



# Aiive

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- Great Care for Great Apes
- Winter Wonderland at the Zoo
- How to be a Zookeeper
- Superb Starlings and Marvelous Macaques
- Getting Artsy with Animals





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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Jodi Gibson

One thing I'm excited about as I settle into my new role at the Zoological Society is watching the seasons change at the Milwaukee County Zoo. I love the beauty of the winter snow after it has first fallen and is crisp and white. Like the bears, I also like some time to hibernate a bit. This is a reflective time of year for me as I look back at the past year, learn what I can from all of my experiences and try to plan for the future. Admittedly, I sometimes wish winter in the Midwest was a little shorter, but I wouldn't give up the clear change of seasons we enjoy in Wisconsin.

Many of you already know that winter is a great time to visit the Zoo, if the hundreds of entries we got in last year's winter Instagram contest are any indication. Check out page 4 to see some of our favorites. Whether you love winter or just tolerate it, there's plenty to do at the Zoo during these months. Our Education Department offers classes throughout the year, including ones for budding artists (page 8). And don't forget there are plenty of indoor animals, such as apes and monkeys, for you to visit if you want to escape the cold. Check out page 6 for a story about the amazing care the zookeepers provide for the Zoo's three species of great ape - orangutans, bonobos and gorillas. If you really need to escape winter for a while, check out our Kids Alive section (page 12) about the animals of the rainforest.

Finally, make sure to read the article on page 3 about our Annual Appeal. This year, we're raising money for enrichment items for the Zoo's elephants, Ruth and Brittany. We're very excited about the potential for this appeal, and we hope you are, too. Visit [zoosociety.org](http://zoosociety.org) to donate. Thank you for your generosity. I hope to see you at the Zoo this winter!

*Jodi Gibson*

Jodi Gibson  
 President & CEO  
 Zoological Society of Milwaukee

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**ON THE COVER:**

Tommy the orangutan poses for his close-up. Photo by Olga Kornienko



# HELP the Herd

The Milwaukee County Zoo has many impressive animals, but nothing inspires more awe than its African elephants, Ruth and Brittany. The Zoo broke ground in fall on an exciting new exhibit for the elephants that will give them four times more indoor space and nine times more outdoor space than they currently have. But the Zoo will need enrichment equipment to fill the new exhibit, says Beth Rich, deputy Zoo director of animal management and health. "A big home is great, but without the enrichment it's just an empty space," she says. Zoo fans have a chance to contribute to that enrichment through the Zoological Society's 2016-17 Annual Appeal.

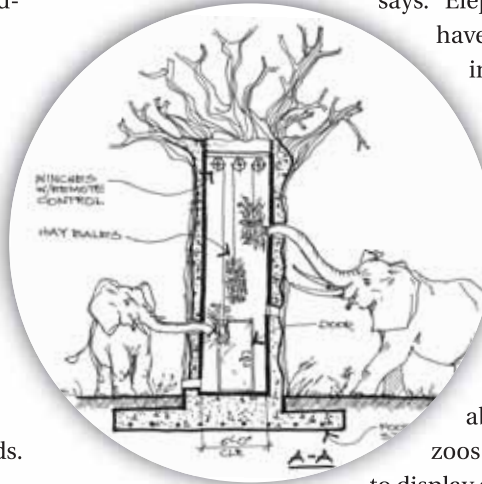
Enrichment is all of the items and activities zookeepers provide to the animals to encourage their natural behaviors. Ruth and Brittany already get several types of enrichment, such as feeders that encourage them to forage for food. Erin Dowgwillo, elephant care manager, says she hopes to get equipment that will allow keepers to put the elephants' food high in the air. "Right now, we're rarely able to make the girls reach above their heads for things, something they should be doing," she says. For example, keepers hope to install winch-and-pulley systems in the elephant barn and the exhibit. These can be connected by cable to food, puzzles and objects such as wind chimes that pique the elephants' curiosity. The Toledo Zoo has even used such a system to set up a popcorn feeder that Dowgwillo hopes to bring to the Milwaukee County Zoo. The elephant blows into the bottom of a PVC pipe to spray the popcorn into the air, then happily munches on the treat after it lands.

Enrichment items are expensive because they must be safe for the elephants and strong enough to withstand their incredible strength, Rich says. But the Zoological Society is confident it can

raise the money, says Robin Higgins, Society vice president of communications, marketing and membership. "Our elephants are amazing animals, and Zoo guests will want to see them engage in enrichment activities," she says. She notes the Milwaukee County Zoo is the only accredited zoo within a six-hour drive that houses elephants. "Since many folks will never get the chance to see elephants in the wild in Africa, our elephants serve as ambassadors for their species."

Zoo-goers enjoy watching the elephants because of their imposing size, but the connection goes deeper than that, Rich says. "Elephants can problem-solve, have 'friends,' are aware of death in their herd and care for their young – all qualities that humans have," she says. New, state-of-the-art enrichment equipment will help complete an exhibit that will benefit Ruth, Brittany and other elephants in years to come. "It's important that we be able to hold elephants from zoos that may have chosen not to display elephants," Rich says. "Those animals can come here and live out their lives in comfort with a great set of keepers who will love and care for them."

