# 2026



# ANNUAL REPORT

LINCOLN PARK ZOO®
FOR WILDLIFE. FOR ALL.



Chimpanzee Kathy
*Photo by Violetta Photography*

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Cover: Lincoln Park Zoo welcomed two brown bears to Walter Family Arctic Tundra in October 2025. *Photo by Hana Johnstone*



# Hope Requires Action

When Dr. Jane Goodall visited Lincoln Park Zoo last year, she spoke about hope. Not just as "passive wishful thinking," as she said, but as an active commitment: hope requires action and engagement. Jane's words resonated because they reflect who we are and how we work.

At Lincoln Park Zoo, hope is not an abstract idea. We envision a world where people are connected to nature and where humans and wildlife successfully coexist in an urbanizing world—and then we get to work. We confidently hold on to hope for a thriving natural world *because we're taking action for it*. That commitment guides how we care for zoo animals, how we engage our constituent communities, and how we advocate for wildlife beyond our gates.

Every day, we work with guests, students in Chicago Public Schools, and partners across our city to spark connection and inspire stewardship. From monitoring ecosystems at the Obama Presidential Center site to collaborating with community partners in North Lawndale, Austin, and Little Village, we are showing what it looks like to put hope into action for humans, wildlife, and the planet.

In recent years, we have also significantly expanded our role in legislative advocacy. Our leadership in building national support for the Captive Primate Safety Act brought public and industry attention to this issue through a *The New York Times* piece as well as earned media and advocacy impact awards from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. More recently, with many of you lending your voices in support, we were proud to help advance an amendment to the Illinois Traveling Animal Act, extending protections beyond elephants to include primates, bears, and non-domestic cats like lions and tigers.

While we do this, we continue to lead our industry in animal wellbeing and best practices for plant and animal management. As a free zoo in the heart of Chicago, we are uniquely positioned to offer transformative experiences that connect people to wildlife, inspire empathy, and build public support for conservation.

The zoo could not make such bold action on behalf of wildlife without the support of our exiting Chair of the Board. During Fran Edwardson's tenure, she oversaw the implementation of our strategic plan, ensured proper governance and established bylaws for all three zoo boards, and championed our advocacy efforts. She is intentional, thoughtful, and fully integrated within zoo staff—or "Team Zoo," as we say. She helped build a foundation for the future of the zoo and we could not be more grateful. Thank you, Fran.

Also, none of this would be possible without you. Your generosity, dedication, and willingness to lend your voice help us to turn hope into action, improving the lives of animals at Lincoln Park Zoo and around the world.

Sincerely,



**Megan R. Ross, Ph.D.**
President & CEO



**Tracey Benford**
Chair, Board of Trustees

# THE FIVE PILLARS OF ANIMAL CARE AT LINCOLN PARK ZOO

**Lincoln Park Zoo embraces five pillars of care for every individual animal and species that calls the zoo home. These fundamental components of the zoo's care program are animal management, nutrition, veterinary services, environmental enrichment, and positive reinforcement training. Together, they build a strong foundation that promotes the wellbeing of animals in human care.**

**The five pillars support everything we do. They are constantly being evaluated and enhanced while animal needs, preferences, and behavior are taken into account. Lincoln Park Zoo staff collaborate daily to ensure animal welfare continues to improve not just here at Chicago's free zoo, but around the world—anywhere animals are being cared for and conserved.**





North American river otter Tucker
*Photo by Christopher Bijalba*

FIRST PILLAR

# Animal Management

The goal of animal management at Lincoln Park Zoo is to provide the highest quality of care for each individual animal, with an objective of maintaining a sustainable zoo population. Management begins before any animal arrives at the zoo, in the makeup of expert animal care teams, the building of habitats with dynamic and enriching features providing animals complexity and choices, and the suitability of the species' natural history and adaptations in Chicago's climate. And it involves ensuring that animals thrive throughout their entire lives, no matter their life stage, health condition, or disability.

The zoo's holistic approach also includes leadership within the industry. Zoo staff have roles in Association of Zoos and Aquariums' (AZA) Species Survival Plans® and Saving Animals from Extinction programs, along with Taxon Advisory Groups, Scientific Advisory Groups, and the zoo's AZA Population Management Center, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2025. Transports, birth management, breeding recommendations, the collection and publication of data, and the keeping of accurate animal records are all part of the way Lincoln Park Zoo cares for animals.

SECOND PILLAR

# Nutrition and Nourishment

The Nutrition Center's job is a massive one, involving multiple high-level tasks: knowing what to feed, sourcing high-quality foods, making sure the food is safe, and getting food to the animals. To ensure different animals with various needs get all the nourishment they require, the zoo nutritionist balances art and science: every animal receives an individually tailored diet that encompasses considerations of feeding ecology, natural history, life stage, sex, body condition, weight, and personal preference.

The Nutrition Center works with Animal Care staff to follow, review, and sometimes create data-backed diets that are palatable to the many personalities in the zoo's care, from dramatic penguins to naturally picky red pandas. Food is important to animal wellbeing, so the team looks at creative and innovative ways to promote welfare through nutrition. For example, the bears' diets will change in the fall as they bulk up so they are ready to go into torpor for the winter, just like they would in the wild.



*Photo by Bryan Summerford*

## SAFETY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Nutrition Center also collaborates with other teams to meet its goals. For example, Veterinary Services helps make sure plants placed in animal habitats or consumed by animals are safe. Nutrition staff also work with Horticulture to give flowers from the herb garden at Regenstein Center for African Apes to the chimpanzees, bananas grown at Regenstein Small Mammal-Reptile House to the prehensile-tailed porcupines, and fresh *browse* (leaves and other plant parts) grown in special behind-the-scenes gardens at the zoo to animals such as giraffes.

New in 2025, the Horticulture team grew more than 1,900 pounds of food for animal diets at Farm-in-the-Zoo. This bounty included red peppers, pumpkins, squash, potatoes, blackberries, carrots, beans, greens, and banana leaves.

## BUYING LOCAL

The zoo has moved toward more sustainable methods of sourcing animal diets in other ways as well. In 2025, the Nutrition Center received more than 200,000 pounds of food for the animals from local partners. More than 7,500 pounds of produce came from eight regional farms, and 190,000 pounds of hay for animals like eastern black rhinos came from another local farmer. Currently, around 50% of browse is grown on-site or comes from local sources. The small businesses that zoo partner Midwest Foods works with to help feed zoo animals include farms that are co-ops, legacy farmers, or certified organic growers.





## CARCASS-FEEDING CADENCES

In 2025, Lincoln Park Zoo began regular carcass feedings for the African painted dogs and the African lions. Both species receive carcasses with hides, organs, and heads from animals such as cattle, goats, and lambs. Carcass feedings encourage natural behaviors like hunting, problem solving, and working as a group. They are also nutritionally appropriate and better simulate how these species would spend much of their time in the wild.







