



PITTSBURGH ZOO  
& AQUARIUM



2024

ANNUAL REPORT



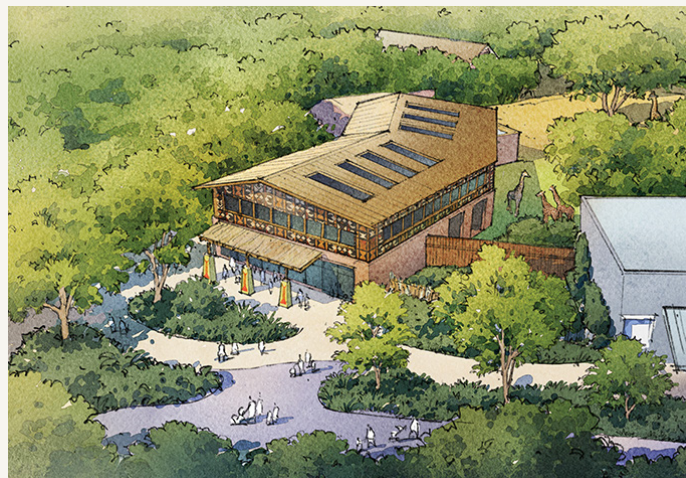
# ONE WILD YEAR



2024 was a remarkable year as the Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium continued to make great strides to assure one wild future for animals and their habitats. Two significant achievements greatly benefitted our mission to connect people to wildlife, inspiring our communities to conserve nature for future generations.

## THE GOLD STANDARD

In September, the Zoo was accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), recognizing excellence and unwavering dedication to the highest standards of animal care and conservation. Our team successfully completed a rigorous process that included a detailed application and a multiple-day inspection of every aspect of Zoo operations by a peer team of highly experienced zoological operations experts. The AZA's Accreditation Commission voted unanimously to accredit the Zoo and were particularly impressed by the excellent overall health of the animals – both at the Zoo and the International Conservation Center in Somerset, as well as our commitment to embrace green initiatives and provide conservation education in an engaging manner. The experts also recognized the Zoo's conservation plan, commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion efforts, general cleanliness, and well-maintained grounds. AZA accreditation will open many doors for collaboration with other accredited institutions in the areas of conservation, education and animal population management to name a few. The AZA honor adds to the prestigious ranks of the Zoo's other accreditations, including the Zoological Association of America, the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums, and American Humane Conservation.



## A ROAD MAP TO REACH NEW HEIGHTS

The Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium has big plans for one wild future – an ambitious two-decade master plan that will revitalize the entire Highland Park campus, focusing on the well-being of its animal residents and the development of habitats and experiences. The first phase of the plan taking place over the next five to seven years encompasses a new front entrance and accessible path, a modern, expanded giraffe barn, an entirely new orangutan habitat, and an expanded Education Complex. Guests can expect to see early modifications to the park begin in early winter.



## WELCOMES

### Bactrian camel & Reindeer

In addition to its elephants, the Conservation Center welcomed two new species – a Bactrian camel and reindeer. Both animals face the threat of declining wild populations, and the climate, terrain, and habitat of the Conservation Center make it an ideal location to concentrate efforts to help their counterparts in the world.

### Bald eagles

The Zoo added our national bird to its roll call of residents – a pair of rescued bald eagles. The male, Justice, and the female, Liberty, sustained injuries in the wild and were rescued and rehabilitated by the Alaska Raptor Center in Sitka but determined to be non-releasable due to their permanent injuries by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Modifications were made to the outdoor exhibit in Kids Kingdom in compliance with bald eagle requirements and the eagles have adjusted to their new home nicely!





**Hatty** A macaroni penguin chick scored a hat trick at the Aquarium: her egg was discarded by her parents, she was given an assist by a pair of gentoo penguins, and she successfully hatched and found a family with her adoptive parents. Named Hat Trick, or Hatty for short, the healthy female chick is the ultimate peng-win, as she was uniquely fostered at the Zoo by penguin parents of different species. Hatty is thriving as an active member of our mixed species colony.

**Bison** The International Conservation Center welcomed one of North America's most iconic species – the American Bison. Four bison, one male and three females, arrived at the Conservation Center in December. These animals represent the purest

bison stock in North America and came to the Zoo through a partnership with American Prairie, a prairie-based nature reserve in Central Montana. The Zoo and American Prairie are both part of the AZA's Saving Animals from Extinction (SAFE) Bison program, which has the goal of merging the resources of AZA facilities across North America with valuable external partners, including Indigenous groups, to recover bison and restore its native North American prairie habitat.