*By Stacy Vogel Davis*



## Here are examples of items the Society and Zoo hope to purchase with proceeds from the Annual Appeal:

- **Baobab enrichment tree:** an artificial tree with a hollow center for food such as hay. Keepers can move the food around inside the tree by remote control, which keeps the elephants guessing and stimulates their minds and bodies.
- **Shade structures**
- **Showers** the elephants can turn on themselves for a cool bath
- **Push pole:** A pole with treats in it that encourages the elephants to push their heads against it, mimicking pushing over trees

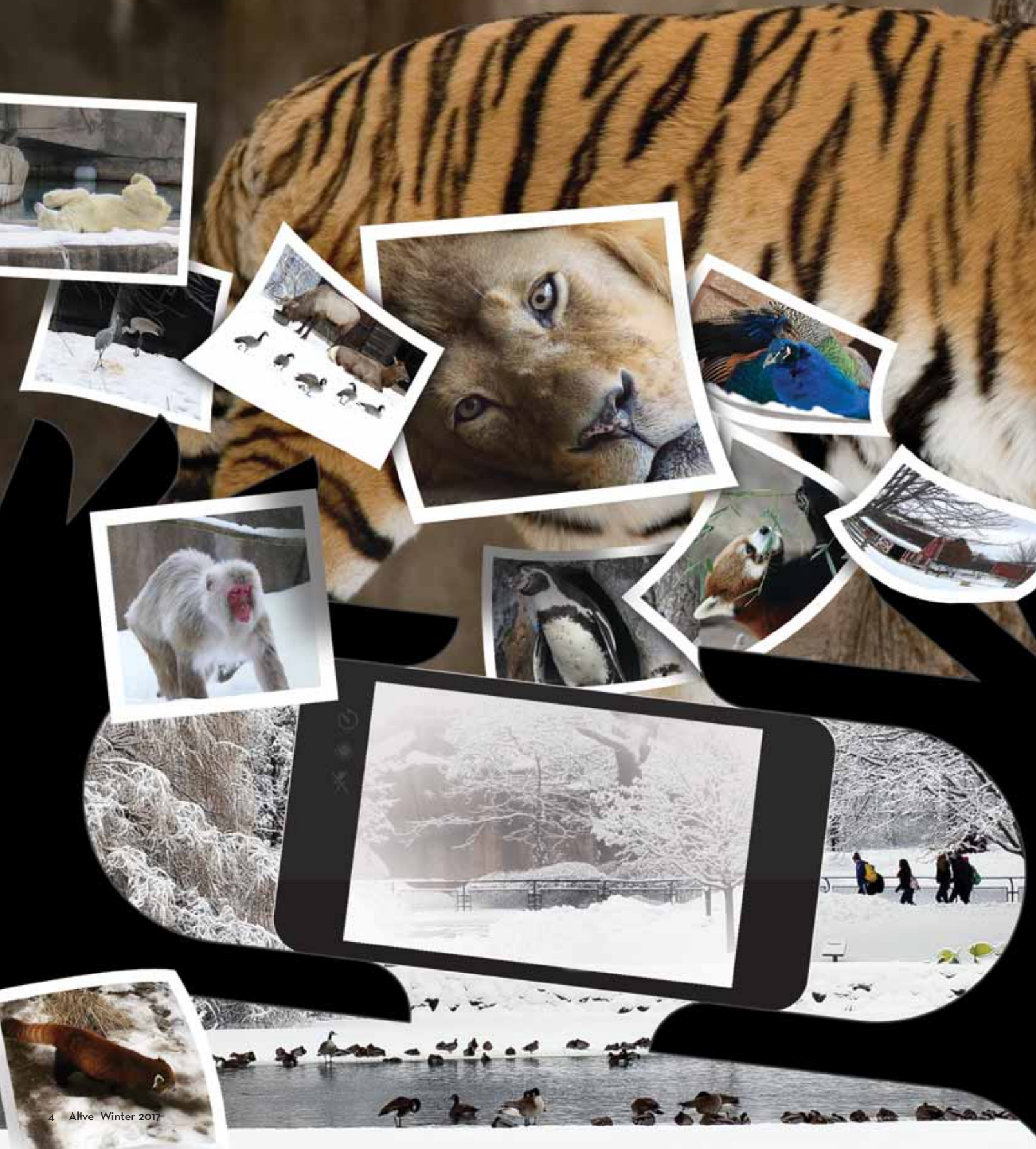
## It's your chance to help the herd!

To give to the Zoological Society's Annual Appeal for elephant enrichment items, visit [zoosociety.org](http://zoosociety.org).