*Photos by Siga Lapinksas, Rachel Valentas, Lauren Carlson, and Demitra Panayotou*

**Podcast Episode**

On the first episode of the zoo's podcast *That Tracks!*, nutritionist Siga Lapinskas explains how the zoo feeds more than 700 animals.

**lpzoo.org/podcast**

that tracks
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THIRD PILLAR

# Veterinary Vigilance

From the renowned late Dr. Lester E. Fisher—the first full-time zoo veterinarian and an iconic zoo director—to the pioneering Dr. Kathryn Gamble, D.V.M., who is one of the first in the world to be double-board certified by both the European and American Colleges of Zoological Medicine, Lincoln Park Zoo has a rich history of being a global leader in the field of veterinary medicine.

Zoo veterinarians serve as internists, surgeons, ophthalmologists, dermatologists, oncologists, radiologists, podiatrists, emergency responders, and dentists for nearly 170 species. In the past year, 120 mammals and 145 birds, along with 25 reptiles, amphibians, and fish, received examinations at Lincoln Park Zoo. The vets' patients range from newborns to geriatric animals and from .35-ounce Henkel's leaf-tailed geckos to 2,700-pound eastern black rhinoceroses.

Here is a look at the pillar of veterinary medicine in practice this year:







## PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE

The zoo's veterinarians perform more than 130 preventative wellness assessments each year, which proactively create a baseline for an individual animal's health and help detect any concerns going forward. In many cases, these exams begin at birth—or hatch! For example, in November 2025, penguin chick Waddle received examinations and vaccines to protect against mosquito-born viruses like West Nile prior to her debut at Robert and Mayari Pritzker Penguin Cove to ensure a healthy transition to her new habitat.

## RESPONSIVE CARE

Like humans, animals can develop chronic or degenerative diseases as they age and require individualized treatment plans. For example, the red-footed tortoises received wellness exams, including radiographs in February 2026, to evaluate the potential for osteoarthritis. Because this species is so long-lived, it is important to think about treatment plans five, 10, and 15 years into the future.

## EMERGENCY CARE

All living creatures are susceptible to sudden illness or injury, and zoo veterinarians respond quickly with emergency diagnostic exams or surgery. In August 2025, male lion Jabari showed concerning changes in behavior, including decreased interest in food and water and difficulty urinating. An emergency examination found a life-threatening issue with his bladder, necessitating surgical intervention. There were many unknowns, but thanks to expert care, Jabari made a full recovery and was successfully reunited with his pride.

*Photos by Hana Johnstone, Sean Raju, and Amy-Mei Lynch*



# Zoo Animal Hospital Turns 50



Since 1976, the animal hospital on the north side of the zoo—formerly called the Kroc Family Hospital and Commissary and then renamed for C.H. "Doc" Searle, M.D.—has easily been overloooked by zoo guests. Yet it has been the site of unprecedented procedures, like a uniquely challenging tongue repair on a venomous Rio Fuerte beaded lizard, emergency facial reconstruction for western lowland gorilla Nayembi in 2013, and lifesaving, cancer-curing efforts for Zhang the Francois' langur in 2022.

The veterinary program has also seen many noteworthy advancements over the decades.

### INNOVATIVE IMAGING

Tabletop film radiographs with portable generators were once state-of-the-art and helped image species in need. Today, a filmless, entirely computerized radiograph machine enables the team to spot issues quickly and easily. Imaging can now also be done on the go with one large ultrasound machine at the hospital and four portable units on grounds, bringing diagnostic care directly to the animals so they can participate in their own healthcare.

### ADVANCEMENTS IN ANALGESIA

Due to their survival instincts, animals are the best secret-keepers and will do everything in their power not to show weakness or pain, often making care difficult. However, with new developments and discoveries in animal welfare science and veterinary medicine, care teams know so much more about individual wellbeing and how to provide analgesics, or pain management, to numerous species. In fact, Lincoln Park Zoo veterinarians were the first to use fentanyl patches as anesthesia on reptiles and amphibians. They also safely expanded the medication Adequan to bird species for osteoarthritis management.

that tracks
A LINCOLN PARK ZOO PODCAST

**Podcast Episode**

How does one care for hundreds of animals representing dozens of species? Lincoln Park Zoo's lead veterinarian, Dr. Kathryn, explains on this episode of the podcast *That Tracks*!

**lpzoo.org/podcast**

### NEXT GENERATION TRAINING

The medical team is dedicated to creating a future of knowledgeable zoo veterinarians and has mentored more than 100 people across the globe. Lincoln Park Zoo is home to a three-year post-graduate residency program and is the only North American zoo to be accredited by both the American and European College of Zoological Medicine. Additionally, since 2008 the zoo has hosted a three-year veterinary residency program, courtesy of an endowment established in 2021 through the estate of Jean Griggs, that offers students a firsthand look into zoo medicine.

FOURTH PILLAR

# Environmental Enrichment

Environmental enrichment is an important part of every animal's wellbeing at Lincoln Park Zoo. It supports their innate instincts and engages their senses. Creating enrichment involves science, creativity, and a knowledge of both natural history and individual preferences.

For some species, enrichment includes developing novel ways of feeding, so that they spend more of their day searching for food. For new-to-the-zoo Sichuan takin brothers Porter and Taiyang, it involves the design, construction, and installation of a climbing structure, funded by longtime volunteer and Heritage Society member Sue Ann Selle and built by the zoo's Facilities team. Takins are native to mountainous regions in the Himalayan mountains at elevations up to 14,000 feet, so this structure helps encourage their natural behaviors.



*Photo by Hana Johnstone*

## Lincoln Park Zoo Becomes WAZA Welfare Award Finalist

Science, innovation, and collaboration drive the zoo's animal care philosophy. For example, Lincoln Park Zoo is responsible for the creation and evolution of ZooMonitor, a free software program currently being used by 2,451 registrants in 87 countries as a tool for monitoring behavior. The zoo has also done pioneering work in developing species-specific care guidelines, implementing welfare assessments for feeder animals, and advocating for welfare-focused legislation.



FIFTH PILLAR

# Positive Reinforcement Training

**Podcast Episode**
Relationships are vital to caring for and training animals. Hear success stories from two zookeepers in this *That Tracks!* episode.
**lpzoo.org/podcast**

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*Photo by Christopher Bijalba*

At Lincoln Park Zoo, training is a major component of animal care. Training provides animals with learning opportunities, avenues for choice, and more control over their environment. It also gives them exercise and strengthens relationships between animals and their care teams while making certain life events—like healthcare procedures—less stressful. The positive reinforcement model used here, considered to be the most ethical by experts, has seen many successes, including a recent accomplishment with 6-year-old pygmy slow loris Cosie (pictured here).