## GRAND OPENINGS



### I Spy a Butterfly

Butterflies landed at the Zoo in late summer with the arrival of “I Spy a Butterfly,” a specially constructed greenhouse for free-flying butterflies that surrounds guests with the majestic beauty of winged wonders. The interactive area not only allows guests to share space with these delicate beauties, but it also educates about the important role pollinators play in the ecosystem. This seasonal experience will return in 2025 and is the first of many new additions that are part of our master plan to connect people to wildlife and inspire our communities to conserve nature.

### Backyard Explorer

“Backyard Explorer” debuted in Kids Kingdom. Designed in-house, this all-new exhibit area inspires visitors to learn more about Western Pennsylvania nature. Subjects include backyard habitats, types of bird feeders and food, and the importance of pollinators. This area was called out as a particular area of achievement by our AZA inspectors. Interpretation Manager Jessica Ries and her team encourage guests to become nature detectives and search for clues to identify the familiar animals of our backyards, as well as introduce citizen science projects they may participate in to help scientists increase wildlife knowledge.

### One Wild Express

A beloved attraction returned as the Zoo train was reincarnated as “One Wild Express.” A new ticketing booth was completely constructed, and the waterfall was activated for the first time in years. The pathway and surroundings were renovated to showcase Pennsylvania's native wildlife

during the journey. The train ride was rethemed for both the Jack O'Lantern Extravaganza and Wild Illuminations. In our first year, the train made a total revenue of \$95,915.



### Ruby

We rolled out the red carpet for the debut of our newest mascot: everyone's favorite firefox – the red panda! An online naming contest dubbed her “Ruby.” One of the Zoo's most popular residents, the playful and popular panda represents the unforgettable fun of a trip to the Zoo. As an endangered species, she also signifies the institution's longtime commitment to conservation.



## A ZOO FOR ALL SEASONS

### Jack O'Lantern Extravaganza

An all-new autumn evening event, the Jack O'Lantern Extravaganza was the ultimate organic art event, featuring thousands of carved pumpkins glowing in the night. Ten different Zoo departments collaborated to make this effort possible. Twenty-seven carvers prepared 2,104 artificial jack o'lanterns in just over two weeks, while 15 carvers carved 55 live pumpkins each week during the run of the show, depicting animals, favorite characters, personalities, and scenes. This Herculean carving effort resulted in 3,115 unique images on both real and artificial pumpkins! 39,038 people attended the event which brought in \$21,000 in sponsorship dollars and a total revenue of \$983,698, ultimately netting \$330,921.17.

### Wild Illuminations

An all-new holiday spectacular made spirits bright, combining two of the Zoo's treasured events: the Asian Lantern Festival and Zoo Lights merged to create Wild Illuminations: A Holiday Lantern Experience. Fabulously frosty lantern displays focused on cold weather animals and the fun of the holidays, surrounded by more than a million twinkling lights. This popular event is sure to become Pittsburgh's newest winter holiday tradition!

## PHILANTHROPY IN ACTION

### Capital Campaign study

Planning for the upcoming capital campaign that will support several major projects over the next five to seven years is well underway. In February, the Zoo completed a feasibility study with CCS Fundraising Consultants and spent most of the year socializing those results with study participants, corporate and foundation leaders, as well as individual donor prospects. Our initial efforts will be focused on our most loyal and philanthropic donors and securing leadership gifts.

### Summer Safari

The Zoo's most popular annual fundraiser, Summer Safari centered around a Black and White theme as guests enjoyed an unforgettable balmy evening under the stars. Corporate sponsorship was \$19,000 over goal, while ticket sales exceeded projected expectations by \$8,000.

### Major Gifts

Major gift highlights include a \$500,000 general operating grant from the RK Mellon Foundation, as well as a Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) award of nearly \$1.8 million dollars for a new giraffe barn. In addition, we secured several foundation and corporate grants to support education programs.





**Accessibility** Through the generosity of the Regional Asset District, the Zoo was made even more accessible for all guests. We secured two lactation pods for the comfort and convenience of nursing parents and added three ADA-accessible water fountains and bottle filling stations. Automatic doors were installed in the Education Complex and World of Discovery buildings to provide better access for those with mobility limitations. The Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium website was revitalized to be fully accessible to users while promoting us as an authority on animals. We currently ranking for “meerkat” in four different languages!

## INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

### Adventures in Learning

Education had a banner year in sharing and reinforcing the Zoo’s mission. We welcomed 48,480 students for self-guided tours, 10,353 for Learning Adventures, and 1,011 for Wildlife Academy classes. Zoomobile programs reached 26,045 learners on a journey of 6,000 miles! Zoo Camp welcomed 1,616 children – a new Zoo record! Furthering the Zoo’s accessibility initiatives, a “campership” program was introduced to provide scholarships to campers with demonstrated financial need. Finally, a record-breaking 50,000 visitors attended presentations at the Amphitheater this summer.

### Sharing the Wonder

The Conservation Center introduced educational programming for the very first time, introducing field trips for Grades K-12, Elephant Wild Encounters, and overnight programs, including select Scout programs and a Summer Family Campout, in either tents or the recently updated cabins.

### Citizen Science

The Zoo hosted an introductory workshop for the community science project, FrogWatch, which instructed an audience of 70 on how to identify and participate in a census project to inventory local amphibians.

## A ZOO FOR ALL

### RAD Staycation

The Zoo was able to open its gates to even more members of the community with the launch of the Regional Asset District’s Staycation Program. Allegheny County Library card holders ages 18 and up were able to receive four free passes to the region’s cultural attractions, including our Zoo, by making an online reservation with their library card. The program ran throughout the summer and was extended through September 30 due to its popularity. This program was suggested by the Zoo to RAD to replace the often-chaotic RAD Free day. It ultimately offered a much better experience for the 16,000 guests who participated, was less taxing on our staff, and increased the number of county residents who could attend the Zoo free of charge!

### Sensory Safari & Days

Graduate students from Carlow University developed a “Sensory Safari Day” for children with sensory processing needs and their families to experience the Zoo in fun, new, specially tailored ways with hands-on activities and stations. We also initiated two “Sensory Friendly Mornings” during the summer when guests with sensory sensitivities could enter the Zoo early and enjoy a wildlife experience with smaller crowds and fewer distractions. This program will continue quarterly.

## WILD WELL-BEING

### USDA Relicensing

Every three years the Zoo must apply for relicensing by the United States Department of Agriculture. Historically, the USDA was only concerned with the mammals under our care, but it is now responsible for assessing birds as well. This was the first inspection since this change occurred and we passed with a spotless inspection. The Zoo is now licensed for another 3 years.

### Full Veterinary Staff

The veterinary team has grown to include its largest number of staff ever with a Director of Animal Health, a senior associate veterinarian and an associate veterinarian, three veterinary technicians, one animal health administrator, and two part-time hospital assistants – the largest animal health department in the Zoo’s history. The veterinary staff also completely updated our

Preventative Medicine Plan, which is our guideline for all routine animal health protocols. This ensures we are adhering to best practice protocols and keeping in line with recommendations for each individual species.