# Winter Fun at the Zoo





Frequent Zoo visitors know that the Milwaukee County Zoo is a great place to get some fresh air and excitement in the winter. You proved that last winter, when you submitted more than 500 entries to our winter Instagram contest. Here are some of our favorites. We hope they inspire you to visit the Zoo soon for our new Instagram Contest beginning January 1, 2017.



**Instagram photos:**

African lion, elk, farm, goose, harbor seal, Humboldt penguin, macaque, moose, peacock, polar bear, red panda, sandhill crane, snow leopard, wolf, Zoo entrance





# Great Care

Tommy the orangutan knew just what to do when he found a pair of glasses accidentally left in his exhibit by a zookeeper. Keepers have trained the Milwaukee County Zoo's apes to hand over items they don't want the apes to have in return for a treat. So when Tommy realized the keeper wanted the glasses, he gave them back – in pieces. “He figured he'd get one treat if he gave back one pair of glasses, so he'd get lots of treats for returning lots of pieces,” Ryan Strack, Zoo primates supervisor, recalls with a laugh.

Primate keepers are full of stories like this that show the apes' intelligence. The Milwaukee County Zoo has three of the four species of great ape – bonobo, orangutan and gorilla. Every animal at the Zoo is unique, and keepers must tailor their care to the animal's personality and species traits. But primate keepers say caring for some of the smartest creatures in the animal kingdom – and the closest biologically to humans – presents its own set of challenges and rewards.

“It's the intelligence factor,” Strack says. “They know they can outsmart us sometimes.” When Strack first started as a primate keeper 15 years ago, he would put food near an exhibit door to entice an

ape to move from the exhibit to its off-exhibit quarters. But if he turned his back for a moment, the ape would grab the food and race back into the exhibit. Sometimes one ape would hold the door open as another ape grabbed the food.

The apes love to take advantage of new keepers, says Cassandra Manteau, a primate keeper. “It's like kids with a substitute teacher.”

Apes have complex social needs. Orangutans are semi-solitary in the wild but still like to socialize. The Zoo has two orangutans: Tommy, who was born at the Zoo in 1982, and Rayma, who arrived last summer. “They enjoy being together, but they also enjoy their time apart,” says keeper Dawn Kruger. Most of the gorillas, on the other hand, stay together as a troop, led by the silverback male, Cassius. The troop includes three adult females and 2-year-old male Sulaiman. “We generally let them alone to be a family together,” says Claire Richard, lead gorilla keeper. “That's especially important with the little guy because he has to learn those social dynamics.” Two other gorillas, Hodari and Maji Maji, are bachelor gorillas, and they spend time with each other and on their own.

By far the most complicated social dynamics in the Zoo happen among the bonobos. The Zoo has 22 bonobos – the largest zoo bonobo population in the world – including several babies and adolescents. Keepers constantly mix them up in

different groups for the indoor exhibit, outdoor exhibit (during warm weather) and off-exhibit areas, tracking each day's groupings on a large magnetic board. They have to know each bonobo, who it gets along with and how it normally behaves to make sure the groups stay peaceful. Sometimes the bonobos might get along fine one day but need a break from each other the next. The keepers look for small signs, such as facial expressions or where the bonobos are sitting, to let them know when something's wrong. “Sometimes silence is pretty telling,” says Mark Scheuber, another primate keeper. “If those guys are too quiet in the morning, something might be amiss.” The keepers



Photo by Richard Taylor



Photo by Richard Brodzeller

generally prefer to let bonobos work out conflicts on their own. “The reconciliation process is very important for them, and the keepers only interfere if the situation would become dangerous,” says Stacy Whitaker, lead bonobo keeper. “The mixing and matching needs to be on their terms.”

The apes need plenty of enrichment, which is activities, items and strategies the keepers provide to stimulate the animals and encourage their natural behaviors. Each species – indeed, each animal – has its favorite forms of enrichment. The orangutans, for example, love sheets. They often hide under them the way orangutans in the wild hide under large leaves when it's raining. Tommy enjoys watching videos on an iPad, especially



# for Great Apes

of other animals at the Zoo and painter Bob Ross. Keepers sometimes set up party lights outside the bonobo exhibit, and the bonobos seem to enjoy watching the light play off the wall in different ways. They also like iced treats and rolls of butcher paper they can carry around, crumple or tear. Scheuber remembers the first time the keepers gave the bonobos chalk. Several bonobos tried to eat the chalk, but one, Laura, immediately started drawing on the floor and then herself. “She’s creative,” Scheuber says. The keepers try to rotate toys and activities among the apes to keep them engaged.

Apes even participate in their health care, more so than many of the animals at the Zoo. Some of the apes have been trained to undergo ultrasounds, blood pressure checks and blood draws without anesthesia, reducing the risk of complications for simple medical tests. Many are able to present certain body parts for injections, such as medicines or vaccines, or go on a scale to get weighed. Because the apes’ biology is so close to humans, the Zoo often brings in human medical specialists such as dentists, neurologists and psychiatrists to consult with the Zoo’s veterinarians when an ape has a problem.