Cosie was diagnosed with urolithiasis, a condition that causes bladder stones. The Veterinary team recommended a twice-weekly regimen of fluids administered subcutaneously, or under the skin. This has so far prevented new stones from forming, but is something she must undergo for the rest of her life. After a 24-step behavior-shaping process that started in 2023 with an animal who had never experienced training before, she has been voluntarily accepting those fluids on a regular basis since December 2025.

Efforts like these were honored by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) when Lincoln Park Zoo became a finalist for the inaugural WAZA Animal Welfare Award for 2025. According to WAZA, the award celebrates institutions with a "comprehensive, science-based approach to animal welfare, combining innovation, compassion, and leadership to set an example for others to follow."

that tracks
A LINCOLN PARK ZOO PODCAST

**Podcast Episode**
How does Lincoln Park Zoo know if animals are happy? A lot of observations, research, and empathy. In this episode of *That Tracks!*, animal welfare scientist Jason Wark, Ph.D., explains.
**lpzoo.org/podcast**

# A TREASURED NEW ARRIVAL: HAZINA, EASTERN BLACK RHINO

**On March 19, 2026, a female rhino calf was born to 20-year-old Kapuki, who is a veteran mom with two previous offspring, King and Romeo. After meeting developmental milestones and growing bigger and stronger, the calf made her debut at Regenstein African Journey in front of 500 members, volunteers, and staff on April 29. She was named Hazina by Jim Neis, a longtime zoo supporter and Life Trustee, after a Swahili word that means "treasure"—and this precious pachyderm is living up to her name.**





Eastern black rhinos Kapuki and Hazina
*Photo by Hana Johnstone*


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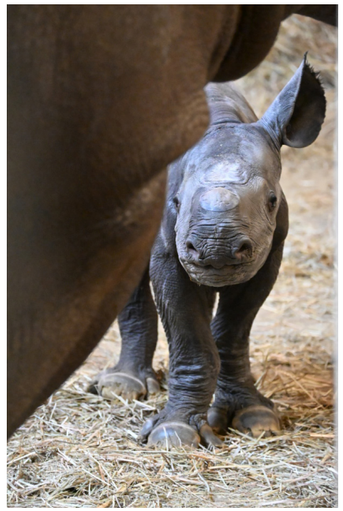


*Photos by Cassy Kutilek*

## EXPERT COLLABORATION AT THE ZOO...

From breeding recommendation to birth, the arrival of Hazina was a process that required the expertise of Animal Care staff, Facilities staff, experts from the Veterinary team, population management biologists, and so many others. She is the result of a pairing between Kapuki and 21-year-old Utenzi, who were matched by the Eastern Black Rhinoceros Species Survival Plan® (SSP). Eastern black rhinos are critically endangered, with only around 1,000 left in the wild as a result of poaching and habitat loss, so every birth is important.

The recommendations come from the AZA Population Management Center (PMC), located right here at Lincoln Park Zoo. This group advises SSPs and Saving Animals From Extinction programs and makes breeding and transfer plans for animals at AZA member institutions. The recommendations the PMC makes are informed by considerations such as genetic diversity, individual animal health, and future population sustainability. Every one to three years, the outlook of hundreds of species at AZA zoos is evaluated by PMC staff and representatives from the institutions that care for them.

## ...AND BEYOND

Once Kapuki was paired with Utenzi and she conceived, efforts by zoo partner the South-East Zoo Alliance for Reproduction and Conservation (SEZARC) were vital. SEZARC is dedicated to increasing populations of endangered species through reproductive science, and the zoo sent the organization fecal samples every month to monitor Kapuki's hormone levels. Tracking progesterone helped her care team keep track of her reproductive cycle and determine when she might give birth.





## GETTING READY FOR A CALF

Along with tracking her hormones noninvasively, zoo staff have also trained Kapuki to voluntarily provide blood and to let keepers assess her body condition in a tactile manner. Thus, she was ready for the medical monitoring that the Animal Care staff does when preparing for a pregnancy of this nature. Those voluntary blood draws helped her care team evaluate her hormones, providing information vital for her prenatal care. Staff also tracked her appetite and behavior to assess her general and reproductive health.

However, there's much more to preparing for a rhino calf. With the zoo's extensive husbandry knowledge, all scenarios are prepared for and hand-rearing supplies are on hand in case human intervention is necessary. With Kapuki, a long gestation period—totaling 457 days—allowed zoo staff to ensure everything Hazina needed, including appropriate space, veterinary care, and nutrition, was in place before she arrived.

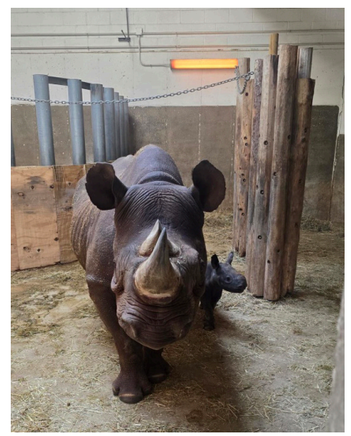
## BABYPROOFING THE BARN

Kapuki's health and the safety of the baby were paramount. The south barn at Regenstein African Journey where Kapuki would give birth had to be made safe and secure for both an adult rhino weighing almost 3,000 pounds and her more fragile youngster. The zoo's Facilities department, which uses creativity and know-how to take care of everything from repairs on historic buildings to major enrichment projects like constructing the climbing structure for the Sichuan takins, collaborated with Animal Care to get this done.

The babyproofing project, which took six weeks, required the attachment of strong, 8-foot-tall pieces of thick plywood with lawn bolts and nuts around currently existing steel bollards to fill in the gaps between posts. Meanwhile, the comfort of the rhinos while work was taking place had to be accommodated. The resulting babyproofing process was modular, with pre-constructed materials moved into the space one section at a time to be finished there. And, because of the way it's installed, the materials can be easily replaced if needed.





*Photos by Amy-Mei Lynch, Rachel Valentas, and Cassy Kutilek*

# ANIMAL ADVOCATES

**Lincoln Park Zoo continues to lead efforts to pass the Captive Primate Safety Act, which would federally prohibit primates as pets—a huge welfare win for these intelligent animals that are our closest living relatives. From Chicago to Capitol Hill, the zoo fiercely champions protections for wildlife and wild places.**





## BEING RECOGNIZED FOR EFFORTS TO PASS THE CPSA

In May 2025, the zoo partnered with the Animal Welfare Institute to host a screening of the HBO docuseries *Chimp Crazy* for government officials on Capitol Hill and lobbied for the passage of this important bill. Since then, the team has returned to Washington, D.C., with AZA, International Fund for Animal Welfare, and World Wildlife Fund to present policy solutions to lawmakers that benefit primates.

Efforts like these are reasons why AZA recognized Lincoln Park Zoo in September 2025 for its advocacy on behalf of the Captive Primate Safety Act with both the AZA Advocacy Impact Award and the Earned Media Excellence Award.

