

# Alive



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Caring for Cranes Around the World

A New View of Hippos

Peacocks on Parade

Second Chance for Sea Lions

The mission of the Zoological Society of Milwaukee is to conserve wildlife and endangered species, educate people about the importance of wildlife and the environment, and support the Milwaukee County Zoo.

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<b>Editor</b>	<b>Graphic Designer</b>
Stacy Vogel Davis	Kevin de Wane
<b>Contributors</b>	<b>Printer</b>
Ren Gresbach	NML Graphics



Did you know that institutions accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, like the Milwaukee County Zoo, fund more than \$200 million a year toward conservation work? That makes AZA one of the largest conservation organizations in the world. The Zoological Society of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County Zoo support conservation around the world, from our Bonobo & Congo Biodiversity Initiative in central Africa to zookeepers who care for endangered iguanas in the Caribbean. But conservation also takes place in our own backyard. For example, the Zoo is working to

make sure Lake Evinrude on the southwest side of its grounds stays healthy and clean. This picturesque spot is home to many species of ducks, geese, turtles and fish. Turn to page 4 to learn about these efforts.

Our friends at Ocean Connections are also protecting animals. The organization, which operates the seal and sea lion show at the Zoo, has taken in three rescue sea lions in the last few years (page 14). These animals were stranded on the West Coast, part of the devastating mass stranding of pups in recent years, and have now become ambassadors to teach people about the importance of keeping our oceans healthy.

Just down the road in Baraboo, the International Crane Foundation is helping protect the world's 15 species of crane. The Zoo and Society have several ties to ICF; most notably, one of the Zoo's whooping cranes, Torch, was hatched there. Visit page 8 to learn more about ICF's work and its renovation project.

Finally, turn to page 6 to learn about plans for a new underwater hippo exhibit at the Zoo. This is the second stage of Adventure Africa, which will reimagine 25% of the Zoo's developed footprint. The Zoological Society is raising \$25 million for Adventure Africa, and we need your help. Visit [zoosociety.org/AdventureAfrica](http://zoosociety.org/AdventureAfrica) to donate. Phase one, a new elephant exhibit, will open to the public May 4. Make sure to visit the Zoo this summer to see the amazing new space. We couldn't have come this far without your support!

*Jodi Gibson*

Jodi Gibson, Zoological Society President & CEO

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**ON THE COVER:** A grey crowned crane at the Milwaukee County Zoo. Photo by Bob Wickland





# Beautiful BIRDS



One of the best parts of spring and summer at the Milwaukee County Zoo is seeing the free-range peacocks spread their gorgeous trains as they compete for mates. Indian peafowl have been a feature at the Zoo for more than 100 years, dating back to the Zoo's original site in Washington Park. Here, bird curator Alex Waier and Zoo registrar Faith Benassi answer some of the most common questions about the dramatic birds.

◀ Young peachicks all have the muted brown coloring of peahens. Males start to change color around six months and grow their first train in their second year. Photo by Joel Miller

## **How many Indian peafowl does the Zoo have?**

42 currently.

## **How long has the Zoo had peafowl?**

The first record of peafowl at the Zoo is in July 1908, when three male peacocks were purchased. The first peahen arrived in 1917.

## **How do you keep the peafowl from leaving the Zoo?**

They stay on the Zoo grounds because we feed them and it is a safe place with many trees to roost in. They occasionally jump the fence during breeding season, but they usually stay very close to the Zoo borders.

## **What do they like to eat?**

We feed them in many areas around the Zoo where they tend to already congregate, such as near the polar bear, the bird building and Macaque Island. They eat the same food that our other gallinaceous (pheasant-like) birds eat, including game bird mix, chopped up fruit and veggies, dog food and insects. Unofficially they will eat almost anything they can forage in the woods or that a guest drops on the ground, but we discourage this behavior from guests as it is not nutritionally what peafowl should get.

## **Since peafowl live in India, where it's warm, how do they adjust to winter here?**

They have adapted, like many birds do, to our winters. Many species of birds can adapt to temperatures outside those of their native range.

▶ A peacock shows off his magnificent train for a peahen. Photo by Joel Miller



## **If you find a peacock feather, is it OK to pick it up and take it home?**

Yes, you can take the feather home. But like anything you find on the ground, it has potential to carry all sorts of germs, so I always ask people to make sure they wash their hands after handling a feather. And please don't ever chase the peafowl or touch them. This is their home, and we want to treat them well.

**It's never OK to try to pull a feather off of a peacock.**

Photo by Bob Wickland



## **HERE ARE SOME FUN FACTS ABOUT PEAFOWL:**

- Only the males are called peacocks. The females are peahens, and babies are peachicks.
- The beautiful feathers that the peacock spreads are the train, not the tail. The train covers his tail, which is made up of the brown feathers underneath.
- Peacocks grow their first train in their second year, and it grows longer and more vibrant each year until age 5 or 6, according to the San Diego Zoo. Females prefer the males with the longest and most beautiful trains. Not incidentally, these are the toughest peacocks that have survived long enough to sport an impressive train.
- The spots on a peacock's train are called ocelli, which means "little eyes" in Latin.
- Peahens are dull brown so they can camouflage themselves with their surroundings to protect their young.