“A lot of days it’s mentally draining,” Richard says of trying to stay one step ahead of the apes. But she and the other ape keepers say they wouldn’t change their jobs. They enjoy the challenge and building connections with the animals, although they always remember that the apes aren’t children or pets. “It’s great when you come in the morning after a few days off and go see the bonobos,” Kruger says. “They come up to the glass and greet you because they haven’t seen you in a while.” “They’re always doing something new,” Strack adds. “You’re always learning.”

*By Stacy Vogel Davis*



Photo by Richard Brodzeller

Photo by Richard Brodzeller





Bella S., 11, painted a spotted rat based on the style of Georgia O'Keefe during a Zoo Art Club session. Photo by Education Department

It's surprisingly quiet in the program for 6- and 7-year-olds in the Zoological Society's education building as children work on bird sculptures. They've spent the whole morning learning about our feathered friends, planning their sculptures and observing the birds in the Zoo's bird building. This is the moment of truth as they bring their creatures to life. "I made up my own bird," explains Mallory A., 6, of Milwaukee. "I made a shape out of white clay and started thinking of how it could fly." Even though the bird is imaginary, it's still grounded in reality. Mallory created an ocean habitat for the bird and a grassy shoreline.

Mallory is participating in one of the many art classes and camps offered year-round by the Zoological Society of Milwaukee for children ages 6-14. "Art classes are a great match for so many subjects, including nature and science," says Patty Trinko, the Society's assistant director of education and instructor of the art classes. "For centuries, animals have been the subject of artists, from the earliest cave drawings to masterpieces by Picasso. The colors you see on a paint palette come from nature, from red berries to green leaves." Classes for younger children tend to focus on animal groupings, such as birds or reptiles, and materials, such as wire or clay. The topics get more sophisticated for older children. "Some classes focus on animal classification,

learning about body coverings or animal behaviors," Trinko says. "We may connect that to creating surrealistic animal art or to textures on a sculpture. Animals are always our subjects, and we get to use the Zoo animals as our inspiration."

Depending on the age group and time of year, classes are offered in half-day, full-day and multi-day sessions. "Zoo Art Club" for ages 8-11 is a three-class series that focuses on the style of a specific artist, such as wildlife artist Charley Harper or writer and illustrator Chris Van Allsburg, author of "The Polar Express" and "Jumanji." Bella S., 11, has been attending Art Club since she was 9, learning about concepts such as sketching, sculpting and minimal realism. "I've learned that there are a lot of different types of art and that you don't have to stick with one type – you can explore all of them," she says. Bella's mom, Rebecca, says she's seen her daughter grow in the classes. "These classes have taught Bella that there isn't a wrong answer sometimes and it's okay to do something differently from the person next to you."

The third and final Art Club session is a Gallery Day when students invite family and friends to see their artwork on display. Guests also try their hands at the art, coached by the students. "I like Gallery Day because I get to teach my family all that I have learned, and most of the time they don't know what it is," Bella says.



Mallory A., 6, shows off a bird diorama at the “Super-Cool Bird Sculpting” class at the Zoo. Photo by Richard Taylor



Zoo Pride volunteer Terry Sutter points out a bird to students in the “Super-Cool Bird Sculpting” class. The students observe birds at the Zoo to help them with their sculptures. Photo by Richard Taylor

Campers choose paint colors during the “Oodles of Art” summer camp for 6- and 7-year-olds at the Zoo. Photo by Bob Wickland



Bella's parents, grandparents and even family friends attend. “We love when Bella teaches us something new and helps us when we are stuck for ideas,” Rebecca says. “We're always laughing about the frustrations of one family member or the creativity of another.” Bella's grandmother, Bonnie, says she also enjoys meeting the other families. “It's just one big community. By the time you leave, you know lots of other people who are there.”

That community learns and grows together as Art Club students and their families attend classes through the years. “Many of the students are repeat attenders. We really get to know each other and develop our relationships,” Trinko says. “I love helping the children learn how to develop their art from the ‘aha’ moment where an idea comes to their mind to the final masterpiece of textures and colors. I can see moments of growth as they become more of who they are.” Trinko talks to the children about skills that apply in art as well as life, such as working through negative feelings and encouraging and complimenting each other.

Students of all ages find value in the classes. Mabel D., 6, of Shorewood, is proud of the hummingbird she has created in the bird-sculpture class, saying it's the best sculpture she ever made. The hummingbird is remarkably lifelike, with green feathers for wings and a pink belly made of a pipe cleaner. “I love the class because I get to sculpt, and I love to sculpt,” she says. “And I love it because it's fun.” The classes are rewarding for Trinko, too. “I have a daughter, and I think about how her teachers have helped her develop. I feel a true sense of privilege that I get to be that person for someone else's child. I learn a lot about myself as an artist and allow the children to inspire me.”