White-cheeked gibbon Murray
*Photo by Russ Smith*

## CELEBRATING A WELFARE WIN FOR ILLINOIS

Nearly a decade ago, the Illinois Traveling Animal Act was signed into law, prohibiting elephants from being transported across the state for performances. It was a great first step, but only the beginning of an effort to help numerous species impacted by circuses, fairs, trade shows, and more.

In 2025, Lincoln Park Zoo worked closely with Humane World for Animals to advocate for a proposed amendment that would include primates, bears, and nondomestic cats such as lions and tigers. Animals in traveling acts do not receive adequate care, housing, or training and are subject to prolonged confinement and forced performances.

Together, Lincoln Park Zoo, animal advocates, and partners engaged their audiences to speak out on behalf of wildlife. These allies were able to get the bill passed in the Illinois House and Senate, and it became state law on July 1, 2026. The impact has been immediate. Unethical animal acts such as the Banana Derby, in which capuchin monkeys are tethered to racing dogs for entertainment, can no longer take place in Illinois. The new law will also hopefully inspire other states to enact similar legislation.



Brown bear Ash
*Photo by Hana Johnstone*



Snow leopards Ozzy and Kennedi
*Photo by Russ Smith*



*Photo by Allison Price*

## IMPROVING LOCAL POLLINATOR ECOSYSTEMS

Closer to home, Lincoln Park Zoo is advocating for the Sustainable Parkways Resolution. In Chicago, there are more than 7,000 acres of parkways—the strip of land between the curb and the sidewalk. These small but mighty spaces host around 90% of the city's tree canopy and have the potential to further support urban wildlife from pollinators to migrating birds.

It is customary for the City of Chicago to install turfgrass in these spaces. However, turfgrass is not native to Chicago and takes a lot of resources (like mowing and watering) to remain green, putting the burden on both the City and residents for maintenance. The Sustainable Parkways Resolution proposes the use of native plantings in these spaces to direct water off Chicago streets when it rains, support native birds and butterflies, keep local neighborhoods cooler and greener, and provide beautification to the streets.

## CONTINUING EFFORTS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Efforts to dismantle the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which has successfully protected species since its introduction in 1973, have advanced in recent months. Lincoln Park Zoo vehemently opposed the changes that would diminish protections for our most vulnerable wild species and their ecosystems.

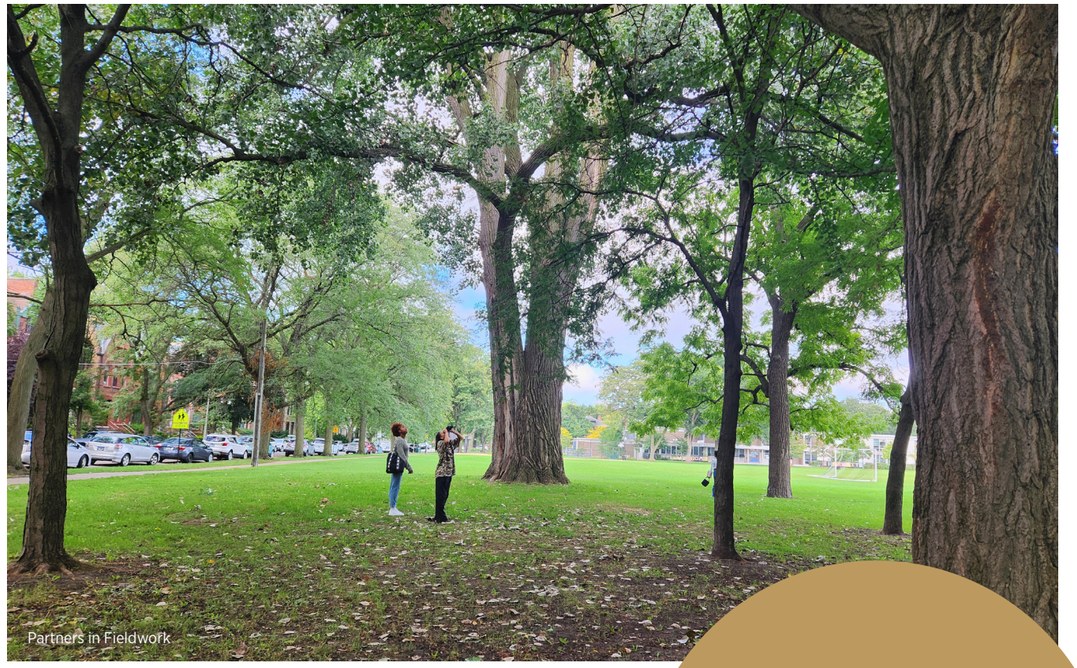
In May 2025, President & CEO Dr. Megan Ross authored an op-ed in the *Chicago Tribune*, which was co-signed by zoo partners, including Shedd Aquarium, The Morton Arboretum, Brookfield Zoo Chicago, and Chicago Botanic Garden. The piece highlighted how narrowing the definition of "harm" in the ESA to remove habitat modifications would not only scar landscapes but drive entire species towards extinction.

In December 2025, the zoo spoke out once more against further proposed changes to the ESA. These changes included removing the "blanket 4(d) rule," which would eliminate protections for species already deemed threatened and add an unnecessary procedural burden to determine if threatened species can be protected in the future.

# ZOO IN COMMUNITY

**The Lincoln Park Zoo community extends far beyond its gates, creating a strong network of neighborhoods, classrooms, and organizations. These connections help the zoo foster meaningful relationships between people and nature through strategic, proactive, and culturally responsive engagement here in Chicago and around the globe. From interacting more than 400,000 times with learners of all ages through educational programs each year to expanding career opportunities in underserved communities, the zoo works to inspire appreciation, stewardship, and a shared commitment to a sustainable future.**





Partners in Fieldwork

## PARTNERING WITH CPS

Through a partnership with Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the zoo prioritizes offering free programs like Partners in Fieldwork, in which more than 500 high school students per year participate in real fieldwork and share their research, and providing scholarships to programs such as Zoo Explorers, which involves school groups in investigations at the zoo. As part of this collaboration, Lincoln Park Zoo hopes to support inquiry-based learning, inspire conservation leadership, help students develop empathy for wildlife, and create community by connecting the work of the zoo with learning goals in CPS schools.

