

A close-up photograph of a red panda sitting on a thick, weathered tree branch. The panda's face is the central focus, showing its characteristic reddish-brown fur, white chest, and dark eye patches. It has a curious expression, looking slightly to the right. Several green bamboo leaves are visible in the foreground, partially obscuring the panda's face. The background is a blurred grey wall.

Conservation & Conversations

Modern Zoos

12:30 - 1:30 p.m.

theZOO
LOUISVILLE



What are Modern Zoos?

A Zoo is...

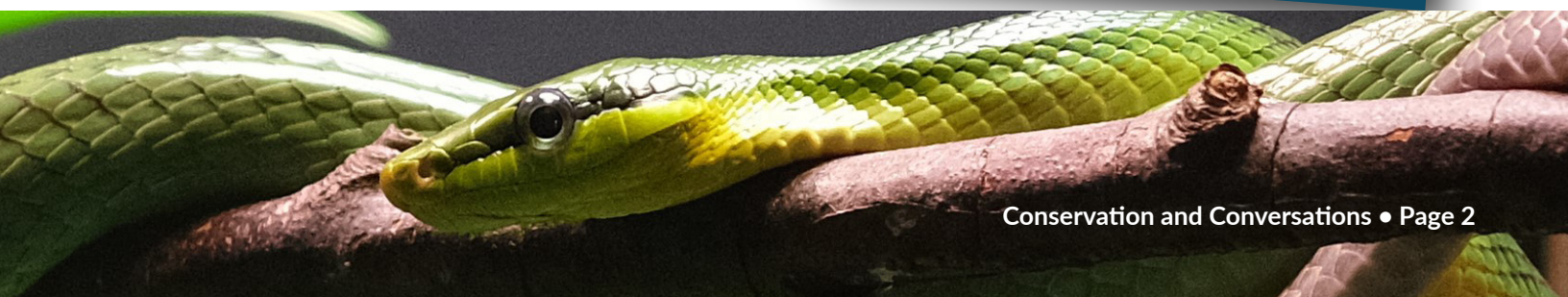
At its most basic [definition](#), a zoo is a place with indoor and outdoor settings where living and typically wild or exotic animals are exhibited to the public.

In the past, zoos were primarily entertainment venues where people could go and see exotic animals caged and on display with little care for individual comfort. These venues were often privately operated by the very wealthy and were called menageries. As menageries transitioned into zoological parks, there was a greater emphasis placed on public accessibility and animal welfare, but it was not until the mid-20th century that zoos began the transition into what we would consider a “modern” zoo.

“Modern” zoos are centers of nature conservation that put conservation and education far above recreation in their list of priorities. As we learn more about how best to conserve animals in the remnant wild, we are learning how to build better environments for them. Animals living in zoos today have immersive habitats designed to allow them opportunities to express a broader range of their behavioral repertoire; the concrete box with iron bars is a relic of the past.

What is a “Modern” Zoo?

As defined by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), a zoo is “a permanent institution which owns and maintains wildlife, and under the direction of a professional staff, provides its animals with appropriate care and exhibits them in an aesthetic manner to the public on a regular basis. The institution, division or section shall further be defined as having as their primary mission the exhibition, conservation and preservation of the earth’s fauna in an educational and scientific manner.”



The Four Pillars of a Modern Zoo

To support that primary mission, the four pillars of modern zoos are conservation, education, research and recreation. The Louisville Zoo and our mission to “to better the bond between people and our planet” works to uphold those pillars every day.

Conservation

Conservation is built into your experience at the Louisville Zoo! Part of the price of every admission ticket and membership sold goes into our Conservation Fund and is distributed to wildlife and nature organizations like [Monarch Watch](#), [Snow Leopard Trust](#), and [Polar Bears International](#). We also work with other AZA-accredited institutions on [AZA SAFE](#) (Saving Animals From Extinction) efforts particularly in our work with the [North American Monarch](#) and the [Black-Footed Ferret](#).

Education

Education efforts can be seen across the Zoo in our signage and through visitor engagement with our knowledgeable keeper and education staff. We have an entire department dedicated to educating the public about our animals and the greater conservation challenges facing our planet with programming for adults and children. You are helping to support the education arm of our Zoo mission by participating in this discussion!