# All About Lake Evinrude



*The Milwaukee County Zoo is a great place to see animals from all over the world, but it's also a great place to see native wildlife. Nowhere is that more true than Lake Evinrude, where ducks, turtles, fish and other wildlife gather on the southwest side of the Zoo. Here is some more information about the lake.*

Photo by Bob Wickland

## Stats

**Size:** About 6.5 acres with an island in the middle

**Depth:** 12 feet at its deepest, 9 feet on average

## Animals

**Waterfowl:** ducks, including American merganser, mallards, bufflehead, hooded merganser and many others (especially during migration season); Canada geese; and the Zoo's trumpeter swans, Boo and Ghost

**Reptiles:** common painted turtles and red-eared turtles

**Fish:** bluegill, sunfish, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, longnose gar, muskellunge, northern pike, sturgeon, black crappie and rock bass

All of the animals in the lake, with the exception of the swans, are wild and self-sustaining.

## History

Lake Evinrude is a man-made lake. It was funded in part by a \$30,000 donation in 1956 from the Ole Evinrude Foundation.

Ole Evinrude, founder of Evinrude Motor Co. and later Outboard Motors Corp., created the first commercially successful, gasoline-powered outboard motor. Legend has it he came up with the idea when his girlfriend asked him to row across a lake in broiling weather to get a dish of ice cream, according to a Milwaukee Journal article about the donation. The landing at Lake Evinrude is named after Ralph Evinrude, Ole's son and president of the foundation at the time of the donation.

Construction of the lake was completed in July 1958, with a dam built in 1959. In August 1960, the lake was filled with water one foot at a time, with workers checking for leaks after each addition.

## Conservation

The Milwaukee County Zoo has taken steps in recent years to keep Lake Evinrude and the Aviary Pond next to the bird building healthy, says Alex Hoefs, Zoo horticulturist. Those include:

- Diverting rainwater from going into the lakes through rain gardens, pervious pavement and rain barrels. Rainwater can pick up pollutants from the ground that then pollute the lake if they make it that far.

- Creating low-mow or no-mow areas around the lakes. Not only do these areas require less fertilizer and mowing, but they also help divert rainwater away from the lake.

- Pre-treating Zoo roads and pathways with salt brine in order to use less rock salt while still keeping people safe.

- Reducing fertilization and using low-nitrogen and non-phosphorus fertilizer to prevent algae growth. Nitrogen and phosphorus occur naturally in the environment, but an overabundance of either can cause overgrowth of algae, which chokes off other plants and wildlife in bodies of water.

- Creating a barley straw plant deck. An Eagle Scout built a plant deck (Hoefs describes it as a "floating island") for the Aviary Pond coordinated by bird curator Alex Waier. The plants and barley straw consume nitrogen, inhibiting algae growth. The Zoo hopes to put one or two on Lake Evinrude, too.

- Removing logs and large sticks from the water. As the logs break down, they release nitrogen, which encourages algae growth.

- Adding native trees such as birch and poplar to the shoreline. These trees prevent erosion and inhibit algae growth.



▲ Above: The Zoo's trumpeter swans live near Lake Evinrude year round, along with many ducks and geese.

Photo by Richard Brodzeller

Below: A painted turtle hatches near the shore of Lake Evinrude.

Photo by Joel Miller



# Teacher Gets on the Kids' Level



Molly Del Vecchio sings a counting song with a Stroller Safari class.  
Photo by Bob Wickland



Del Vecchio reads a story to the Polar Pals class.  
Photo by Paul Ruffolo

It's almost time for Stroller Safari to begin at the Milwaukee County Zoo, but where is the instructor? There she is – sitting on the floor in the corner playing with a drum. Instructor Molly Del Vecchio gently taps her fingers on the drum, then bangs on it with her whole hand, much to the delight of 20-month-old Charlotte. A few minutes later, she calls the parents and children together to start Stroller Safari, a 45-minute class for children under 2 and their grown-ups. Although it's a cold and rainy December morning, Del Vecchio's sunny disposition is enough to make everyone perk up as they prepare to walk to the primates area for "Hands, Feet and Sometimes Tails."

"Miss Molly," as she's known to the kids and parents, is many families' first introduction to the Zoological Society's Education Department as she teaches infants through age 5. "She's awesome," says Cara M., who is here with her niece, 12-month-old Stella. As a nanny, Cara has brought children to many classes led by Del Vecchio. "She gets so into it and she really cares. You can tell she really loves her job." Del Vecchio is a stellar example of the Society's passionate, professional educators, says Patty Trinko, assistant education director. "She develops creative curriculum that is fun, interactive and engaging for young children and their adults. She individualizes her approach with children and understands what helps them get excited about animals and nature."

