comes with the fall season. In case you haven't heard, we are thrilled to announce that our 2025 Empathy Summit is just around the corner. We're looking forward to having Network Members and Affiliates convening to progress our work forward. To learn about all things related to the Empathy Summit, visit the [landing page on our website](#).

We are also excited to be launching the Empathy Measurement in Zoo and Aquarium Audiences Project (EMZAAP): a multi-institutional collaboration focused on enhancing our ability to measure empathy toward animals in our audiences. The goal of EMZAAP is to provide validated instruments that are designed to be implemented in our unique settings and that support consistent measurement across our organizations and programs. Learn more about this project and how to get involved in this process [here](#).

And speaking of evaluation, check out our new [empathy observation tool](#), a guide to creating an observation protocol for organizations or individuals interested in measuring the variety of empathy-related behaviors their audiences engage in during exhibit visits or facilitated programs. This tool provides a list of behaviors, categorized by their related overarching empathy-related attitudes, for practitioners to choose from when considering conducting observations of expressions of empathy in their own audiences.

We also wanted to remind you all that our ACE for Wildlife Network™ Photo Contest will be closing at the end of the month, and we want you to share what empathy in action looks like at your organization! Click [here](#) to learn more about the competition, prizes and rules.

We are currently updating our Conservation Action, Empathy Training, Empathy Evaluation, and Pollinator Action, toolkits for the Network. To have your resources considered for the 2025 editions of these resources, [you can submit them here](#) through November 25.

And finally, the Membership Committee has approved Saint Louis Zoo as our newest Organizational Partner. They have been working in the empathy space for several years and we are thrilled to have them join us in a more comprehensive way. Welcome, Saint Louis Zoo!

Upcoming Events

November 14 @ 10:00 am – 11:30 pm PST Native Governance Webinar: Beyond Land Acknowledgement

We are excited to invite you to an enlightening four-part series with the [Native Governance Center](#). During our second session, attendees will learn more about these statements, why it is crucial to go further, and so much more. You can view and sign up for the additional webinars [here](#).

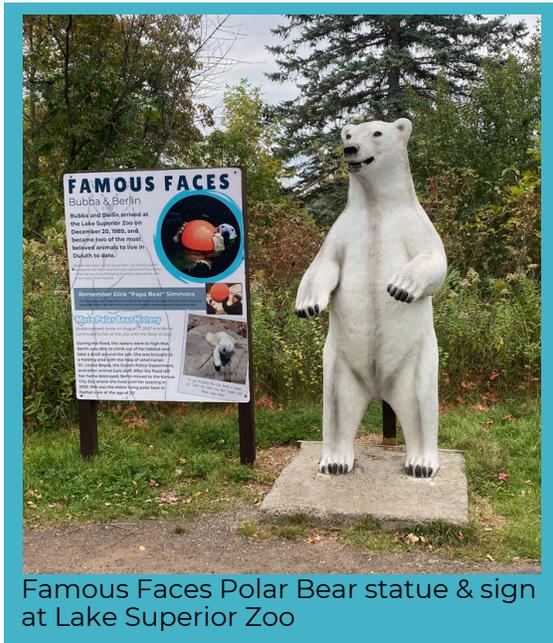
November 21 @ 11:00 am – 12:00 pm PST Empathy Evaluation Coffee Chat

Join us for the first ACE for Wildlife Network Evaluation coffee chat! Attendees will have the chance to informally share and discuss empathy-related evaluation tools, methods, and ideas with other Network Members and Affiliates to build our collective knowledge on how to measure empathy in zoos and aquariums.



HONORING OUR ANIMALS: FAMOUS FACES AT LAKE SUPERIOR ZOO

The animals in our care are at the heart of everything we do, inspiring guests, facilitating learning, and creating unforgettable connections. When we lose one of these beloved animals, the impact is deeply felt by our staff, volunteers and the communities we serve. Each animal holds a special place in our hearts, and it's important to honor their memory. This month, we're sharing a meaningful program from Lake Superior Zoo that they've developed to celebrate and remember the lives of their cherished animals.



Famous Faces Polar Bear statue & sign at Lake Superior Zoo

The Famous Faces exhibit is a key feature of Lake Superior Zoo's Centennial Anniversary celebration. Founded in 1923, their zoo has been home to countless beloved animals over the past 101 years, many of which hold special places in the hearts of their visitors. As they planned this exhibit, they were inspired by guests who fondly recalled memories of animals like Berlin and Bubba, their iconic polar bears, and Bessie the elephant. Wanting to offer more interactive experiences, Lake Superior Zoo paired these memories with life-sized statues of some of the most memorable residents, creating unique photo opportunities.

This exhibit fosters empathy by sharing the personal stories of these animals through interpretive signage. Visitors can learn about their unique personalities, behaviors and contributions to the zoo's legacy. By connecting with the individual stories of these animals, guests are encouraged to reflect on the broader importance of wildlife conservation. This deeper understanding of Lake Superior Zoo's former residents helps cultivate compassion for all wildlife and a

shared responsibility for protecting their natural habitats. Through these stories, Famous Faces not only honors our past but also inspires hope for the future of conservation.

