



Photo by Karyn Caster

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



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DIRECTORS STATEMENT

Photo by Paul Caster

In 2023, the Little Rock Zoo embarked on a journey of transformation, significantly enhancing our visitor experience and operational efficiency. One of our notable achievements was the implementation of a new point-of-sale (POS) system, which has streamlined entry into the Zoo, allowing our guests to begin their adventures with minimal delay. Additionally, our partnership with SSA has revolutionized food service in our café, dramatically reducing wait times and improving overall guest satisfaction. With SSA's management of the gift shop, guests have exciting new merchandise to choose from.

Our commitment to animal care was bolstered by funds raised through special events, which enabled us to acquire state-of-the-art equipment for our veterinary hospital. This new technology ensures we can provide the best possible care for our animal residents.

Communication with our members and subscribers was also enhanced through improved tools for our e-newsletter and social media platforms, ensuring our community stays informed and engaged with Zoo happenings.

In 2023, we achieved remarkable financial successes:

- Zoo Brew and Wild Wines events saw record success, with revenues up by over 25%.
- Partnered with Zoo leaders to secure the Animatronic Dragon Exhibit, Dragon Kingdom, for 2024.
- Secured a \$150K sponsor for the Dragon Kingdom exhibit.
- GloWILD achieved record sponsor revenue, with a 15% increase.
- GloWILD attracted 40,000 visitors, marking the highest attendance yet.
- On track to exceed revenue goals for the Zoo Foundation.
- Surpassed budgeted revenue targets for 2023.

In line with our Zoo for All initiatives, we are proud to announce that our staff underwent training and certification with KultureCity, enabling us to better serve our neurodivergent guests. The Little Rock Zoo is now the first institution in our region to receive this certification, reflecting our commitment to inclusivity. Additionally, the creation of Spanish maps and other resources has further advanced our goals, making our Zoo more accessible to all visitors.

At the Little Rock Zoo, stewardship isn't just a guiding principle—it's at the core of everything we do, shaping our efforts to protect the planet and inspire our community to do the same. In 2023, we partnered with Keep Little Rock Beautiful and the Little Rock Sustainability Office to host four recycling events, collecting 38.4 tons of materials—a 25% increase from previous years and a testament to our community's commitment to sustainability.

A standout achievement in our conservation efforts was the successful release of dozens of collared lizards into the Ozark glades—the first time we have bred and reintroduced animals into their natural habitat. This milestone, made possible through our partnership with Arkansas Game and Fish, University of Central Arkansas, University of Arkansas Fayetteville, and the Arkansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, highlights our leadership in conservation and unwavering commitment to protecting wildlife for future generations.

Through these transformative efforts, the Little Rock Zoo continues to evolve and thrive, guided by our mission to inspire people to value and conserve the natural world.

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,



Susan Altrui
Director, Little Rock Zoo



ASSOCIATION
OF ZOOS &
AQUARIUMS



ANIMAL UPDATES



The Little Rock Zoo continues its focus on providing the best in animal care and husbandry in 2023. The Zoo actively participated in several Species Survival Plan (SSP) programs. SSP programs are cooperative breeding and conservation initiatives coordinated by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) that aim to maintain genetically diverse and demographically stable populations of endangered species in captivity. Through these efforts, the Zoo celebrated the successful births of endangered species such as the Pygmy Slow Loris and African Penguin, contributing to the conservation of these remarkable animals.

MAJOR ANIMAL ACQUISITIONS

Reptiles: Several new species have been added to our reptile collection.

Serval: A male serval has been acquired for breeding purposes.

Sloth: We welcomed a female sloth and are expecting a male to join her soon as part of a future breeding program.

Tamandua: A male tamandua has been introduced as an ambassador animal.

Maned Wolf: A female maned wolf has been brought in for breeding purposes.



END OF AN ERA: LITTLE ROCK ZOO BIDS FAREWELL TO GRIZZLY BEARS



Photo by Debbie Thompson

In 2023, the Little Rock Zoo said goodbye to two beloved residents, Ann and her sister, Nona. The grizzly bears were transferred to the Zoo in 1993 after causing a stir in Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness by raiding 19 backcountry camps and attempting to enter several tents. Upon their arrival in Little Rock, they were welcomed with a teddy bear parade.

For nearly three decades, the "grizzly girls" captivated Zoo visitors with their charm and presence. Ann was particularly remembered by the Zoo staff for her sweet personality. One staff member fondly recalls her habit of sleeping with a branch or another outdoor "snuggle log" in her den.

About Nona, keeper Claire McElroy shared, "Nona had a big personality and was stubborn. She definitely did what she wanted when she wanted." McElroy added, "She was very smart and picked up on new behaviors quickly." Another keeper, Erin Dauenhauer-Decota, remembered her saying, "Nona was as beautiful as she was sassy. In fact, she was the queen of sass and had it in abundance."

Both Ann and Nona were estimated to be 33 years old at the time of their passing. Their legacy will live on in the hearts of all who had the pleasure of knowing them.

JOHARI BELOVED BLACK RHINO PASSES AT 27

In 2023, in addition to saying goodbye to long-time residents Ann and Nona, the Little Rock Zoo also mourned the loss of Johari, our beloved black rhino. Johari had been a cherished member of our Zoo family since his arrival in 1996. He is survived by his male offspring, Kevin, born in 2021, following a breeding recommendation from the Species Survival Plan. At the time of his passing, Johari was 27 years old, significantly surpassing the median age of 18 for black rhinos living in human care. His presence will be deeply missed by both staff and visitors.