### Collaborations for Animal Treatment

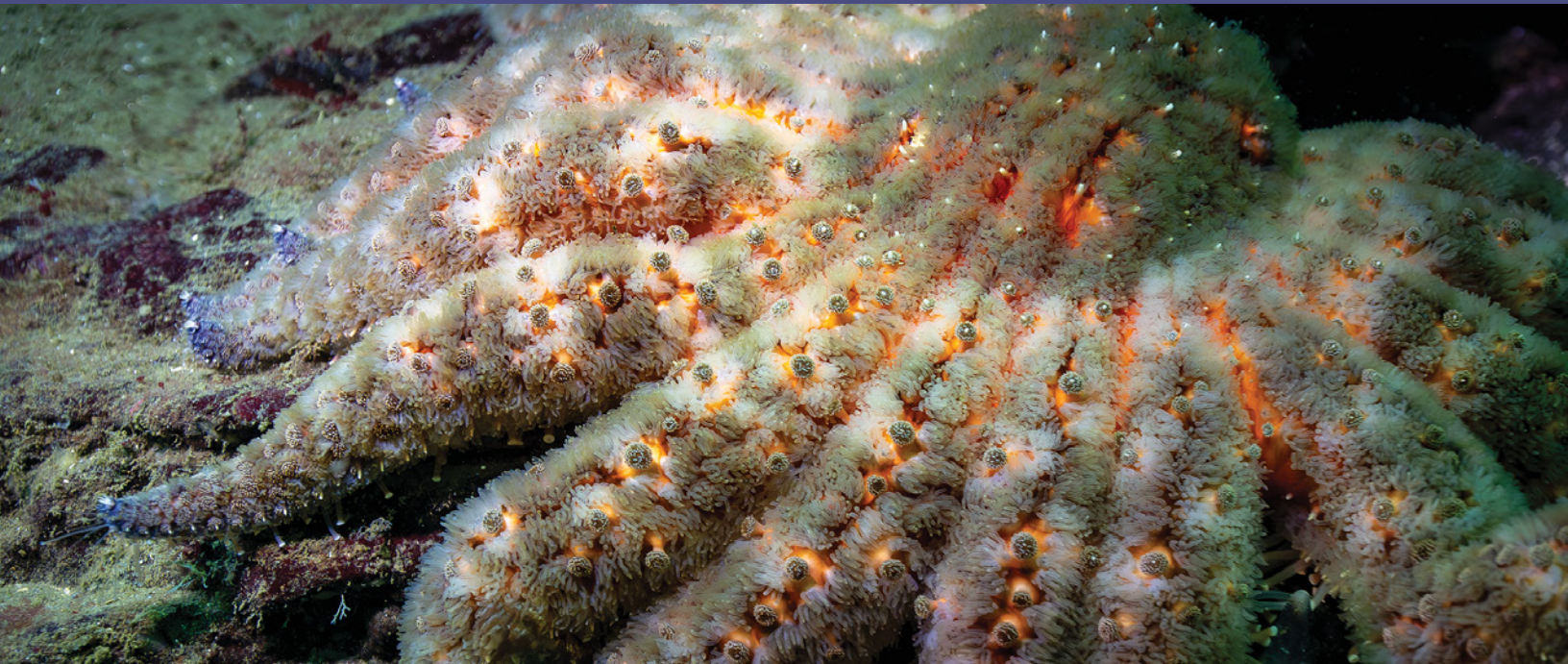
Our Animal Health Department collaborated extensively with the Pittsburgh medical and veterinary community to diagnose and treat many of our animal residents. Several animals with complicated health issues were transported off-site to Blue Pearl medical facilities for advanced imaging and procedures, including Isabelle the gentoo penguin, Tesha the tiger, and Keliliah the sea lion. Working together with the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, several animals received echocardiograms to diagnose and monitor heart health. Veterinary anesthesiologists and cardiologists were also

called upon to consult and assist with many medical procedures throughout the year.

### Fish & Invertebrate Sustainability

Fish and invertebrate sustainability are focal topics for all AZA institutions as we attempt to find solutions to minimize the impact in wild-caught populations. Our goal is to contribute to this effort by rearing key species including peppermint shrimp, *Berghia nudibranchs*, and jellyfish as well as endangered Australian Rainbowfish. These animals are reared from eggs by Zoo aquarists and cared for throughout their life cycles by closely monitoring conditions, such as food levels, water quality, salinity, and other essential factors. The Zoo also provided some of these species to other public aquariums and received aquaculture species in return thus decreasing the need to collect from the wild.





# CONSERVATION STARTS HERE

## SAFE programs

Whether it is an iconic species like the bison or an important local indicator species like the freshwater mussel, the Zoo is working to save them. Through the AZA’s SAFE initiatives, member institutions focus our collective experience to save species around the world. The Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium actively participates in SAFE programs for red panda, African lion, African elephant, sharks and rays, North American songbirds, Bornean orangutan, and sunflower sea stars. This work has involved zoo-team members across departments taking conservation actions on and off Zoo grounds. As an example, the Zoo has several representatives as leaders in the SAFE Red Panda program: Vice President of Education and Community Engagement Jenn Torpie is co-chair of Public Engagement, Associate Veterinarian Dr. Lauren Kane co-leads One Health, and Director of Conservation Dr. Shafkat Kahn is program co-lead.

## SECORE

The Zoo supports the work of SECORE International to help protect, restore, and conserve the world’s coral reefs. This year, our conservation photographer documented spawning events for Elkhorn Coral and the successful lab work to separate, fertilize, and rear baby corals of this endangered species.

## Sea Turtle Second Chance

One of our longest standing conservation programs, the Sea Turtle Second Chance program had another successful year as six cold-stunned sea turtles were released back into the ocean after months of rehabilitation. During their recovery, the turtles were given a restorative diet and physical rehabilitation by the Zoo’s animal care staff until they were fit for rerelease. The release was held on Amelia Island in Florida, and for the first time, two members of the Education Department, Beth Neal and Brea Stephan, participated in the release. The Zoo team documented the travel and release process while answering pre-submitted student questions. This was a perfect example of how we achieve our mission; all departments working together to conserve wildlife and engage our community in the process.