Del Vecchio taught fifth grade in Arizona before giving birth to her daughter, Zoe, and moving with her family to Wisconsin. She was a stay-at-home mom for five years before joining the Zoological Society's staff a decade ago. "My teaching experience and my parenting experience really came together in the job," she says. For example, she helped create the Stroller Safari curriculum in 2015. "Songs and music were a big part of my time as a parent, as well as using multiple ways of learning such as puppets."

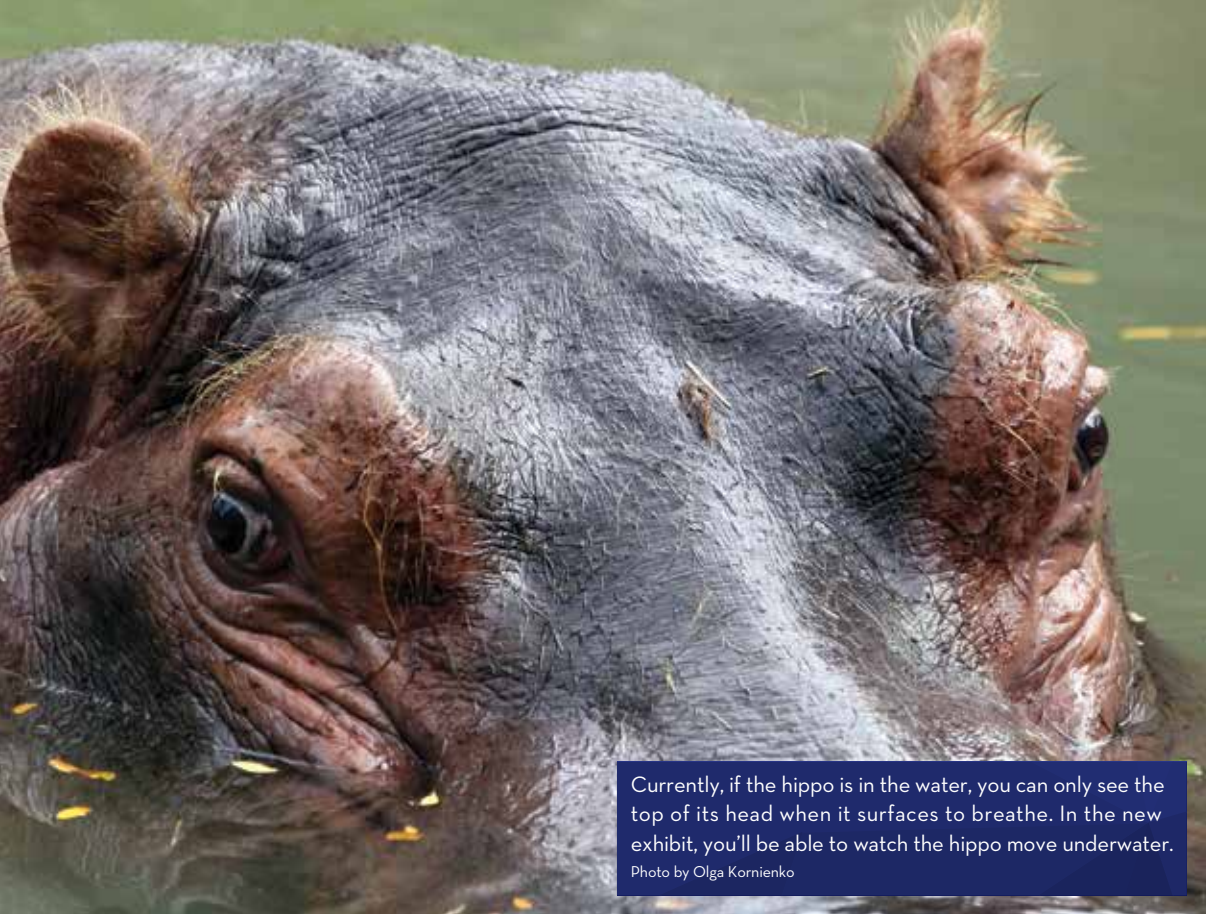
She brings all of those elements to Stroller Safari, using her whole body – hands, facial expressions and voice – as she talks and sings about the Zoo's apes and monkeys. As the group arrives in the apes building, she leads them in a traditional acting warmup using body parts that apes and humans share – "fiddly fingers, wobbly wrists, eager elbows." The children watch entranced as she sings a counting song about monkeys: "One little, two little, three little monkeys..." But Del Vecchio says her favorite part is facilitating interactions between parent and child. That's one reason she enjoys using puppets; she fades into the background as the adult and child focus on feeding, petting or playing peek-a-boo with the puppet together.

