Rick Zawlocki’s five young nieces and nephews love the Milwaukee County Zoo. In 2007, Zawlocki (above, left) and his partner, Gerald Dias, joined the Platypus Society to make Zoo trips even more fun for the youngsters. “Our nieces and nephews are very special to us,” says Dias. “We wanted to bring them here for events and to help instill pride in the Zoo.” The children, ages 2 to 7, loved Platypus Society perks such as an annual after-hours summer picnic. Dias and Zawlocki discovered that a membership in the Zoological Society of Milwaukee’s (ZSM’s) highest-level donor-member group gives adults a chance to enjoy the Zoo as well.

It all began with a special behind-the-scenes tour of the Zoo’s pachyderm area that Dias and Zawlocki won at a Platypus Society event auction. (Volunteer-guided VIP tours of the entire Zoo are offered to all Platypus Society members.) Dias and Zawlocki watched a training session with the Zoo’s two elephants, Ruth and Brittany. They learned how training improves animals’ lives and encourages them to participate in their own health care. The couple even helped zookeepers set out vegetables for the elephants and watched as the pachyderms ate up the treats. “We fell in love with opportunities to get up-close exposure to animal staff and how the Zoo operates,” says Dias.

Getting an insider’s perspective on the Zoo inspired the couple to become among the Platypus Society’s most enthusiastic ambassadors. Dias and Zawlocki attend Platypus events such as premieres of new exhibits, cocktail parties and an annual awards dinner in the fall (see inside pages). They even encourage their friends and neighbors to join the Platypus Society. “We share the really cool stuff that’s right at your fingertips,” Dias says. Their friends David and Candace Alswager joined them on the pachyderm tour. Last summer, Dias and Zawlocki won a behind-the-scenes tour of the Zoo’s greenhouse (normally off-limits to zoogoers) at a Platypus Society cocktail party auction. They invited Shannon and Fernando Rojas, a couple from their Milwaukee neighborhood, to come along. “The tour was just phenomenal,” says Dias. The Alswagers and the Rojases joined the Platypus Society (see back page for a new-member profile of the latter couple).

Dias, who moved to Milwaukee 11 years ago, was impressed by the city’s conservation-minded ideals. “I love the way we take care of our natural resources in Wisconsin,” he says. Caring for the Zoo is a priority for the couple. Dias plans to join Zoo Pride, the ZSM’s volunteer auxiliary, to help educate visitors about the park. The men also plan to donate to the ZSM’s annual appeals in honor of Zawlocki’s nieces and nephews: Mya and Tyler Salinas, Zach and Josh Zawlocki, and Alexis Hartgrave. The children’s enthusiasm for the Zoo is infectious, says Zawlocki. Seeing their names on Zoo recognition signs will encourage the youngsters to support the Zoo when they’re older.

“The Zoo is one of Milwaukee County’s most treasured resources,” adds Dias. “Platypus Society membership maintains the quality we’ve all become accustomed to and enjoy. It’s important to preserve that for younger generations.” Thanks to Platypus Society members like Dias and Zawlocki, young people will enjoy the Zoo for years to come.

By Julia Kolker
Suzy and Byron Foster of the Foster Family Foundation received the Gorilla gorilla gorilla conservation award, a framed footprint of a lowland silverback gorilla. Suzy is a member of the ZSM’s research and conservation committee, which supports conservation initiatives such as the Birds Without Borders-Aves Sin Fronteras® project and a bonobo (rare great ape) conservation project. The Foster Family Foundation also contributed to the New Zoo II Capital Campaign. The campaign, completed in 2008, improved more than 25% of the Zoo.

Joe and Jennifer Kresl received the Leontideus rosalia (golden lion tamarin) award for longtime support of the Zoological Society. As president of Hawks Nursery, Joe donated $50,000 worth of landscape design and plantings for the Zoo’s new entrance, the U.S. Bank Gathering Place. From 1999 through 2006, Hawks also donated hundreds of holiday trees for the Hawks Nursery Fantastic Forest at the Zoo. Hawks is contributing 30 trees to decorate the Gathering Place this December. The Kresls donate flower centerpieces for ZSM events and donate to Zoo Ball. Joe also recruits volunteers to staff a summer raffle for the ZSM. Joe is a member of the ZSM’s Board of Directors and has served as president of the Associate Board. In 2005, the ZSM honored Hawks Nursery with an award for outstanding corporate service.