The topic of animal grief and bereavement is closely tied to empathy, and we've observed many moving examples of this across our Network. In this spirit, we would like to open a space for organizations to share how they honor their animals. If you are interested in this discussion, we invite you to respond to [this discussion post](#) and share the ways in which your organization commemorates the lives of their animals. By learning from one another, we can celebrate the lives of these remarkable animals together.

NEW MEMBERS & AFFILIATES: NOVEMBER

Introducing our new Members and Affiliates! Please give them a warm welcome to the network.

Organization	Name	Email address: if shared
Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center	Tessa Cafritz	tcafriz@sbnature2.org
Leadership, Ethics, Animals, Planet (LEAP)	Andrea Nassar	andrea@leapforanimals.org
Walt Disney World-Animals, Science and Environment	Michelle Matuszewski	Michelle.Matuszewski@disney.com
Fresno Chaffee Zoo	Courtney McNulty	cmcnulty@fresnochaffeezoo.org



BIOFACTS EMPATHY TRAINING WITH CALGARY ZOO

At the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo, biofacts are more than just educational tools—they're key to fostering empathy and inspiring conservation action. For over 30 years, the zoo has been honing a biofact training program that has grown into a thoughtful and comprehensive process. This training equips both staff and volunteers with the knowledge and skills they need to use biofacts effectively in creating meaningful connections between guests and wildlife.

One component of the multimodal training program is a 3-hour, in-person session that introduces participants to empathy-centered practices and the proper handling of biofacts. A critical part of the program is modeling: staff are trained to handle biofacts with care and respect, which in turn sets the tone for how guests engage with these items.

This training approach extends beyond just teaching facts, as staff are also taught how to create thematic touch tables that tell a holistic story. Instead of simply displaying grizzly bear biofacts, they might include items from the bear's ecosystem, such as plants and other animals, to provide a broader understanding of the interconnectedness of nature. One example of this approach was featured at the 2024 AZA Zoo Day, where Calgary Zoo volunteers hosted a “guess the biofact” game. Visitors identified marine animals hidden in boxes—a fun and interactive way to engage with wildlife while learning about the animals' traits and habitats.

Another important element of Calgary Zoo's training is the use of critical anthropomorphism. By drawing scientific comparisons between human and animal experiences, staff help guests relate to animals on a more personal, emotional level. As many of us know, biofacts often prompt challenging questions from guests, such as whether an item is from a real animal or how it was obtained. The training also prepares staff to respond to these questions with sensitivity, providing age-appropriate, compassionate answers that enhance understanding.

For other zoos seeking to adopt a similar training, Calgary Zoo stresses that promoting empathy through biofacts requires dedication, mentorship, and an openness to learning and unlearning practices. It's not a quick process, but the rewards of creating authentic connections between visitors and wildlife are invaluable. They also emphasize the care and organization of biofacts themselves. How biofacts are stored and displayed sends a powerful message about their value and the respect they deserve. By organizing these items thoughtfully, staff model the same care and respect they hope to inspire in guests.



Volunteer facilitating a touch table with visitors from summer camp

Ultimately, the Calgary Zoo's biofact training program is about more than just imparting facts—it's about creating emotional connections that leave a lasting impression. Through this empathetic approach, the zoo is inspiring its visitors to become lifelong advocates for wildlife conservation. If you are interested in learning more about this project, you can contact avrillea@calgaryzoo.com

Wilder Institute/ Calgary Zoo's Educational Resource Collection is sponsored by ConocoPhillips Canada

Are you working on an empathy project at your organization that you'd like to be featured in the newsletter? Submit a short description of your project to sarah.panciroli@zoo.org – we would love to showcase your work!

EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE™ NETWORK

DECEMBER 2024



Greetings everyone,

We can't believe that the Empathy Summit is only a few short months away- if you are interested in registering, presenting, or want to learn more, you can find all things related to the Empathy Summit on this [landing page](#). The deadline to register and submit presentation proposals is 12:00 am Friday, December 6.

Announcements:

Bylaws

Thanks to the hard work of the Steering and Membership committees, the Network's [2025 bylaws](#) have been finalized.

Sustainable Holiday Guides

Last year, the Conservation Action Committee created the World Wildlife Conservation Day (WWCD) Toolkit to support you in promoting sustainable practices over the holiday season. World Wildlife Conservation Day is celebrated on December 4, but by getting these documents out in advance we hope we can help people plan for a sustainable holiday. You can view the toolkit [here](#).

Advancing Empathy Granting Program Toolkits

We are excited to present the rollout of our new [Grant Toolkits](#) - a convenient place to learn about the findings and best practices from grant projects by the Advancing Empathy Granting Program. The first two are on DEAI Projects and Educational Programs and Partnerships. More will be rolled out in the coming months.

Committee Updates

Stay up to date with committee happenings [here](#).

The Advancing Empathy team sends you best wishes this holiday season and a happy new year!