“All six turtles that we released are a little young for breeding, but will continue to swim and grow strong and, in a few years, will lay eggs of their own,” says Zoo Community Programs Manager Beth Neal. “Even though Pittsburgh is miles and miles from the ocean, we can still help these magnificent animals and give them a second chance at life!”

## Tree Pittsburgh

A partnership with Tree Pittsburgh on urban canopy conservation is inspiring conservation locally. This endeavor enables the Zoo to engage with the community

and collaborate with Tree Pittsburgh on restoring forest canopy in the greater Pittsburgh area. Besides supporting ten tree adoption events in 2024 and 2025, the collaboration is also co-producing tree-based education materials to encourage biodiversity and wildlife conservation through the planting of native trees and shrubs, as well as collaborating with the Pittsburgh City Forester’s office on a project to co-design community green spaces in vacant lots in Homewood and the Hill District.

## Around the Globe

The Zoo’s Director of Conservation, Dr. Shafkat Khan, focused on strengthening existing ties and building new field conservation partnerships this year. His travels took him to Nepal for field assessments and conservation planning training for Red Panda Network Staff. On the African continent, he visited longtime Zoo collaborator Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust in Zimbabwe to assess conservation needs and initiate new programs, as well as journeyed to Uganda to meet a new field partner, Innovations in Conservation (ICON) that researches the impact poaching has on wildlife and mitigate its harmful effects by removing snares from the landscape.

## ECO Grants

Two exciting new opportunities were offered to Pittsburgh Zoo staff. Empowering Conservation Opportunities (ECO) is a staff grant program where three grants were awarded to teams working on regional conservation projects with Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and Western PA Conservancy. Aquarist Justine Curley teamed the Zoo with Three Rivers Waterkeeper to monitor polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in local water for her project. She explains, “As a resident of the City of Pittsburgh I am personally invested in all assurances of clean water for the boroughs. As an aquatic biologist working in the Aquarium here at the Pittsburgh Zoo, I am acutely aware of the effects the city water supply has on animal life. Joining together, we can be a driving force for environmental protection in Pittsburgh and surrounding communities to ensure thriving ecosystems for wildlife and people to equally enjoy and appreciate.”

Additionally, Conservation Service Hours were allocated for all Zoo employees to work on a day of environmental service, in collaboration with other conservation organizations. Multiple opportunities were offered in October and November with the Zoo’s partners.





# ZOO BY THE NUMBERS

351

Electronic devices donated by Zoo guests to “Gorillas on the Line” conservation initiative

225k

Views of our most popular online residents, the penguins, in January

\$3.35

Retail per capita: the third highest total on record

#1

Ranking of Pittsburgh’s Best Birthday for Kids by readers of Pittsburgh City Paper