As the children move on to classes for 2-year-olds and beyond, Del Vecchio enjoys seeing them grow in knowledge, confidence and abilities. "Even in one session, you can see so much growth." She is eager to continue her own growth as an educator. The Education Department is entering an exciting time under the leadership of the Zoological Society's new senior director of programs, Julia Petersen, Del Vecchio says, with more opportunities for collaboration and professional development. "That aspect is really exciting to me, to be able to grow and continue learning myself."

*By Stacy Vogel Davis*

**REGISTRATION** is now open for  
**ZOO SUMMER CAMPS**, sponsored by Penzeys Spices,  
with offerings for infants and children through age 14.  
**VISIT** [ZOOSOCIETY.ORG/EDUCATION](http://ZOOSOCIETY.ORG/EDUCATION) to learn more.





Currently, if the hippo is in the water, you can only see the top of its head when it surfaces to breathe. In the new exhibit, you'll be able to watch the hippo move underwater.

Photo by Olga Kornienko



# NEW VIEW OF HIPPOS

Scat. Feces. Waste. Whatever you choose to call it, poop is a fact of life, especially for the hippopotamus, one of the world's largest land animals. Hippos eat 80 to 100 pounds of grass per night and then spend up to 16 hours a day in the water, where they create hundreds of pounds of poop. That can be a problem if the water is in a contained area – say, a pool at the Milwaukee County Zoo – especially if you want to keep the water clear enough to see through it.

That's just one of the challenges facing the planners of the Zoo's new hippo exhibit, scheduled to break ground later this year. When finished, the exhibit will be one of eight in North America with underwater viewing of hippos. Visitors will be able to go right up to the glass of a 60,000-gallon pool, similar to the way they can view the polar bear and harbor seals underwater now. "The clarity of the water is what makes or breaks these exhibits, for sure," says Brent Pitcher, vice president at GRAEF, a Milwaukee engineering and consulting firm that is leading the design team.

Planning for a new outdoor hippo exhibit started before the Zoo expanded the indoor hippo area in 2009. Now, that plan is close to becoming a reality as part of Adventure Africa, which will include new exhibits for the elephants, African hoofstock, hippos and rhinos. The elephant exhibit will open to the public May 4, and the Zoo is expected to break ground on the hippo exhibit soon after. To help pay for the improvements, the Zoological Society is raising \$25 million through its Window to the Wild Capital Campaign.

Back in 2008, representatives from GRAEF and the Milwaukee County Zoo went on a whirlwind tour of zoos, visiting underwater hippo exhibits in San Diego, San Antonio, St. Louis, Tampa Bay and Orlando in a span of four days. They noted what worked and what didn't in the exhibits, Pitcher says. "There was a lot of attention to viewer experience – the glass, the structure, the building it will be housed in – for example making sure that it's dark so you're not getting glares from the lights preventing you from seeing into the water." Then the real work began of designing an exhibit for Milwaukee, says Erin Dowgwilllo, elephant care coordinator and pachyderm keeper. "We worked closely with the engineers, architects and pachyderm staff to try to get the best possible design for our space. There were lots and lots of meetings and blueprint reviews."

The resulting design dramatically increases the space for hippos both in and out of the water and offers the hippos more choices throughout the day. It includes a beach area three times larger than the current space with different surfaces to give the hippos the choice of where they want to lie. The pool offers varying depths of water, 7 feet at the deepest, with sloped rocks and ramps to give them different resting options. Choice is an important part of animal enrichment, which is the effort to draw out animals' natural behaviors and meet their physical and psychological needs.

Water filtration technology is constantly improving in sustainability and disinfection, Pitcher says. The system in



The new hippo exhibit will have a beach area three times larger than the current space.  
Photo by Olga Kornienko

## YOU CAN HELP THE HIPPOS GET A NEW HOME!

The Zoological Society is raising money for the new hippo habitat for its 2019 annual appeal. Through the end of June, MillerCoors will match **dollar for dollar** any donations to the appeal. Visit [zoosociety.org/hippos](https://zoosociety.org/hippos) to learn more and donate.



The new hippo exhibit will cover 13,000 square feet, more than twice the size of the current exhibit, with a large beach area and underwater viewing.



The underwater viewing area will be shaded so sunlight doesn't cause glare on the glass.



Renderings courtesy of M.A. Mortenson Co.

Milwaukee will use ozone to purify and clarify the water in the indoor and outdoor pools, says Zoo Director Chuck Wikenhauser. The same system is already being used in the new otter exhibit. "It will be a healthier environment for the hippos," Wikenhauser says.

The system will also save money and be good for the environment. Previously, zookeepers had to empty the outdoor and indoor hippo pools at the end of each day, but the new exhibit will filter and reuse the same water for the entire season, saving 20 million gallons of water a year. Solid waste will be composted. The filtration equipment will be stored in the basement of the former elephant building. "That's one of the biggest logistical challenges of this project," Pitcher says.