Research

Research is a part of an accredited zoo’s daily routine. Our animal keeper staff collects daily and weekly samples from our animal ambassadors that allow us to measure things like their hormone levels and add to the body of knowledge available on these animals globally. Here at the Louisville Zoo, our female [tapir](#), Sarah, has been getting regular blood draws done since she was 5 and is considered one of the best studied tapirs in the world, giving us all an insight into how tapir’s change as they age.

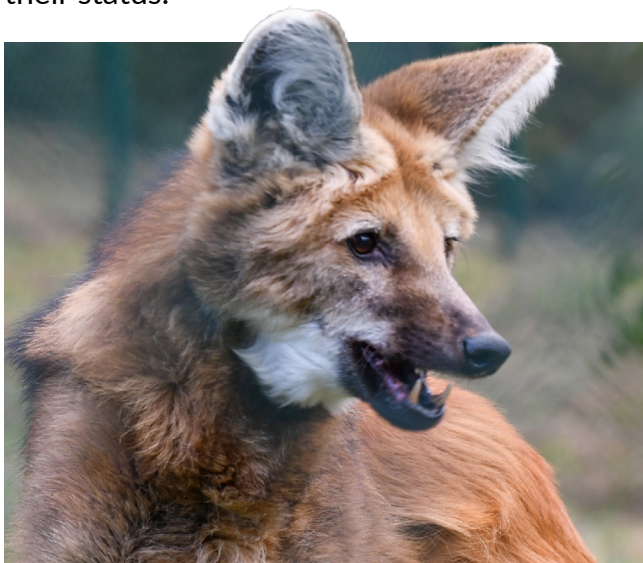
Recreation

Recreation is the least serious but most attention-grabbing pillar of modern zoos. Zoos use the entertainment value of special exhibitions like the Louisville Zoo’s [Wild Lights](#) Lantern Festival or the after-hours movies to encourage visits and increase the size of their audience.



What is the Association of Zoos and Aquariums?

The [Association of Zoos and Aquariums](#) (AZA) was founded in 1924 and has evolved into an international 501(c)3 nonprofit that is “dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, research, and recreation.” They first began accrediting zoos and aquariums in 1974. While only ten percent of the almost three thousand USDA-licensed wildlife exhibitors are accredited, those facilities that achieve accreditation must go through the process every five years to maintain their status.



Why Does Accreditation Matter?

Accreditation matters because it means someone from outside our organization is checking up on our facilities and procedures to make sure that everything we do has the best interests of our animal ambassadors and our staff at its heart. AZA accreditation is considered the “gold standard” for zoos and aquariums around the world, which means your Zoo is meeting the highest possible standards for animal care.



- The AZA represents over 235 facilities globally and shares its conservation message with more than 200 million visitors annually.
- Collectively AZA facilities spend \$230 million per year on supporting field conservation work.
- AZA programs, like [Saving Animals from Extinction \(SAFE\)](#), connect zoos and aquariums to in situ (in their native range) conservation efforts and help support species outside of zoos and aquariums. [Species Survival Plans \(SSPs\)](#) are programs aimed at helping to maintain the sustainability of populations inside zoos and aquariums.
- Each year, AZA facilities provide training to 40,000 teachers and reach 50 million children through school and family visits with engaging science-focused and standards-based educational programs.



What is Accreditation?

Accreditation is an official process that evaluates a program, organization, or institution against recognized standards. The evaluation is handled by a panel of experts who observe every aspect of the program, organization, or institution and compare their practices to industry standards and best practices.

In the case of AZA accreditation, there is an Accreditation Commission of 15 impartial experts who spend months reviewing all aspects of the facility – from its mission statement and finances to its veterinary program and animal exhibits. They will make visits to the facility to do onsite inspections and interview staff, as well as review documentation. The commission meets monthly; twice per year, they review each organization that is seeking accreditation.