*By Stacy Vogel Davis*

## Zoo Classes!

**Spots still remain for Winter and Spring Zoo Classes, sponsored by Meijer.** Upcoming art classes include “Super-Cool Mammal Sculpting” for ages 6-7 and “Zoo Art Club” for ages 8-11, focused on the style of painter Gustav Klimt. Registration for Summer Camps, sponsored by Penzeys Spices, starts Feb. 8. Visit [zoosociety.org/education](http://zoosociety.org/education) for more information.



# Zoo Education Goes High-tech



It's a hypothetical medical mystery at the Milwaukee County Zoo: A Humboldt penguin has died from a mysterious disease, and now other penguins are showing symptoms. About a dozen students are trying to identify the disease, based on a real case study, in "Zoo Science Investigation: Humboldt Penguin," a class offered to school groups by the Zoological Society of Milwaukee's Education Department.



Mason S. tries out the new interactive touchscreen board in the upgraded Thrivent Mutual Funds Animal Adaptations Lab. Photo by Stacy Kaat

This year, the students have brand-new, state-of-the-art equipment to help them solve the mystery thanks to a \$100,000 grant from Thrivent Mutual Funds. The donation allowed the Education Department to buy equipment such as digital microscopes, tablets, computers, multimedia projectors and an interactive touchscreen board. Much of it will be used in the department's lab classroom, now known as the Thrivent Mutual Funds Animal Adaptations Lab. Part of the grant will also help pay for transportation to bring several schools, community centers or Scout groups to education programs at the Zoo.

Even though the Education Department teaches children about the natural world, it's still important to keep up with technology, says James Mills, Society education director. The department hadn't had a major technology upgrade since the Karen Peck Katz Conservation Education Center opened in 2004. "The lab classes focus on investigations and scientific skills," he says. "It's all about the investigatory power of this equipment." In the Zoo Science Investigation class, students look at slides of red blood cells from Humboldt penguins to identify which cells have the parasite that causes avian malaria. Then, they use handheld microscopes to examine a mosquito

Stewart R. (left) and Maddox S. use laptops and handheld microscopes to learn about the natural world with the help of instructor Chris Uitz in the Thrivent Mutual Funds Animal Adaptations Lab. Photo by Stacy Kaat

that could carry the disease. The microscopes are similar, although not nearly as sophisticated, to the ones used by the staff at the Zoo's Animal Health Center. The images from the microscopes show up on tablets for better viewing.

"To expose the kids to that equipment, so they can see how it's used in a scientific field, is really great," says Charlotte Allen, of Waukesha. Allen's daughter, Daelynn, 9, participated in the Zoo Science Investigation class. "I love how they got to first observe the penguins at the Zoo and then use the microscope and other equipment."

"It's not just tablets and computers," says David Royal, Thrivent Mutual Funds president. "They have physical specimens that kids can do projects with. It's really that combination of technology, hands-on experience and some great staff that help integrate the two." Thrivent supported the project because of its potential to help families and children, he says. "These are unique experiences that many children in the community might not otherwise have access to, particularly in underserved neighborhoods." Thrivent also is the sponsor of the Zoo's playground, continuing the theme of supporting young families.

The new equipment will be used across the Education Department's programming, from fee-based classes to school programs to teacher training, Mills says. And the education staff is learning, too. As instructors become more comfortable with the equipment, they will develop software for the tablets and the touchscreen boards to make them more interactive and targeted to the department's programs. "We want to take advantage of all the technology has to offer," Mills says.

*By Stacy Vogel Davis*







Alex Thomas grabs 10 bags of trash from the Milwaukee County Zoo's daily haul and begins to sort through them. Pretzels go in the compost pile. Popcorn bags to recycling. Wrappers, trash. Thomas, the Zoo's 2016 sustainability and waste intern, has done this 10 times over the summer.

About 10-14 percent of what he found thrown in the Zoo's trash bins was suitable for recycling and around 40 percent was compostable. But Thomas is helping the Zoo bring those numbers down.

A senior at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Thomas brings a passion for sustainability and waste management and a slew of fresh ideas to the Zoo's 12-week internship program. "Having an intern has enhanced our sustainability efforts," says Vera Westphal, deputy Zoo director of administration. "It really helps to have interns to take our ideas and make them go further."

Thomas is the second participant in the Zoo's sustainability and waste internship program. To help the Zoo become more sustainable, he took on a multitude of projects to improve everything from recycling rates to composting. As his first project, he completed a map of every trash and recycling bin at the Zoo. "My philosophy for recycling is to make it as easy as possible," Thomas says. "It should be just as easy for guests to recycle as it is to throw things away."

Thomas did make it easier. He added 30 bins to the Zoo's 110 recycling bins via Pepsi Recycles in June, worked with the Zoo's Creative Department to create signs that indicate where recycling bins are and what is recyclable, and facilitated a successful electronics recycling day that collected more than 500 pounds of recyclables.