The result is a much better experience for hippos and visitors, Wikenhauser says. "Visitors will be able to really see the hippos, instead of the tops of their heads." When completed, the outdoor exhibit will be open approximately April through October, as hippos can't tolerate the cold. After more than a decade working on the project, Pitcher says he's excited for families, including his own, to finally see the finished exhibit next year. "When kids see these huge animals up close, underwater, I think it's just going to be an awesome experience. It's going to be great for Milwaukee and great for the Zoo."

By Stacy Vogel Davis



The majestic crane, with its long neck, impressive height and beautiful plumage, has been celebrated for centuries all over the world. The bird is found in ancient Sanskrit poetry and Greek and Roman mythology. In much of Asia, the crane symbolizes happiness and good fortune. Cranes are the national bird of several African countries. Yet one of the most important organizations for crane conservation is right here in Wisconsin – the International Crane Foundation, founded in 1973 in Baraboo.

The International Crane Foundation (ICF) has several ties to the Milwaukee County Zoo. Both are accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), and the Zoo and Zoological Society of Milwaukee have donated to ICF in the past. The Zoo’s male whooping crane, Torch, was hatched at ICF in 2006 and brought to Milwaukee because he couldn’t be released in the wild. The Zoo’s zoological medicine residents from the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine also spend time working at ICF. It is the only Wisconsin institution to share reciprocity with the Zoological Society, meaning Zoo Pass members get free admittance to ICF’s headquarters. The Zoological Society and ICF share a commitment to conservation and are in the early stages of exploring potential collaborative educational opportunities.



The Siberian crane is critically endangered.  
Photo courtesy of International Crane Foundation archives



Slidell, a grey crowned crane on exhibit at the International Crane Foundation.  
Photo courtesy of ICF archives

Beilfuss has worked for ICF for more than 20 years. He built the foundation’s program in Africa, where four species of cranes live. For example, ICF is working to restore the large floodplains that sustain wattled cranes in southern Africa. “The floodplains are some of the most important wetlands in the world,” Beilfuss says. “(Our work) created opportunities to restore water species in those floodplains, reduce invasive species, and reduce wildfires and poaching.” Those efforts have benefited not just cranes but also large mammals such as African buffalo, elephants and hippos.

Here in the U.S., ICF is known for its efforts to conserve the whooping crane, the most endangered bird in North America. In 1940, fewer than 20 of these magnificent birds

ICF is one of many AZA-accredited institutions doing important conservation work. It exhibits each of the world’s 15 crane species at its Baraboo headquarters, and it supports crane conservation with offices or partnerships in Texas, China, Cambodia, India, South Africa, Vietnam and Zambia. Of the 15 species, 11 are threatened or endangered.

Conserving cranes is a way to address many environmental issues, says Dr. Rich Beilfuss, ICF president and CEO. The main problems facing cranes around the world are loss of habitat and wetland degradation. Wetlands are vital ecosystems for cranes and thousands of other species. They are often destroyed for agriculture or real estate development, and they’re also hurt by pollution and climate change. “Most of our work is about land, water and communities, whether we’re trying to secure land agreements or preserve healthier water systems or help people who live near cranes to develop alternative livelihoods that support cranes and wetlands,” Beilfuss says. “Basically cranes narrow our geography but not the breadth of conservation issues we work on.”



A whooping crane at the International Crane Foundation.  
Photo courtesy of ICF archives





ICF visitors check out Slidell, a grey crowned crane.

Photo courtesy of International Crane Foundation archives

lived in the wild, a number that has grown to about 500 today. Only one naturally occurring flock remains, migrating between Canada and coastal Texas. ICF was part of a coalition that established a second flock that migrates between central Wisconsin and the southeastern United States. “The reintroduction in Wisconsin was really all about creating insurance for the wild birds,” Beilfuss says. “In case something happened to the wild population, we wanted to have a separate population.”



A rendering of the new visitor center under construction at the International Crane Foundation. Rendering courtesy of ICF and CLR Design

ICF’s Baraboo headquarters is the only place in the world where you can see all 15 species of crane. But those exhibits are getting a major upgrade in 2019 as part of a \$10 million renovation, so the headquarters will be closed to the public until 2020. Each new exhibit will feature a pond surrounded by native plants that resemble the natural habitat of each species. The renovations will also include a larger visitor center, murals and interpretive exhibits that tell the story of ICF’s conservation work all over the world. “We see these birds as ambassadors,” Beilfuss says. “We’re really trying to make the connections between that visitor experience and saving the birds in the wild.” In the meantime, you can visit the Milwaukee County Zoo’s three species of crane, including the grey crowned cranes that will move to their new exhibit in Adventure Africa in May.