**Podcast Episode**

Conservation topics in French class? Kids saving migratory birds? And what is "Respecting the PONY"? Hear from educator Rosie Arnold on the ways the zoo is shaping the next generation of conservationists on this episode of *That Tracks!*

**lpzoo.org/podcast**

that tracks
A LINCOLN PARK ZOO PODCAST

## INFLUENCING HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE CURRICULA

Lincoln Park Zoo offers multiple professional development workshops for CPS teachers and provides educational resources, such as science-related mini-lessons created in 2025. In one, students take on the role of Population Management Center scientists, making genetically diverse matches for a fictional red wolf population. Another focuses on having students redesign the South Loop section of the zoo, taking habitat design, animal welfare, and high-school physics knowledge into account. Teachers also provide feedback that will be used to improve these programs and make them available for all via the lpzoo.org website. By providing this content for free, Lincoln Park Zoo supports teachers and students while strengthening conservation messaging in Chicago schools.




## INITIATING CHICAGO BIRD CHAMPIONS

The zoo recently introduced the eight-week, six-session Chicago Bird Champions program for elementary school classrooms. This program empowers students, encourages community engagement, and allows deeper exploration of a topic that encourages conservation action. Participating students can make a difference by learning ways to be bird-friendly, then advocating in age-appropriate ways—like urging businesses to turn off their lights and use window decals that the kids make and provide. Eighty-six percent of students in the program's pilot indicated that it increased their desire to help birds; it also helped them identify anthropogenic threats to wildlife. Chicago Bird Champions is now being offered as a paid program during the 2026–2027 school year with two separate cohorts. The zoo received grant funding from the Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife Network to offer programs for free for 12 classrooms.

*Above: Photo courtesy of BUILD Chicago*



*Photo by Brenda Rivera*

## PARTNERING WITH AFTER SCHOOL MATTERS

After School Matters (ASM) is a citywide youth employment program that provides after-school and summer opportunities for teens. With its support in providing youth stipends, the zoo is able to hire, train, and foster community for 30 teens a year.

The zoo's partnership with ASM includes the Conservation Ambassadors Board (CAB), a youth leadership program that runs in the winter and fall. CAB equips teens with knowledge about zoo conservation, then lets the teens create a project or initiative to share what they've learned with their peers. During the 2025–2026 school year, CAB students focused on migratory birds, even taking a field trip to Starved Rock State Park to see birds such as bald eagles.

The collaboration also includes the new Nature Buds program. In the summer of 2025, Nature Buds interns helped educate the zoo's youngest guests, providing opportunities for nature play, sensory exploration, and story times like Reading With the Animals.





*Photo by Julie Reynolds*

## CREATING PATHS TO EMPLOYMENT

By promoting job and internship openings through zoo partners, Lincoln Park Zoo works to provide meaningful green jobs and career training in underserved communities. The zoo offers direct employment in Austin, Little Village, and North Lawndale, supporting more than 50 jobs per year through its partners. The zoo also provides opportunities for teen interns through programs like the Malott Family Zoo Internship Program. And zoo staff attend job fairs and programs such as the Chicago Housing Authority's Take Flight program to expose teens to meaningful career pathways while boosting their professional readiness.

Since 2024, the zoo has worked with the Chicago High School of Agricultural Science to send representatives to job fairs and workshops for the senior class and speak to students about career paths at the zoo. The zoo has also collaborated with Chicago Public Schools' Summer Internship Program, in 2026 hiring two students from Schurz High School for the zoo's Accounting and Animal Care departments.

Lincoln Park Zoo continues to work with programs such as Bridges from School to Work, to place young adults with disabilities in jobs that can transform their lives, and Ignite, securing employment for young people with experience being unhoused. In doing so, the zoo creates multiple entry points to employment at the zoo.

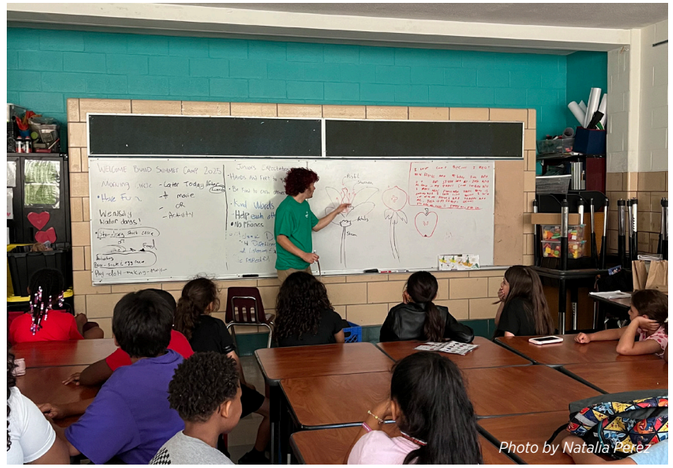
# Malott Family Research Apprentice Program Receives AZA Top Honors

Lincoln Park Zoo received AZA's Top Honors in the 2025 Education Award for the Malott Family Research Apprentice Program (RAP). This award recognizes outstanding achievement in education program design and judges zoos on their ability to promote conservation knowledge, attitudes, and behavior while showing innovation and measuring success.

The RAP program gives six Chicago teens paid field experience over seven weeks each summer, allowing them to work with zoo scientists on real-world research exploring conservation topics from population management to plant and pollinator interactions. In an August 2025 evaluation of teen programs, RAP alumni indicated that one of the program's most significant influences was on their appreciation of urban ecology; the program helped them understand the role of green spaces in cities, nurtured their interest in sustainable living practices, increased their understanding of careers focusing on the environment, and deepened their sense of responsibility as environmental stewards.




*Photo by Lisa Miller*




## SUPPORTING STEAMBASSADORS

In partnership with Project Exploration in the neighborhood of Austin and with funding from the Bill Bartholomay Family Foundation, Lincoln Park Zoo trained 11 recent high school graduates in science, conservation, health, and wellness as part of this workplace readiness and mentorship program. STEAMbassadors guide field trips, plan special events, create lesson plans, cultivate content, and help kids develop an affinity for the natural world, peers, and the wildlife around them. Each summer, they lead camps and programs for an estimated 240 elementary school students: This year, zoo-trained STEAMbassadors will visit eight Austin-based summer camps.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY GARDENS

In October 2025, North Lawndale Employment Network's (NLEN) Pollinator Pavilion became a finalist for the prestigious Pritzker Traubert Foundation Chicago Prize. As a result, it received a six-figure grant for the next stage of its construction. The zoo worked closely with NLEN to develop these sustainable gardens, helped train NLEN staff on garden care, and assisted in developing its interpretive plan. Informative new signs, designed by zoo staff with pollinator-friendly messaging, were installed in NLEN's outdoor gardens and its locally-run BeeLove Café this year.

In Austin, BUILD Chicago's new campus has a working urban farm and terraces filled with planters. This area was designed and installed by zoo staff, including Horticulture experts, so that young people using BUILD's violence prevention and youth development services can connect with nature. This peaceful space will be used as a backdrop for wellness activities and the plants may eventually be used to create natural dyes and teas.