Mark Poker was honored for outstanding individual service to the Zoological Society with the Spheniscus humboldti award, a framed footprint of a Humboldt penguin. Poker, a partner at the law firm Michael Best and Friedrich LLP, contributed many hours of pro bono work to establish an endowment fund for the non-profit ZSM. He now serves as one of the fund’s trustees. Poker is also a member of the Simba Society, the ZSM’s planned-giving group, and serves on its steering committee. Mark’s wife, Mary Catherine, is on the ZSM’s Associate Board of Directors.
Platypus Awards

Animals from polar bears to birds were featured at the 27th annual Platypus Society Awards Dinner on Oct. 2 at the Zoo. Winning the Emu Egg, the Zoological Society of Milwaukee’s (ZSM’s) top award, was Judy Derse. The award, a real emu egg encased in glass, honored Derse for exceptional commitment to the ZSM. Derse chairs the board of the Foundation for Wildlife Conservation (FWC), Inc., the ZSM’s partner. She is also on the board of Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya, a nature preserve supported by the FWC and the ZSM. The Derse Foundation has been a major contributor to the ZSM over the years, including the Derse Family Foundation bird-observation deck at the Zoo. The Derse Foundation also helped fund an FWC-ZSM bird research-education-conservation project called Birds Without Borders-Aves Sin Fronteras®. The Derse Foundation has been a Platypus Society member since 1988 and was previously honored with two awards: the Elephus maximus award for exceptional support in 1992 and the Gorilla, gorilla, gorilla conservation award in 1998. The seven other award winners are shown here.
New-Member Profile

Patron Member: Shannon and Fernando Rojas  
Address: 3825 S. Griffin Ave., Milwaukee  
Phone: (414) 899-5916  
E-mail: sh-rojas@hotmail.com

Reason you joined the Platypus Society:  
We had been to the Milwaukee County Zoo many times prior to becoming members. We bring our two kids (ages 8 and 4) to the Zoo a lot. We enjoy seeing the animals, especially the penguins and giraffes, and attending Zoo events such as the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel a la Carte.

Why the Platypus Society is important:  
The Zoo is a beautiful part of the city. The Platypus Society helps support the Zoo and the animals. We’re big fans. We believe it is very important to preserve all wildlife, especially for the education of our children.

Personal history with Zoological Society and Milwaukee County Zoo: Our neighbors Gerald Dias and Rick Zawlocki (see cover) introduced us to the Platypus Society. They won a behind-the-scenes tour of the Zoo’s greenhouse and invited us to come. This year’s awards dinner (see inside pages) was the first Platypus event we attended. We are looking forward to attending many future events as Platypus Society members.

Calendar

Dec. 5  
Fantastic Forest of child-decorated holiday trees, sponsored by Hawks Nursery, opens in the U.S. Bank Gathering Place.*

Dec. 6  
Family Free Day at the Zoo, sponsored by North Shore Bank and FOX 6, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Dec. 6-7, 13-14, 20-21  
Breakfast and Lunch with Santa, sponsored by Racine Danish Kringles; to get on Zoo mailing list, call (414) 256-5412.

Jan. 6 & Jan 18  

Jan. 15  
Free talk by Dr. Gay E. Reinartz, director of ZSM’s bonobo-conservation program in Africa. 7 p.m.; Cedarburg Cultural Center, W62 N546 Washington Ave., Cedarburg; call (262) 375-3676 for details.

Jan. 18  
Samson Stomp & Romp for the Zoo, sponsored by Gatorade and Pick ‘n Save, 8 a.m. registration. Call (414) 256-5412 for details.

Jan. 21 & 24  
Two-session Zoo Pride introductory volunteer orientation; call (414) 258-5667.

Jan. 22  
Puttin’ on the Ritz gourmet dinner and boxing fund-raiser for ZSM; 6 p.m. cocktails, Hyatt Regency Milwaukee. For an invitation, e-mail Julie at julieb@zoosociety.org.*

Feb. 5  
Wines and Beers of the World ZSM fund-raiser, sponsored by Wachovia Securities, 7-10 p.m., at the Zoo.*

*For more information, call (414) 258-2333 or go online at www.zoosociety.org.

Wachovia Securities reps sample wines at the event last year. From left are Paul and Nicole Jackson of Hartland, Wis., and Sherry and Gary Sievewright of New Berlin.