# THE MILWAUKEE COUNTY ZOO’S CRANES

You can learn more about cranes by visiting the three species of crane on exhibit at the Milwaukee County Zoo.

## GREY CROWNED CRANES:

*Irving and Ichabod*

The Zoo welcomed Ichabod from the Lincoln Children’s Zoo in Nebraska and Irving from the Saint Louis Zoo in Missouri in late 2017. Grey crowned cranes are found in the wild in the grasslands of eastern and southern Africa. Irving and Ichabod previously lived in the savanna yard but will move this year to the new hoofstock exhibit that’s part of Adventure Africa, next to the new elephant exhibit.



Photo by Joel Miller

## SANDHILL CRANES:

*Sparkler and Holly*

The sandhill crane is one of two crane species (the other is whooping crane) found in North America. It was once threatened because of hunting and habitat loss but has made a strong comeback in the last 50 years. It is common to see large groups of them near the Wisconsin River in late summer and fall. You can visit the Zoo’s female cranes, Sparkler and Holly, in the caribou exhibit.



Photo by Richard Brodzeller

## WHOOPING CRANES:

*Torch and Tiki*

Torch arrived at the Zoo from ICF as a juvenile in 2006. A broken wing made it impossible for him to be released into the wild. In 2008, a female named Tiki became his companion. She can’t live in the wild because of a deformed leg. You can find them both in the Wong Family Pheasantry next to the Herb & Nada Mahler Family Aviary.



Photo by Richard Brodzeller



# PEACOCK PARTY!



Spring means bright and vivid colors returning to the world, and what better animal to celebrate spring than the peacock! With their amazing trains and brilliant “crowns,” called crests, peacocks are definitely some of the most colorful animals at the Zoo. Only males are peacocks; females are called peahens, and together they are called peafowl. There are three types of peafowl: Indian, green and Congo. The Milwaukee County Zoo is home to 42 Indian peafowl that roam around the grounds as well as two Congo peafowl in the bird building.

## MAKE YOUR OWN PAPER PLATE PEACOCK

### You will need:

- Paintbrush
- Turquoise paint
- 9-inch paper plate
- 6-inch paper plate
- Green, gold and tan construction paper
- Blue marker/stickers
- Googly eyes
- Scissors
- Stapler
- Glue

### Directions:

1. Trim the edges of the smaller plate to make it look like a peacock head.
2. Paint the bottom side of both plates using the turquoise paint and set to dry.
3. Cut 8 long strips of green construction paper about 1½ inches wide.
4. Use your tan construction paper to cut out two feet and a triangle beak.
5. Cut small circles out of the gold construction paper.
6. When the plates are dry, staple the smaller plate to the larger plate to make a peacock face and body.
7. Fold the green strips end to end around the rim of the larger plate and staple them to make long peacock feathers.
8. Glue the beak, googly eyes and feet onto the peacock.
9. Use the gold circles and blue marker/stickers to decorate the green peacock feathers.







# PEACOCK FEATHER FRUIT KABOB

One of the most incredible things about peacocks are their trains, which are made up of more than 200 vibrant blue and green feathers. Train feathers make up more than 60% of a peacock's body and are used both to attract mates and scare off rivals. Make your own peacock feathers using your favorite colorful fruit!

## Ingredients:

- Blueberries
- Kiwi
- Green grapes
- Small wooden skewer

## Directions:

Peel and slice your kiwi. Alternate putting the different types of fruit on the skewer until you reach the end.



# SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Can you find the 7 differences between the peacocks?



ANSWERS: 1. FEATHER SPOTS 2. EYE PUPILS 3. BELLY 4. FEET 5. CHEST FEATHERS 6. EYE SHADOWING 7. BEAK



# CHECKING IN WITH PROJECT SEARCH

It's hard to believe a fourth class of interns is about to graduate from the Project SEARCH program at the Milwaukee County Zoo. That's four years of learning and growing for interns, instructors and Zoo staff, and four years of young adults with disabilities confidently entering the workforce. "It sure has worked out the way I hoped," says Zoo Director Chuck Wikenhauser.

The program helps people with developmental disabilities acquire job skills and employment by providing them with immersive internships along with coaching and training. Participants ages 18-24 go through three 10-week rotations in different areas of the Zoo and Zoological Society such as animal buildings, education and food service with the Zoo's concessions vendor, Service Systems Associates (SSA). They work 20-25 hours per week and attend classroom components each day.

"Being here onsite at work five days a week, all day long, it allows so much growth in terms of work skills and social skills," says Shelly Niebler, a Project SEARCH instructor at the Zoo. The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development operates 27 Project SEARCH sites around the state through its Division

of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and close to 89% of program graduates in Wisconsin are employed at least 16 hours per week. At the Zoo, Project SEARCH is a collaboration between Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin, the Cooperative Educational Service Agency #1, the Zoo, SSA, the Zoological Society and DVR, the agency responsible for providing job training and job search support for people with disabilities across the state. Once Project SEARCH interns obtain employment, DVR provides support to the interns in their new jobs.