129

Active Zoo Docents



78 Zoo Teens



700

Gallons of water in the new electric eel habitat

20%

Increase in giving from the spring appeal

68%

Increase in giving from the end-of-year-appeal

22,846

Member households in 2024

\$8.8M

Total for 2024 Zoo fundraising

206

Full-time Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium employees

93

Part-time Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium employees

71

Regional corporations that generously support the Pittsburgh Zoo

47

Foundations that generously support the Zoo

8,600

Animals call the Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium home

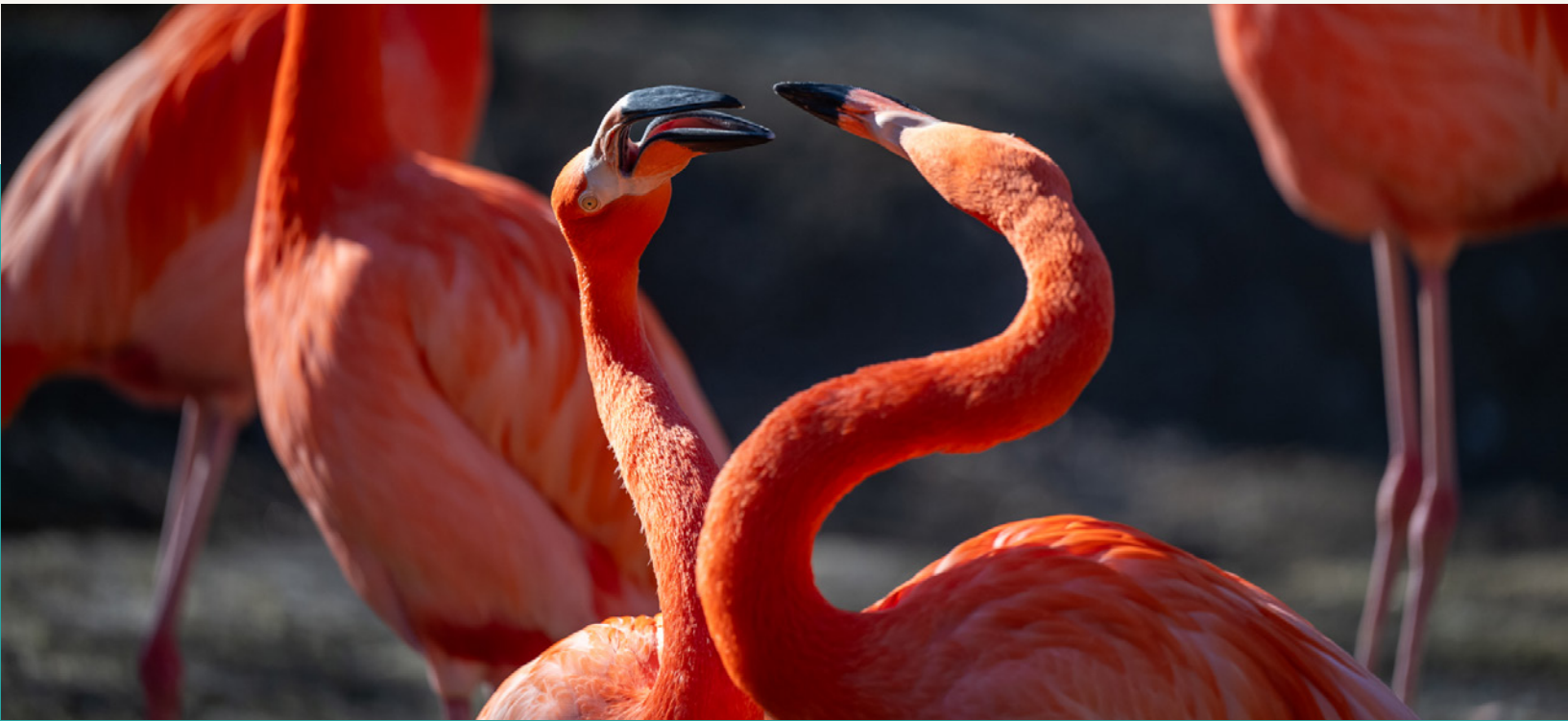
500

Diverse species are represented



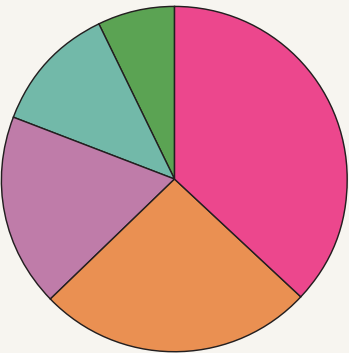
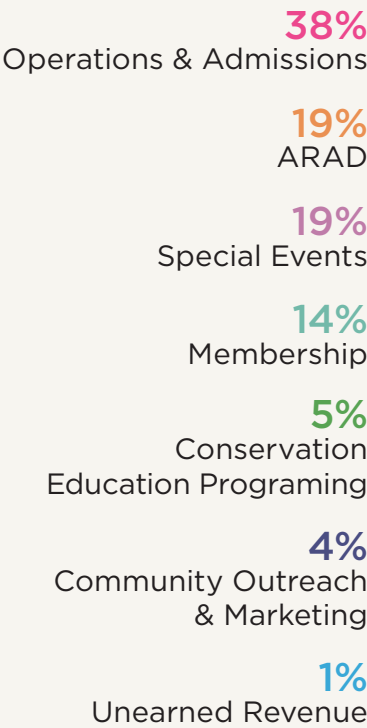
26

Threatened or endangered species at the Zoo



## REVENUE & EXPENSES

REVENUE: \$27,351,359



EXPENSES: \$25,961,563

37% Administration, Business Operations

26% Animal Husbandry

18% Maintenance, Horticulture, Landscaping

12% Utilities

7% Education



# 2024 DONORS



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