He also created an easy-to-follow compost guide that helps zookeepers and staff know what to compost in the Zoo's eight compost tumblers. New to the Zoo's compost collection is a large

compost bin that is home to hundreds of red wriggler worms the Aquatic & Reptile Center staff can use as food for their animals. Last year, the Zoo spent \$22,810 on transporting and landfilling waste (poop) from its herbivores. Now the waste is composted at

Blue Ribbon Organics. The Zoo saves \$10,000 a year, and what was once garbage is turned into rich compost dirt. "It smells like earth," Thomas reassures. "It doesn't smell like 'zoo doo' at all."

Of course, Thomas isn't the only person making a difference. The Zoo has implemented several ideas from Zoo staff, including compostable cups, using wood from the Zoo's forest to make benches, turning fall leaves into mulch to use in spring and a green commuter program. Moving forward, the Zoo's Green Committee hopes to continue to increase recycling rates, promote the Zoo's composting efforts and more. A 2016 clean energy "roadmap" for the Zoo outlines energy-related goals expected to be completed by 2020. "These goals are definitely obtainable for the Zoo," Thomas says. "It will require a lot of hard work, but I think we can do it."

Here are some other sustainability projects in the works at the Milwaukee County Zoo:

- Chemical inventory lists that track the types and amounts of chemicals used around the Zoo
- Updated map of the Zoo's storm drains
- Continuation of a cellphone recycling program through EcoCell. (Cellphones include a rare mineral, coltan, that is mined in Central Africa, destroying gorilla habitat.)
- Food waste composting with

the Zoo's catering and dining department

Learn more about the Milwaukee County Zoo's sustainability efforts at: [milwaukeezoo.org](http://milwaukeezoo.org).

By Mary Jo Contino

## Sustainability SUCCESS



Photos clockwise from top left: • Alex Thomas, the Milwaukee County Zoo's 2016 summer sustainability and waste intern, sorts through garbage during a trash audit. • Sustainability intern Alex Thomas was able to add 30 recycling bins to the 110 already on Zoo grounds through the Pepsi Recycles program. • One way the Zoo's staff practices sustainability is by using dead or fallen wood from trees found on the Zoo grounds to build benches. • The Zoo now sends waste from its herbivores to a composting company, saving money and keeping the waste out of the landfill.

Photos by Joel Miller



# The Rockin' Rainforest

Rainforests have lots and lots of rainfall - typically between 98 and 177 inches each year. There are two kinds of rainforests: tropical rainforests and temperate rainforests. Tropical rainforests are sometimes called the Earth's "lungs" because they produce almost 30% of the world's oxygen! There are many animals that call the rainforest their home, as well as millions of plant species and microorganisms. Because of deforestation, the elimination of trees from an area, many of these animals' homes are being destroyed and the animals are becoming extinct. Because of this, it is important to understand the need for rainforests and the wildlife that live in them. Let's learn a little more about rainforests.

## Lemur Tail Kabob

Lemurs are rainforest animals that live off the coast of Africa on the island of Madagascar, but you can also find them at the Milwaukee County Zoo! They have distinct yellow/orange eyes and a black and white striped tail. Try this tasty snack inspired by the lemur's tail!



lemur

### Ingredients:

- Bananas
- Blackberries
- Wooden food picks

Peel and slice your banana. Alternate putting a banana slice and a blackberry on a wooden pick until you get to the end.

## Enjoy!



### EMERGENT LAYER

Trees here get lots of sunlight and poke-up over the other trees. Only certain animals can swing this high!

### UNDERSTORY LAYER

Leaves and bugs are abundant in the understory, so lots of bug-eaters live here.

### FOREST FLOOR

This layer gets very little sunlight and is for animals that can't climb up the trees.

Answers: All About Layers  
Emergent layer: spider monkey; Canopy layer: sloth; Understory: yellow banded poison dart frog; Forest floor: jaguar



# All about Layers

Tropical rainforests, like the Amazon Rainforest in South America, have four layers, each housing different plants and animals. Can you guess which animals belong where? Draw a line from the animal to its home. (All of these animals can be found at the Milwaukee County Zoo!) Answers on page 12.

sloth



yellow banded  
poison dart frog



jaguar



spider monkey



## Did you know?

Orangutans live in the rainforest, but unfortunately, their homes have been devastated by palm oil plantations. Palm oil, which is used in everything from snack food to shampoo, can be found in over half of all packaged items at the supermarket. Because of the deforestation caused by the palm oil industry, orangutans have lost 80% of their habitat in the last 20 years. **To learn more, go to [cmzoo.org](http://cmzoo.org)**, then click on “conservation matters,” then “palm oil crisis.”

### How can you help?

- Purchase items that contain palm oil alternatives, sustainable palm oil or no palm oil.
- Tell your friends about the harmful effects of deforestation.



### CANOPY LAYER

This layer has dense trees where some animals like to “hang” out.