# Zoo Offers Connection for Hospice Patients and People With Dementia

In 2025, the zoo developed Your Lincoln Park Zoo Pack in cooperation with Unity Hospice and Palliative Care. This packet features beautiful frame-worthy images, facts, and questions designed to inspire interaction and evoke memories, assisting volunteers in the Chicago area who provide companionship and non-medical support to patients approaching the end of their lives. The distribution of the Zoo Pack, which was being provided to 55 volunteers each quarter, has since expanded: It is now being used at Unity Hospice's office in southern Illinois and is being included in Chicago Public Library's brand-new memory kits, which will be available for checkout at all branches this fall. This project makes Lincoln Park Zoo one of the only cultural institutions in Chicago working specifically with hospice patients.

The zoo's monthly Memory Enrichment program, launched in 2023, continues to draw steady attendance from people with dementia and their loved ones. This initiative, along with the dementia-friendly Sharing Wellness and Nature program launched in 2024, helped the neighborhood of Lincoln Park receive recent recognition as the 50th Dementia Friendly community in Illinois by Dementia Friendly America.



## URBAN WILDLIFE INSTITUTE UPDATES

The zoo's Urban Wildlife Institute (UWI), a global leader in urban ecology, directs a variety of community-based initiatives that help increase understanding of urban biodiversity, educate the public, and reduce human-wildlife conflict. UWI's work includes local initiatives such as the Chicago Garden Wildlife Project, helping facilitate positive interactions between local growers and urban wildlife, and wildlife monitoring near the newly opened Obama Presidential Center. Zoo scientists offered feedback on the Jackson Park structure's impact on the environment as well as bird-friendly design.

**Podcast Episode**

Whether it's the viral Chicago Rat Hole or flying squirrels on Chicago's North Side, we are surrounded by urban wildlife. Listen to scientist Seth Magle, Ph.D., as he discusses our animal neighbors in this episode of *That Tracks*!

**lpzoo.org/podcast**

that tracks
A LINCOLN PARK ZOO PODCAST







*Photos by Christopher Bijalba and Anna Cieslik*

## BAT SIGNALS

UWI's Bat Tracker program experienced a record field season in 2025. Ninety volunteers participated in 192 bat walks across 27 green spaces in the city of Chicago, recording 11,052 bat calls from six local bat species such as big brown bats and eastern red bats. Two instances of tricolored bat calls were also captured—an exciting development, since this cave-dwelling species was hit especially hard by the invasive fungal disease white-nose syndrome, which has decimated bat populations nationwide. The Bat Tracker microgrant program also launched this year to provide local organizations with funding for bat outreach and monitoring.

## OH, RATS!

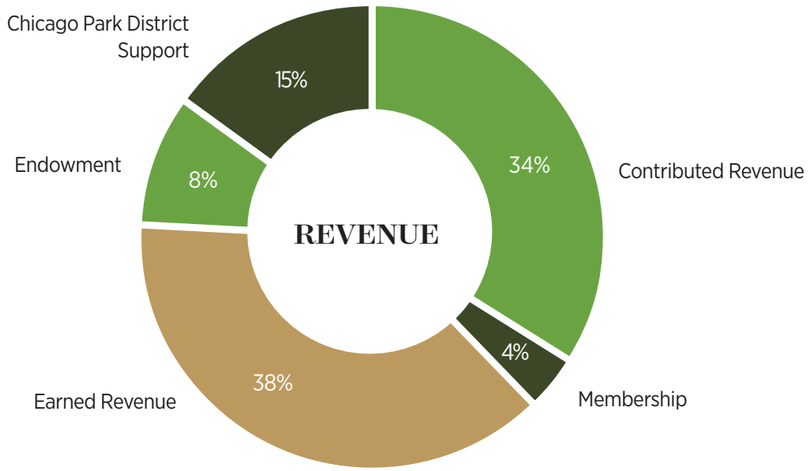
UWI embarked on a pioneering study this year with partners the Chicago Bird Alliance, the Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation, and 43rd Ward Alder Timmy Knudsen, exploring rat contraception as a way of managing urban rat populations. This ongoing project with several local municipalities—including the neighborhood of Lincoln Park—seeks to test the efficacy of a more humane way of controlling pests, since more traditional rodenticides can be ineffective and harm urban wildlife.

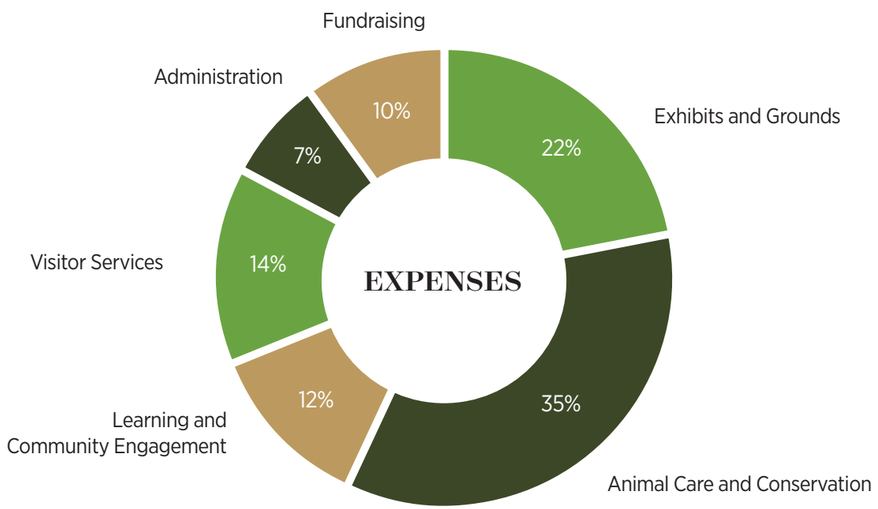
## SUMMIT SUCCESS

In September 2025, the zoo's participation in the global community was spotlighted when many of its partners in the Urban Wildlife Information Network (UWIN) arrived in Chicago for a summit to build relationships, collaborate, and connect. Supported by the Walder Foundation, the event included presentations, hands-on demonstrations, field trips, and small group work for 41 attendees representing 16 cities in 10 countries. During the symposium, UWIN partners worked to define goals for the future, including finding ways to work more closely together; testing methods of researching less-studied animals; and investigating wildlife disease, behavior, and habitat use. UWIN now boasts 62 partners worldwide, all working together to develop the full picture of urban wildlife across the planet.