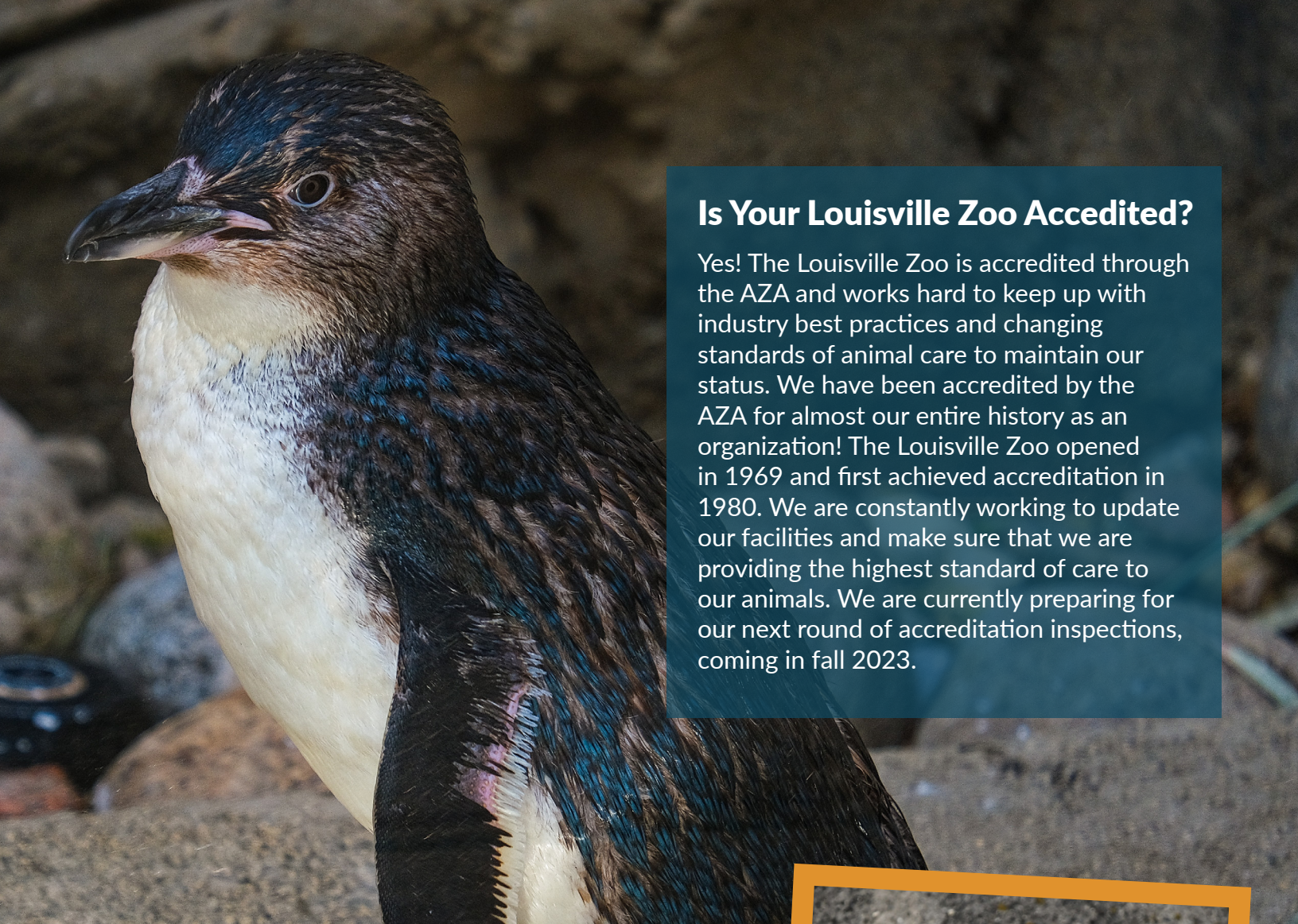
- Every AZA member organization must be accredited, and we must all go through the process every 5 years to make sure that we are staying current with the highest standards of animal care.
- You can find a basic outline of the process [here](#) on the AZA website, including a link to the detailed 33-page questionnaire each candidate must fill out as the first step in the process.

**ASSOCIATION
OF ZOOS &
AQUARIUMS**

Benefits of Accreditation

For a complete list of AZA-accreditation benefits you can check out their [website](#). Some of the most important to the Louisville Zoo's mission are:

- Increases the public's trust in the Louisville Zoo as an institution
- Gives staff access to a vast professional network we can tap into when needed, including knowledge of which zoos house the same animal species as the Louisville Zoo so we can reach out to colleagues quickly
- Regular evaluation of our facility by expert professionals
- Provides access to [Taxon Advisory Groups \(TAGs\)](#) and [Species Survival Plan \(SSPs\)](#) which help us create care, breeding and transfer plans for many of the species we work with today



Is Your Louisville Zoo Accredited?