Photo by Karen Caster

CONSERVATION PROJECTS

COLLARED LIZARD PROJECT

In a collaborative effort with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC), University of Arkansas Fayetteville, Arkansas Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit, and the University of Central Arkansas (UCA), we have been working on conserving and restoring populations of the Eastern Collared Lizard in Arkansas. This "Collared Lizard Conservation Team" initiated a captive propagation program aimed at providing source lizards for reintroductions to restored habitat sites. In late 2023, we proudly completed the first reintroduction of lizards from our captive breeding program, releasing 43 yearling lizards into three different glade sites in the Ozark Mountains of Northern Arkansas.

PARTY FOR THE PLANET GRANT

We were honored to receive a Party for the Planet grant from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), which has supported various sustainability initiatives throughout the year, including our full participation in Plastic Free July.

STORM WATER PROJECT

Through an extensive stormwater management project, the Zoo has made remarkable strides in fortifying its infrastructure against potential pollutants and ensuring the preservation of local ecosystems.

Central to this initiative is the installation of 72 state-of-the-art storm covers strategically placed throughout the Zoo's expansive grounds. Each of these newly deployed storm covers is outfitted with advanced filtration systems, incorporating specially designed barriers to intercept solid waste and prevent its passage into the drainage system.

The significance of this project transcends the confines of the Zoo's premises, as the implications of stormwater management extend far beyond its boundaries. By implementing these innovative storm drain filters, the Little Rock Zoo is taking proactive measures in safeguarding the health and integrity of city and state waterways.

Photo by Misty Waddle



LITTLE ROCK ZOO RECYCLES TONS IN 2023

In 2023, the Little Rock Zoo, in collaboration with Keep Little Rock Beautiful and the Little Rock Sustainability Office, hosted four highly successful recycling events. Held quarterly in the Zoo's east parking lot, these initiatives encouraged residents to responsibly recycle various items, such as electronics and bicycles, significantly reducing landfill waste. The drive-through format facilitated convenient drop-offs, attracting hundreds of cars and fostering a community-wide commitment to recycling. Together, these events collected a grand total of 38.4 tons of recyclable materials, marking a substantial increase of over 25% in recycling efforts compared to previous years. This achievement highlights the community's dedication to sustainability and environmental stewardship.



Photo by City of Little Rock

THE ZOO INVITES TORNADO VICTIMS TO GATHER WITH FAMILY AT THE ZOO

In response to the tornadoes that struck Arkansas on March 31, 2023, the Little Rock Zoo offered free admission, Saturday, April 8, and Sunday, April 9, to individuals and families affected by the storms. Fortunately, the Zoo did not sustain any damage from the severe weather and sought to support the community during that challenging time.

"We are honored to provide a comforting space for our community to come together and find solace after such a traumatic event."

-Zoo Director, Susan Altrui

Photo by Karen Caster



ADVANCING DEIA AT THE LITTLE ROCK ZOO: 2023 MILESTONES

In 2023, the Little Rock Zoo proudly achieved significant milestones in our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI). As the first institution in our region to receive certification from **KultureCity**, our staff underwent specialized training to better serve neurodivergent guests. This certification ensures that every visitor can enjoy an inclusive and welcoming experience, setting a new standard for accessibility in our community.

In addition, we expanded our multilingual resources by introducing Spanish maps and guides, breaking down language barriers to make the Zoo more accessible for all. These initiatives reflect our ongoing dedication to creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, valued, and able to fully engage with the wonders of wildlife.

EDUCATION UPDATES

In 2023, the Little Rock Zoo's Conservation Education team continued to expand its impact, reaching a record number of individuals both onsite and in the community.

Across all programming, the team achieved a total guest impact of 59,625 interactions in 2023, showcasing the incredible dedication and reach of the Conservation Education team.

24 Early Childhood Programs, engaged **402** participants

58 Offsite Programs, reaching approximately **4,744** Individuals

51,202 Onsite Guest Interactions

59,625 Total Guest Interactions across all programs



Photo by Little Rock Zoo Staff Member

2023 REVENUE

The Little Rock Zoo's financial health remained strong in 2023, thanks to the continued support of our community, members, and partners. This generosity allowed us to advance our mission of conservation and education while providing memorable experiences for our visitors. We are deeply grateful for this support, which helps ensure the Zoo remains a vital part of the Little Rock community.

Concessions \$431,667

Education \$25,912

Gift Shop \$404,740

Membership \$507,545

Misc Revenue \$21,195

Special Events \$36,316

Admissions \$1,795,987

Amusement Rides/Tokens \$123,323

Rentals \$38,940

Total Revenue Earned \$3,382,357

Total Operations (Expenses) \$8,110,630

Transfer In \$4,728,273

ZOO FOUNDATION GRANTS MADE TO THE LITTLE ROCK ZOO IN 2023:

\$150,000 Dragon Kingdom Sponsorship

\$50,000 Veterinary Equipment for Vet Hospital

\$30,000 Conservation Support

\$20,000 Staff Training

\$20,000 Summer Intern Sponsorships

\$17,000 Staff Conservation Travel

\$10,000 AZA Grant for Party for the Planet