# FINANCIALS

## FY26 Operating Results (audited)




### The Lincoln Park Zoological Society
### Statements of Financial Position
### March 31, 2026 and 2025 (audited)

| ASSETS | FY 2026 | FY 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| **Assets** | | |
| Cash | 4,134,120 | 3,836,199 |
| Investments | 245,333,754 | 216,184,499 |
| Investments - Other | 19,168,657 | 19,264,576 |
| Receivables | | |
| *Pledges and grants, net* | 9,872,113 | 8,465,068 |
| *Other* | 915,899 | 947,486 |
| Other Assets | 1,089,436 | 691,086 |
| Property and Equipment, net | 6,473,504 | 4,482,109 |
| **Total Assets** | 287,080,262 | 253,968,470 |

| LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Liabilities** | | |
| Accounts Payable | 2,483,521 | 3,134,008 |
| Annuities Payable | 1,017,481 | 798,644 |
| Deferred Revenue | 1,134,422 | 881,759 |
| Accrued Expenses | 2,440,425 | 2,536,429 |
| Bonds Payable, Net of Issuance Costs | 49,883,694 | 49,832,487 |
| **Total Liabilities** | 56,959,543 | 57,183,326 |
| **Net Assets** | | |
| Donor Restrictions | | |
| *Without Restrictions* | 117,861,354 | 98,628,954 |
| *With Restrictions* | 112,259,365 | 98,156,190 |
| **Total Net Assets** | 230,120,720 | 196,785,144 |
| **Total Liabilities and Net Assets** | 287,080,262 | 253,968,470 |

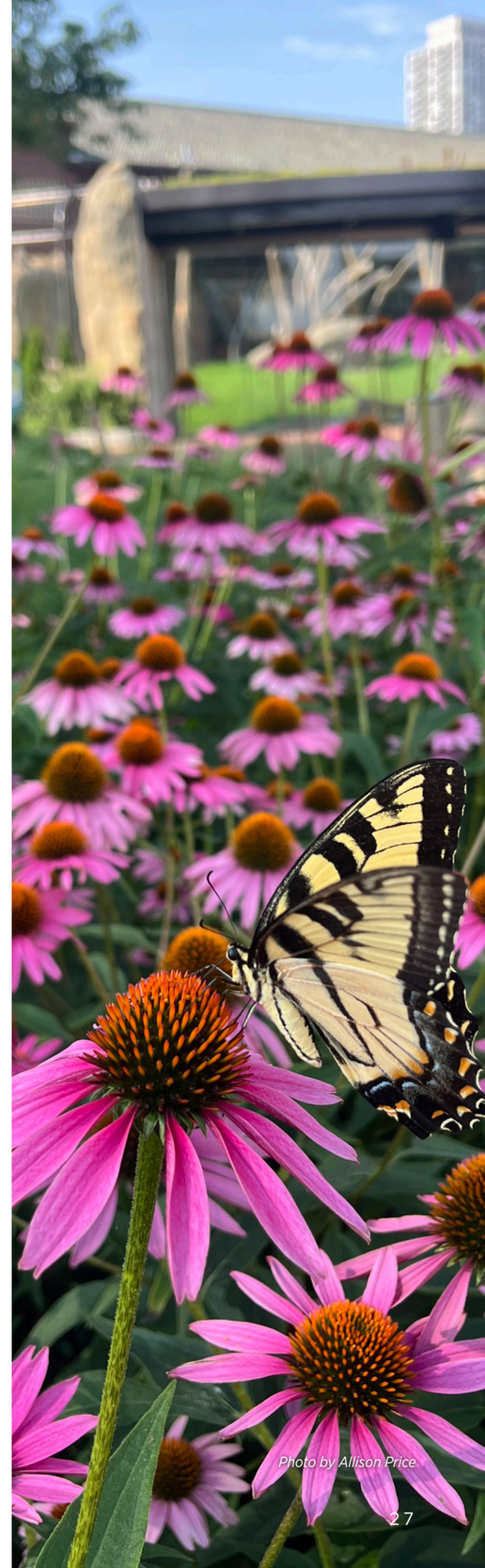


*Photo by Allison Price*

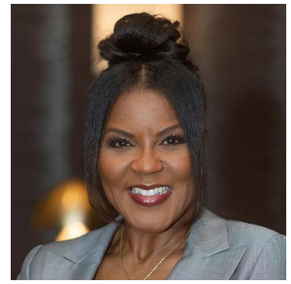
# HONOR ROLL

Chilean flamingo
*Photo by Hana Johnstone*



# Welcome, New Trustees!

**The Lincoln Park Zoological Society's Board of Trustees oversees the institution's strategic direction and financial resources. Its members are civic and corporate leaders, essential to ensuring that the zoo continues to grow responsibly and fulfill its mission.**



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**Lincoln Park Zoo is grateful to the following donors for their leadership and generous support between April 1, 2025, and March 31, 2026.**

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The Conservators' Council is Lincoln Park Zoo's premier philanthropy circle. These individuals and organizations provide unrestricted, annual support for zoo operations, and we acknowledge their generosity with gratitude.

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## ZOO BALL

On July 11, 2025, more than 600 guests celebrated Zoo Ball: Serpentine Soiree. Co-chaired by Trish Giannoulias and Colleen Mansell, the event was inspired by the beauty of snakes, highlighting the zoo's conservation efforts, including combating the illegal wildlife trade—a significant threat to reptiles and other species globally. The gala raised $1.8 million to support the zoo's admission-free promise and initiatives in science, conservation, and learning.




*Photo by Kyle Flubacker*

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*Photo by Violetta Photography*

## CHAIR'S DINNER

The annual Chair's Dinner took place on September 5, 2025, and was hosted by Board Chair Fran Edwardson. The event featured a discussion on creating wildlife-friendly cities and the zoo's work in urban wildlife ecology. Panelists included Seth Magle, Ph.D., of the zoo's Urban Wildlife Institute; Christopher Schell of the University of California, Berkeley; Jack Westwood of the Walder Foundation; and President and CEO of Openlands Michael S. Davidson, who moderated.

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Donna and Phillip Zarcone
Xiaoying Zhang and Ray Young
Elizabeth Ziegler
Len and Pat Zolna
Christine M. Zrinsky

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The following individuals and their families made gifts to all areas of the zoo's mission, including special programs, capital projects, and events between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026.

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## ANNUAL MEETING

On June 26, 2025, the zoo's generous donor community gathered for the 66th Annual Meeting of The Lincoln Park Zoological Society to celebrate the accomplishments of the past year. Zoo leadership shared updates on the state of the zoo and showcased key milestones and impacts from the year. Guests explored interactive stations throughout Pepper Family Wildlife Center, where they engaged directly with experts in conservation research, animal care, horticulture, and event planning.




*Photo by Kyle Flubacker*

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## GIVING DAY

Lincoln Park Zoo's first-ever Giving Day, held on September 26, 2025, was an extraordinary success, raising more than $287,000 from 770 donors. Fueled by a $75,000 challenge from three generous supporters, Giving Day inspired remarkable community participation. Dedicated ambassadors, including staff, Trustees, volunteers, and Auxiliary Board members, helped expand the zoo's reach and its philanthropic community. We are deeply grateful to every donor and ambassador whose generosity and enthusiasm made this inaugural effort so meaningful.