Yes! The Louisville Zoo is accredited through the AZA and works hard to keep up with industry best practices and changing standards of animal care to maintain our status. We have been accredited by the AZA for almost our entire history as an organization! The Louisville Zoo opened in 1969 and first achieved accreditation in 1980. We are constantly working to update our facilities and make sure that we are providing the highest standard of care to our animals. We are currently preparing for our next round of accreditation inspections, coming in fall 2023.

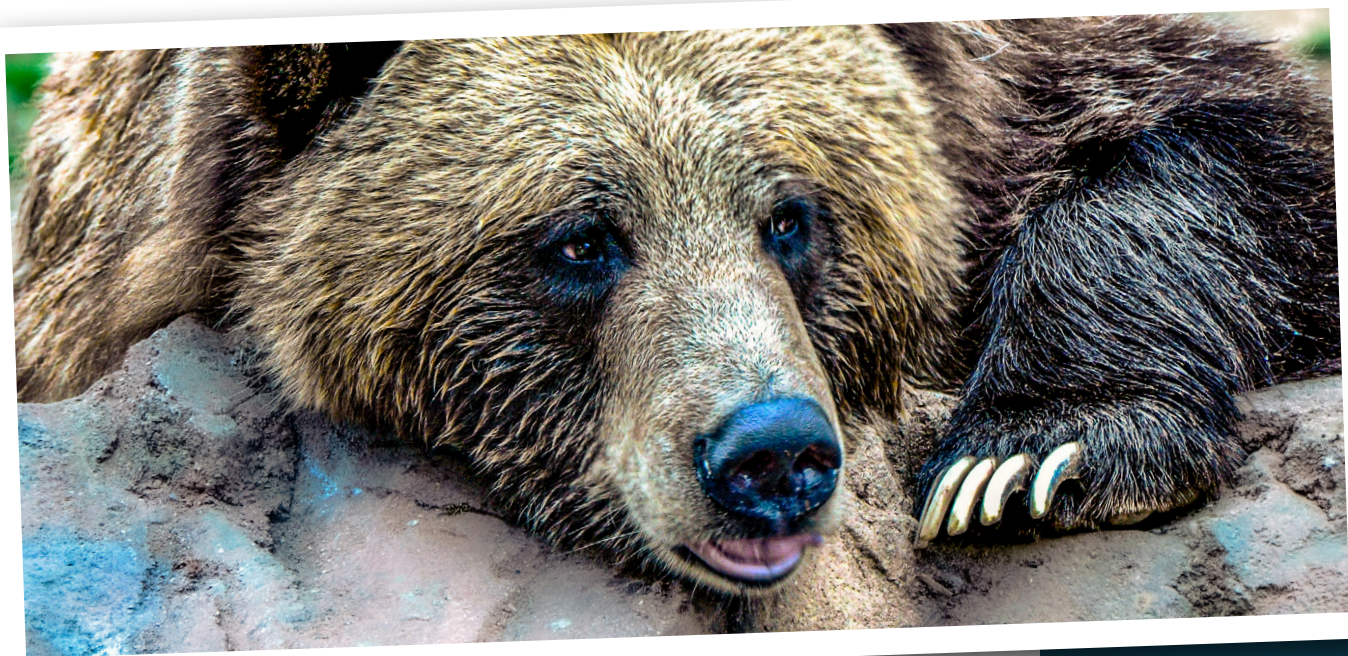
Animal Collections

One of the most drastic ways zoos have changed over time is in our animal collections policy. Long ago, when zoos were first transitioning from menageries, zoo directors and animal keepers went on “collecting expeditions” and brought animals into zoo collections directly from the remnant wild.