Upcoming Events

December 10 @ 10:00 am – 11:30 am PST: Native Governance Webinar–Appreciation not Appropriation

[Learn more and register here.](#)

December 11 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm PST: Learning Group–Empathy and Biofacts Part II

[Learn more and register here.](#)

February 11 @ 9:00 am - 1:00 pm PST: Virtual Empathy Summit

[Learn more and register here.](#)

Are you working on an empathy project at your organization that you'd like to be featured in the newsletter? Submit a short description of your project to sarah.panciroli@zoo.org – we would love to showcase your work!



CREATING EMPATHY THROUGH MEDICAL SIGNAGE AT RACINE ZOO

Understanding the welfare of our animals through the eyes of our guests can often present challenges. Our visitors seldom share the same context that we have about our animals, or know the details of their specialized care. To explore this dynamic, we spoke with Abigail Flores, Conservation Education Manager from Racine Zoological Society about their innovative approach to using empathy-infused signage to share medical information about their animals.



Exhibit sign titled "Where are the Rhinos?" regarding medical notes from staff.

This signage uses empathy tools to highlight the unique medical needs of certain animals, informing guests about the zoo's animal welfare while preventing misinterpretations about an animal's health. This technique was used with one of Racine Zoological Society's male black rhinos, Kianga, who became noticeably timid when visitors returned post-pandemic. To address this concern, a sign explains how the sudden presence of people impacts Kianga, easing visitor concerns and creating a learning opportunity while curbing negative assumptions about animal welfare. These signs go beyond traditional medical signage by addressing behavioral nuances alongside

physical health. For instance, one penguin, Nelson, has a spinal deformity. A sign for Nelson highlights his condition and reassures guests that it doesn't limit his quality of life.

To add validity that these medical signs are a positive addition to the zoo, there are ample QR codes surrounding enclosures that allow guests to share their learning experiences. One visitor commented, "I learned that rhinos mental health (and every other animal), like humans, can take a huge toll due to changes in their environment and everyday life, like the COVID pandemic. I noticed Kianga pacing in the back of his habitat, and was thinking that if he has had anxiety due to changes in his life, then other rhinos (and animals) in the wild will likely have a lot of stress when their environment and other animals are threatened due to poaching, deforestation, etc."

For other organizations interested in similar signage, Abby suggests listening to the big questions guests frequently ask. Observing these questions can guide the creation of effective signage that resonates with visitors, highlighting behavior as much as medical conditions. She also advises using this approach selectively—too many medical notices might send unintended messages. Thoughtful signage can enrich visitors' experiences, encouraging them to see each animal's unique story and value. You can contact Abigail about these signs [here](#).

NEW MEMBERS & AFFILIATES: DECEMBER

Introducing our new Members and Affiliates! Please give them a warm welcome to the network.

Organization	Name	Email address: if shared
Angela Millwood-Lacinak	Precision Behavior	amillwood@precisionbehavior.com
Emilie Alfonso	Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Gardens	emiliea@centralfloridazoo.org
Emma Congalton	Monterey Bay Aquarium	econgalton@mbayaq.org
Michelle Ashkin	Columbia University / Voices for Urban Wildlife	maa64@columbia.edu
Mollie Samocha	Birch Aquarium	mbsamocha@ucsd.edu



CONSERVATORY: ROADMAP AND EMPATHY IN CURRICULUM DESIGN

In 2021, Como Park Zoo & Conservatory launched their ROADMAP (Reaching Our Audiences by Developing Mission-Aligned Programs) to empathy project, which has played a pivotal role in shaping their educational programming. This initiative integrated empathy best practices into the ROADMAP program's design, resources, and tools. With the ROADMAP now fully implemented, Como has applied it to various programs, including their summer camps, where they enlisted curriculum designer Monica Digre to help guide this innovative approach.

Monica, who joined the team with a background in curriculum development and science education, played a pivotal role in embedding empathy practices into program design. Drawing on the concept of "backwards design," she worked closely with the education team, integrating their expertise to create thoughtful and immersive experiences for program participants. Creating the position of curriculum designer brought fresh perspective through theoretical and practical strengths, bridging traditional curriculum methods with Como's goal to foster empathy for wildlife.

One program, "Animal Care and Exhibit Design" for fifth and sixth graders stood out as a unique opportunity to connect students with animals on a personal level. Each participant designed an exhibit tailored to a specific animal living at Como, not just a general species. This approach encouraged students to learn the animal's name, recognize their unique personality, needs and preferences, and use empathy to see the world from their perspective. By deeply engaging with their specific animal throughout the project, students formed meaningful connections that extended beyond the program. This program was a resounding success, fostering a deeper appreciation for animal individuality and providing students with valuable tools to practice empathy.

Looking ahead, Como is also exploring the concept of empathy for plants through a new school program called "Wildly Misunderstood." Guided by their ROADMAP, this initiative aims to help students relate to unconventional plants, encouraging them to see value in the unique roles these "misfit" plants play in the ecosystem.

The zoo and conservatory shared that the shift to empathy-infused programming has resulted in greater engagement and investment from students, sparking a new level of creativity and connection. Moving forward, Como looks to continue expanding the reach of empathy through the ROADMAP program design process, and if you're interested in learning more about these initiatives, you can reach out to Como Park Zoo & Conservatory [here](#).