Wikenhauser enjoys seeing the interns gain skills and confidence. "The benefits are not just in work productivity; they're in the relationship between the staff and the interns. Everybody wins." Graduates often keep in touch with Zoo staff and come back to visit. Now that the program is established, Niebler hopes to work more with potential employers to show them how people with disabilities can fit in their workplace. "We feel like our interns can really fulfill the employers' needs in a lot of ways."

**We checked in with four Project SEARCH interns to see what they're up to since graduation:**



## Dan Saubers

Dan always liked to be outdoors, and he discovered a love for maintenance and groundskeeping while working those rotations at the Zoo during Project SEARCH. He also learned he loves being part of a team. His job as a full-time service worker at Wisconsin Memorial Park Cemetery checks all those boxes. His tasks there include preparing gravesites, mausoleum spaces and crypt fronts. Though he enjoys the work, it can be stressful, especially in times of bad weather. "With the snow, everything is three times as hard," he says.

Project SEARCH helped teach Dan about the day-to-day challenges and expectations of a full-time job, says Dan's mom, Linda. "It's pushing the envelope for kids who grew up in very structured environments to see what they're capable of," she says. He quickly found success after graduation, taking a paid job with the Zoo in maintenance and grounds work and then getting a full-time job at Home Depot. He got the cemetery job almost a year ago and enjoys the teamwork and variety of tasks involved. His employer has a lot of trust in him, which makes him feel good, he says. Dan would recommend Project SEARCH to anyone considering it. "Go for it, because it will help you through life," he says.

◀ Dan Saubers works full-time at Wisconsin Memorial Park Cemetery. Photo by Paul Ruffolo





## King Hall

Just about every Zoo employee and many regular visitors knew King during his internship in 2015-16. King has since taken his smiling face and friendly demeanor to Home Depot, where he works as a greeter and in customer service. “I like it,” he says. “My coworkers are nice and friendly.”

During his internship, King worked in the Zoological Society office, in food service in the Flamingo Café and in the Zoological Society Education Department. One of the main things he learned was customer service, he says. “The thing I liked most was helping my coworkers and helping the customers.”

King Hall enjoys greeting customers and doing customer service at Home Depot.

Photo submitted by King Hall

In addition to his job, he has been studying culinary arts at Milwaukee Area Technical College. He would eventually like to be a chef at a restaurant. He continues to exercise often and participate in wheelchair basketball.

## Liz Atkinson

The Zoo was the perfect place for Liz’s internship, because she loves animals. She still likes to visit the Zoo and take pictures of the animals. During her Project SEARCH internship, she enjoyed the variety of the different rotations, working in the Small Mammals Building, Animal Health Center and Zoological Society office. “It helped me a lot to boost my confidence and know that I could look for a job I really liked and stick to it.”

Liz is doing just that in her job at Goodwill Industries in New Berlin. She has worked in softline and hardline merchandise and currently works in the utility department, which is mostly cleaning, she says. “I make sure everything is in tip-top shape and nothing is dusty or dirty.” The job is rewarding because she can see the results of her work after a day spent cleaning. She also enjoys writing fiction, photography and horseback riding.

Liz Atkinson has worked in merchandising and utility at Goodwill Industries in New Berlin.

Photo courtesy of Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin

## Madison Smith

Many Project SEARCH interns enter the workforce after graduation, but Madison opted to go to college full time. She’s a sophomore at Edgewood College in Madison in the Cutting Edge Program, which offers an inclusive experience for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The program stood out to her and her parents as they looked at colleges because it was inclusive, allowing participants to take classes and live with the general student population.

She was on the fence about what kind of career she wanted until she started her Project SEARCH rotation in the Education Department. “When I got to assist and be in the classroom, I knew it was my happy place, and I want to do that.” She is working toward a teacher’s assistant certificate and considering adding an art major.

Madison has become a leader in Cutting Edge. She assists incoming freshmen, serves on the student board and sits on a panel during the program’s open houses. “The first time, I was terrified. But in Project SEARCH, we did a lot of speaking in our classroom. I think if I didn’t do Project SEARCH, I wouldn’t have been able to do the open house.” She is happy to have found a home at Edgewood that is just as accepting as Project SEARCH. “We’re very open-minded and friendly toward all. I’ve never met a group of people, besides in Project SEARCH, who are just so kind and welcoming and inclusive.”



Painting is an activity Madison Smith enjoys at Edgewood College.

Photo submitted by Madison Smith





# A SECOND CHANCE FOR SEA LIONS

It's a warm fall afternoon, and the California sea lions at Ocean Connections are ready to play. Diego, the dominant male, gives out a low bark as he darts toward the performance pool. The younger animals follow closely behind in a rousing game of tag. From a smaller pool off to the side, a tiny nose is pressed against the mesh. To her, the game might seem confusing. She hasn't spent much time around other sea lions, and her life hasn't included a lot of fun so far.