## Make Your Own Rainforest!

### What you'll need:

- A medium-to-large-sized empty jar with a lid, such as a large mason jar
- Potting soil or moist dirt from the ground
- Plants (mosses, grasses and ferns work well)
- Small rocks
- Optional: small plastic rainforest animal

Add a small layer of potting soil and rocks so the jar is about  $\frac{1}{3}$  full. Then, add your plants; pack them on top so that the roots are meeting the soil. If you'd like, add a toy animal that would live in the rainforest. Cover the jar with the lid, sealing it tightly. Place somewhere bright, with indirect sunlight. Within a few days, the warmth of the trapped sunlight will create water vapor that will fall back down to feed the plants!





# How to be a Zookeeper

It's morning. Milwaukee County Zoo Aquatic & Reptile Center zookeeper Melissa Spreda is going about her daily routine monitoring water temperatures and checking on animals. She makes her way to the Pacific Exhibit featuring the California sheephead, a fish that is large and in charge. Spreda feeds the other fish, ignoring the wide-jawed sheephead. In a fit of rage at being snubbed, it flips its dark red and black tail against the water, soaking Spreda from head to toe.

Years of education, internships and jobs have brought Spreda to this point in her life. And she's standing in a puddle of fish tank water.

The California sheephead is notorious for splashing the zookeepers. But the keepers still feed, monitor and care for it daily. As Spreda would tell you, it takes a lot of patience, time, effort – and towels – to be a zookeeper. This rewarding, often messy career doesn't just happen overnight. Becoming a zookeeper is all about the experience and lots of it.

Spreda's lifelong passion for animals led her to an undergraduate degree in biology and captive wildlife management, followed by a master's in biology and a post-baccalaureate certificate in zoo and aquatic studies. A master's degree isn't necessary for the zookeeping profession, but it certainly helps. She worked as a veterinarian's assistant, animal lab manager, intern – twice – and animal manager at a pet store before landing a job at the Milwaukee County Zoo. "Experience is vital," Spreda says. "I don't know a zookeeper that has gotten a job without an internship. Be persistent."

Amy Andree, zookeeper in the Winter Quarters, understands diligence. She knew from age 6, when she attended a dolphin show, that she wanted to work with animals. Her passion brought her to Honolulu, where she studied marine biology at Hawaii Pacific University. Andree held multiple internships and temporary zookeeping jobs all over the country before landing a full-time job at the Milwaukee County Zoo. "You have to bounce around to different zoos to get a variety of experiences and work with a variety of animals," Andree says. "Getting hands-on experience whenever possible is important."

Milwaukee native and longtime zookeeper Ryan Taylor started his career at the NEW Zoo in Green Bay followed by seven years at Disney's Animal Kingdom before heading home to the Milwaukee County Zoo in 2015. He suggests that the younger you start getting experience, the better. "Stay in school and study science, even if you don't like it or it's hard," Taylor says.



Top left: Amy Andree, a keeper in the Zoo's Winter Quarters area, works in the South America Exhibit near an alpaca. Keepers have to perform many tasks, including cleaning, feeding, training and medicating. Photo by Richard Taylor Above:

Melissa Spreda worked hard to get animal experience before getting a zookeeper job at the Zoo's Aquatic & Reptile Center. Photo by Richard Taylor Bottom left: Zookeeper Ryan Taylor tells a group of Zoo visitors about the enrichment activities for hippos. Keepers have to take care of animals and interact with the public. Photo by Stacy Kaat

## Zookeeper-in-Training Checklist

- ✓ Decide you want to work with animals.
- ✓ Go to college for something related to biology or animal science.
- ✓ Get lots of animal-related experience, including internships.
- ✓ Find a specialty, but try different things.
- ✓ Don't give up.

"Volunteer at local shelters, vet offices or zoos, and start applying for animal-related positions during college."

Zookeeping is tough work, physically and emotionally. Feeding, cleaning, medicating, lifting, training, enriching, washing and much more are part of daily work. For Spreda, Andree and Taylor, one of the hardest parts of the job

is seeing an animal become sick or die, especially after working so closely with them. "It's tough sometimes," Andree says, "but we do it for the animals."

Is it all worth it? A unanimous "yes." Being up close and personal with the animals, watching them achieve a new skill and educating the public are just some things zookeepers say make their job a rewarding one. "I have always wanted to be a zookeeper for as long as I can remember," Taylor says. "Having accomplished that goal and being able to have my dream job is a wonderful feeling."

By Mary Jo Contino





## Very Superb Starlings

Adorned with bright blue, teal and rust-colored feathers, eight notoriously noisy superb starlings joined the dozens of species of birds at the Milwaukee County Zoo this year. Hailing from the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago, the birds came in four groups of two beginning in February, with the last two arriving in June. Superb starlings are commonly found in East Africa and have strong feet and boisterous calls. You can hear them around the Herb and Nada Mahler Family Aviary making a variety of calls; they sing quietly during the day but can get quite loud when excited, making the trill “whit-chor-chi-vii.”