*Photo by Catherine Miller*

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*Photo by Lisa Miller*

## DR. MEGAN ROSS, SUSTAINABLE CEO

Lincoln Park Zoo was proud to have President & CEO Megan R. Ross, Ph.D., recognized as a 2025 Notable Leader in Sustainability by Crain's Chicago Business. She was honored among 56 Illinois leaders who are advancing sustainability across business, government, education, and nonprofit sectors. The honor noted Ross's biggest professional win as helping to protect the Republic of Congo's Djéké Triangle by making it part of Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, safeguarding habitat for great apes.

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Jennifer and David Martay

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## VOLUNTEER MILESTONES

This year, we proudly recognize several dedicated volunteers for their exceptional years of service and commitment to our organization.

**40 years**
Rondi Carlsen
Clarice Norin

**35 years**
Cathy Bolton
Lynn Henry
Violet Kerbel
Judie Mika

**30 years**
Wendy Binder
Joan Rathbone
Barry Sears
Elizabeth Barnes

Zoo volunteers annually contribute **more than 35,000 hours of service**, demonstrating an extraordinary commitment to supporting our mission and community.

At the end of the 2026 fiscal year, Lincoln Park Zoo welcomed **84 new volunteers**, bringing the total volunteer base to approximately **450 active members**.


Photo by Kyle Flubacker

## WOMEN SUPPORTING WILDLIFE LUNCHEON

The inaugural Women Supporting Wildlife Luncheon, hosted by the Women's Board on September 11, 2025, was an unforgettable event, featuring the late Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE. Over 500 attendees heard Dr. Goodall's incredible stories from her decades of research and animal advocacy. The luncheon was chaired by Beth Kies, Megan Weiland, and Sue Charles Weinstein.

Trustee and longstanding friend Susan Regenstein was also honored for her exceptional philanthropy to the zoo and wildlife causes with the establishment of the Susan Regenstein Award for Conservation Leadership.

Madeline Martin
Vicki and Mark Martin
Vincent Martini
Sofia Marie Mascia
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Lincoln Park Zoo is grateful to the generous donors who have established or contributed to the following leadership endowments. Their philanthropy provides a source of permanent support for essential zoo initiatives.

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Lincoln Park Zoo's Auxiliary Board includes 124 vibrant young professionals. In 2025, the Auxiliary Board raised over $284,000 to help keep the zoo free. Its largest annual fundraiser, Zoo-ologie, took place on May 2, 2025, and was co-chaired by Ollie Kassam, William Press, and Mia Wagner. Spooky Zoo, led by Nicole Dawson, Bradley Lohsl, and Alec Wasner, took place on October 18, 2025, welcoming more than 15,000 visitors to trick-or-treat around the zoo.



*Photo by Violetta Photography*

## HERITAGE SOCIETY

We honor friends who have made a commitment to the zoo's future through a will or trust provision, or other planned gift. Planned gifts include charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, charitable lead trusts, gifts of retirement plan assets, gifts of life insurance and other beneficiary designations.

Key:
*Deceased
+New Member (since April 1, 2025)

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## HERITAGE SOCIETY

The Heritage Society is a community of dedicated zoo supporters who have made the zoo's future part of their personal legacy with a commitment in their estate plans. At the annual luncheon in May 2025, Director of Horticulture Katrina Quint spoke to the group about the art and science of horticulture. And in the fall, Senior Conservation Scientist Charles Foley, Ph.D., highlighted the zoo's work with local communities to protect vital wildlife migration corridors in Tanzania.



*Photo by Kyle Flubacker*

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Lincoln Park Zoo is grateful for the following donors who made gifts in memory of friends and loved ones.

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## IN MEMORIAM

We remember with fondness the following zoo donors, leaders, and friends who have passed away since April 1, 2025.

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Main Mall
*Photo by Leah Wendzinski*



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# In Memoriam

## DR. JANE GOODALL

For 40 years, Lincoln Park Zoo shared a vision with Dr. Jane Goodall to better understand and protect chimpanzees. She was a steadfast advocate for primates, a dedicated naturalist, and an inspiration to millions of people around the world. Her final visit to the zoo, just a few weeks before her death, was also her last time interacting with chimpanzees. This moment of reflection and hope was a reminder of her boundless compassion and the enduring legacy she leaves behind. In a note reflecting on her visit, Dr. Goodall wrote, "I leave Chicago with happy memories."

## TOM ZIMMERMAN

A longtime friend of the zoo, Tom Zimmerman lived a life defined by a passion for learning and a generous spirit. For years, he served as a proud volunteer in the zoo's Conservation & Science department, where he contributed his time and talents to advance conservation research. A former teacher and educational publishing professional, Tom shared his love of nature and learning by funding scholarships for children to attend the zoo's summer camp, opening doors to experiences that inspire curiosity about the natural world in the next generation.

## CLARK "JERRY" HAGERTY

Clark Gerald "Jerry" Hagerty, beloved husband to founding member of the Women's Board Jean Hagerty, staunchly supported Lincoln Park Zoo for many years. Jerry was a friend of the zoo who annually volunteered at the Women's Board's Caroling With the Animals event. Like his wife, Jerry loved animals and also served as a board member for The Anti-Cruelty Society in Chicago.

## PETER BENSINGER

Peter Bensinger, with his wife Judy, supported Lincoln Park Zoo for 65 years. In addition to making generous donations, Peter dedicated some of his time to serving as the Chairman of The Lincoln Park Zoological Society in 1961. Peter's life was defined by service to others. He ran the Drug Enforcement Agency under Presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. After leaving the DEA, he pioneered the use of workplace drug testing and assistance programs for employees impacted by the scourge of narcotics. He cofounded Bensinger, DuPont & Associates, which develops employee assistance and substance abuse intervention programs. Peter also served on the board of Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

## ALLAN PAUL MELLIS

Allan Mellis was a longtime zoo member and a pillar of the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Making his first gift to the zoo in 1978, Allan supported the zoo for nearly 50 years until his passing. Shortly after moving to Chicago, Allan became involved with numerous neighborhood efforts, through which he established community events and spearheaded a successful campaign for a new branch of the Chicago Public Library. He was known as "the mayor of Lincoln Park."

## JANE RAE BUCKWALTER

Jane Rae Buckwalter was a zoo member for nearly 50 years. A lifelong Chicagoan, Jane was dedicated to her community. She had a long career as an administrator at the University of Illinois Chicago, including running the Office of Urban and Governmental Affairs and the Office of Public Affairs, and serving as deputy director of the Office of International Criminal Justice. In her retirement, Jane enjoyed her passions—architecture, books, and theater. Jane's wish was that any remembrance be in the form of an act of kindness toward another Chicagoan. In her own last act of kindness, she left a bequest to the zoo, helping to keep it free for generations of Chicagoans to delight in the wonders of nature.

African penguin
*Photo by Hana Johnstone*

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