Moana was found stranded in a California storm sewer at about 4 months old, but she was given a second chance at life through Ocean Connections (previously Oceans of Fun), the organization that runs the seal and sea lion show at the Milwaukee County Zoo. A year and a half after that fall day, Moana is now a confident, mischievous pup, says Shelley Ballmann, Ocean Connections president. "She's like a toddler, into anything and everything," she says. And she has two new friends who were also rescued from the California coast, Kanuk and Ripley.

While Ocean Connections is glad to have the new animals, the reason they're here is anything but happy. Thousands of sea lion pups have stranded themselves along the West Coast in recent years, unable to feed themselves, Ballmann says. As the ocean temperature rises, prey fish search for colder waters. This means mother sea lions have to go farther to find food and struggle to provide enough nutrition to their pups. "By the time the pups are stranded, they're skin and bones," Ballmann says.

Five marine mammal centers on the California coast take on the overwhelming task of helping these pups. The goal is rehabilitation in the wild, but sometimes that isn't possible because the pups aren't able to forage for food on their own. That's when the centers reach out to organizations like Ocean Connections. In fact, Ocean Connections has stopped its breeding program in order to take on more orphaned animals. "The need in the wild is so tremendous, and that's our responsibility to conservation," Ballmann says.

Ocean Connections rescued Kanuk in 2015, but he was loaned to the Brookfield Zoo in Illinois so he could stay with Kodiak, another young sea lion with whom he had formed a strong bond. Unfortunately, Kodiak died in 2017 from organ damage due to the extreme starvation he experienced when he was stranded. Kanuk was sent to Milwaukee and seems thrilled to be part of a large sea lion population, Ballmann says. "He is just blossoming. His personality is starting to come out and he is sweeter than sweet." Ripley was also rescued in 2015 and spent three years at Mystic Aquarium in Connecticut before coming to Ocean Connections. He will spend summers at Ocean Connections' second location in Hershey, Penn., and the rest of the year in Milwaukee. Moana, Kanuk and Ripley all enjoy training and are learning new skills every month, Ballmann says. Moana will participate in the seal and sea lion shows this summer.

Moana was found in a storm sewer in California at age 4 months. She couldn't survive on her own in the wild, so she was sent to Ocean Connections.

Photo by Bob Wickland



Ballmann knows she has made a commitment to these animals for the rest of their lives, but she's not sure how long that will be. Some sea lions born in the wild have been exposed to red tide, a toxic algae bloom that can cause neurological damage and cancer. For others, like Kodiak, the trauma of their early lives can shorten their lifespans. In fact, the organization has already lost three rescued sea lions between the ages of 3 and 10. By contrast, animals born at Ocean Connections usually live to their late 20s or early 30s. Ballmann considers all of Ocean Connections' animals to be ambassadors for their species and the oceans, especially the rescue animals. "Even the animals we lose, they teach us something," she says. "Regardless of how long that animal lives, they deserve a second chance."

Right: Kanuk originally was sent to the Brookfield Zoo but came to the Milwaukee County Zoo in fall 2018.

Below: Ripley will spend his summers at Ocean Connections' second location in Hershey, Penn., and the rest of the year in Milwaukee. Photos courtesy of Ocean Connections

These days, 3-year-old Moana is mischievous and playful. She is expected to perform in the seal and sea lion show this summer. Photo courtesy of Ocean Connections



***In the wild*, sea lions face natural threats from predators such as orcas and sharks. But sea lions and other marine animals also face dangers caused by human behavior, including:**

- Trash that can poison or choke animals
- Ocean warming that makes prey fish harder to find
- Overfishing
- "Red tide," a toxic algae bloom that could be caused by climate change and runoff from fertilizer and other chemicals

**You can make a difference in keeping ocean habitats clean. Here are some tips from Ocean Connections' website:**

- Pack lunches in reusable containers with lots of healthy, waste-free snacks like fruits and vegetables.
- Wash your clothes in cold water.
- Use reusable bags when shopping and choose products with less packaging.

- In winter, open your curtains during the day to let sunlight in. In the evening, close your curtains to retain heat and reduce the chill from cold windows.
- Change regular light bulbs for more energy-efficient fluorescent light bulbs.
- Dispose of your waste properly when out on a hike, exploring in a forest or walking along the beach. Better yet, lend a hand and pick up stray litter.
- Fix leaky faucets. A leak can waste 3,000 gallons of water a year.
- Use eco-friendly snow and ice melt. Rock salt can harm plants, groundwater, pets and children.

**For more tips and information about ocean conservation, visit [oceanconnections.org/ecofriendly\\_tips](https://oceanconnections.org/ecofriendly_tips).**



**Alive**



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