The eight male superb starlings get along well and are busy building nests, despite not having mates. “They can be naughty at times, getting into other birds’ business where they shouldn’t,” says Aviary zookeeper Mickey O’Connor. “There is one individual that is curious about our Inca tern chicks and gets too close for the

parents’ comfort. This results in both Inca tern parents chasing him around.”

Superb starlings feast on fruit and lots of bugs including waxworms, mealworms and live crickets. They are very curious, getting excited about enrichment items like phonebooks, PVC tubes and hanging objects. Superb starlings are gregarious, meaning they are highly social animals. They typically live and fly in large flocks, gracefully soaring above in movements called “murmurations.” Starlings are not afraid of humans; they’re sometimes found foraging through human food waste on the ground.

Thankfully, the birds are not currently endangered. “They are a wonderful addition to the Zoo because of their remarkable songs, color and activity levels,” O’Connor says. “They are always on the move.” Check out these chatty birds at the Aviary.

*By Mary Jo Contino*



Superb starlings, found in East Africa, are noisy and social birds.

Photo by Joel Miller

## Spirited Snow Monkeys

You may be familiar with the famous National Geographic photograph of a monkey with a bright red face relaxing in a hot spring in the snowy mountains of Japan. That would be a Japanese macaque, or a snow monkey, warming up after a harsh snowfall. As winter arrives, the nine Japanese macaques at the Milwaukee County Zoo will be perfectly suited to embrace the cold in their outdoor exhibit.

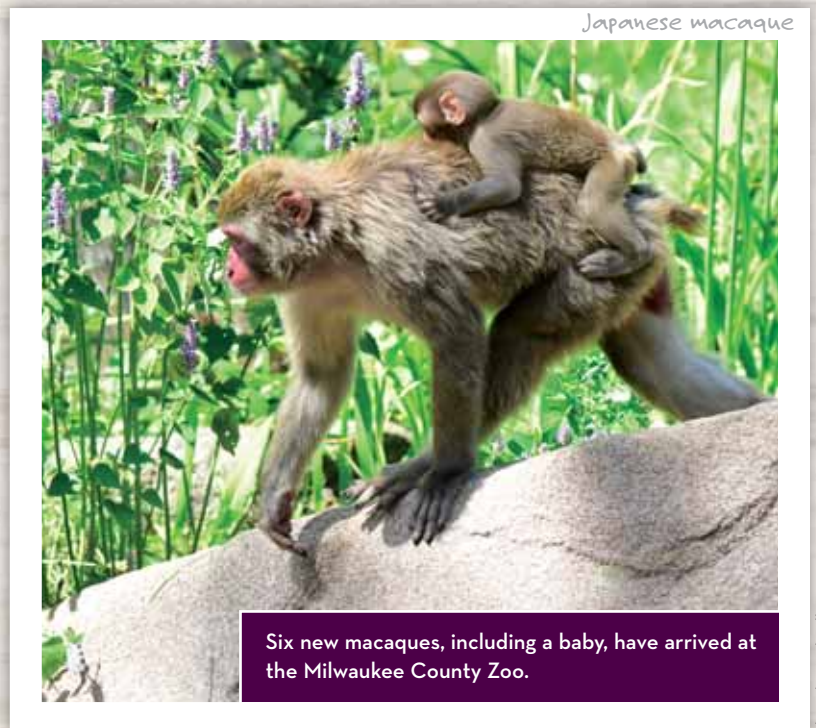
In late June, the Zoo welcomed six new Japanese macaques from around the country: females Zeppeki and Usagi from Green Bay, females Negai and Rikka from Minnesota, male Kota from New York, and Kaishi, the male baby of Negai. They’re all relatively young, ranging in age from 8 months to 5 years old. Trish Khan, curator of primates and small mammals at the Zoo, says that is key to their integration process.

In August, the six macaques joined three older snow monkeys: Kodomo, Bogie, and Grinch. The new recruits have been welcomed with open arms. “The introductions have gone very well,” says Khan. “They love the space, and they have been so active.”

The macaques are part of a Species Survival Plan® (SSP), which manages specific species – typically endangered or threatened – within institutions accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. The SSP hopes breeding will occur when Kota reaches maturity in two to three years.

Macaques are very hierarchal in the wild, with each animal having a place on the social ladder. Bogie and Grinch are the dominant male and female of the macaque group at the Zoo. Kaishi follows Bogie around like a puppy, while Kota has just been trying to fit in. “They all have such unique personalities,” says Khan. “We’ve had so much fun observing them.” Meet the new macaques at Macaque Island, located between the apes and primates building and the sea lion show.

*By Mary Jo Contino*



Six new macaques, including a baby, have arrived at the Milwaukee County Zoo.

Photo by Joel Miller





Alive

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Photo by Ryan Sheets

A caribou, a grizzly bear,  
African lions and a macaque  
outside on a snowy day.



Photo by Richard Brodzeller



Photo by Stacy Kaat



Photo by Richard Brodzeller

# Many animals at the Milwaukee County Zoo enjoy the snow.

Why not bring your "little animals" to the Zoo next time they have a snow day?