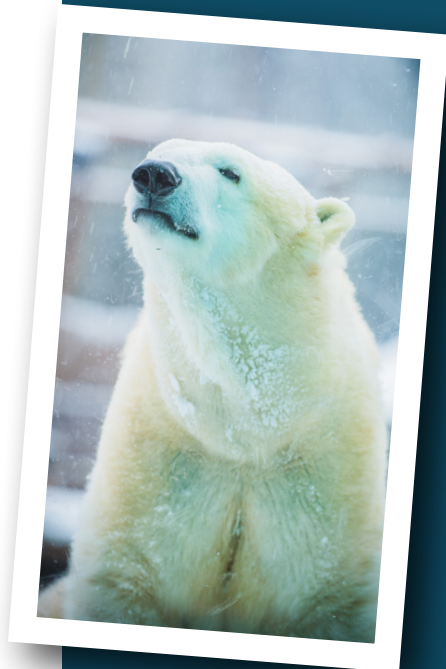
Today, zoos gain the vast majority of their animal collections from other zoos with select species arriving as surrendered pets, from wildlife sanctuaries or in partnership with organizations like the [Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife](#) or the [United States Fish and Wildlife Service](#).



If an animal comes in from another AZA-accredited zoo, it is often part of the [SSP](#) for that animal. AZA-accredited institutions work together and use SSPs to maintain sustainable populations of species. All SSPs have a goal of managing their population to keep 95% of the available genetics in the population for 100 to 200 years in managed care. This helps make sure that zoos and aquariums have strong and healthy populations of endangered, vulnerable, and threatened animals which can then help scientists learn about how to best help the populations of animals still in the remnant wild.



Animals that are surrendered to zoos either from private individuals (which is very rare) or from government agencies, come to live in AZA-accredited facilities as ambassador animals because they are unable to survive in the wild either due to injury or behavior. For example, all four of the bears currently living at the Zoo were acquired through our partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife. All three of our [grizzly bears](#) came to the Zoo in 2010 from Montana after being labeled nuisance bears. Inga, our 18-year-old mama grizzly, and her 13-year old cubs, Otis and Rita, arrived after being caught three times raiding chicken coups for food. Our female [polar bear](#), Qannik, arrived a year later in 2011 after being separated from her mother and sibling. Her arrival caught national attention and is known as [Operation Snowflake](#).



Zoos in the News

Zoos have been in the news more frequently since the rise in popularity of shows like “Tiger King” and “Secrets of the Zoo” and increasing debate around the ethics of accredited zoos, roadside animal attractions, wildlife sanctuaries and other similar facilities. While the bulk of the debate occurred in 2020 and 2021, you can still see the occasional opinion piece written more recently. More frequently in the news this year are pieces highlighting conservation and inclusion work.



Many zoos (including your [Louisville Zoo!](#)) are working to become more inclusive of individuals with sensory processing issues, and you can find news articles and information online about their efforts. The Louisville Zoo is certified through [KultureCity](#), an organization founded by the parents of children with autism; you can use their app to see what features are available, including quiet spaces and sensory bags, as well as get an idea of what the zoo experience will be like through our Social Story. You can find news articles and blog posts on sensory inclusion in zoos and other attractions if you would like to learn more.

In addition to outside news coverage, zoos often put out their own press releases about animal events, conservation projects they work on, and any other relevant announcements. Your Louisville Zoo sends out press releases for [animal birthdays](#), [animal health updates](#), [updates on funding for new exhibit projects](#), and even when we welcome new [animals](#) and [staff](#) into our community.

Zoos will even sometimes focus their media coverage on a specific animal if their story resonates with the public the way the [Cincinnati Zoo](#) has shared [Fiona](#) with the world.

Reintroduced in the Senate for the 5th time in late March 2023, the [Recovering America's Wildlife Act](#) has bipartisan support in congress and support from conservation organizations and even from hunting and

fishing groups. The bill has already passed in the House and if made into law will provide over one billion dollars in comprehensive federal wildlife conservation funding to be disbursed to the states and an additional almost one hundred million dollars to tribal fish and wildlife managers each year. This would be a game changer for zoos and other wildlife conservation focused entities and provide aid to thousands of vulnerable species. You can expect to see [more articles](#) on this and other conservation efforts later this year!



Live Virtual Conversations on What Makes a Modern Zoo

Zoos in the Media – Wed. May 24, 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

Join the conversation this month as we explore the perception of zoos in the media. How are zoos seen in books, movies, and television? What do people think about when they think of zoos? These are big questions that we will begin to explore together as we look at recent depictions of zoos in fiction and nonfiction. This topic is a large one and we certainly will not be able to cover every representation of zoos or even every aspect of that representation. Do not hesitate to reach out and let us know which ones are your most or least favorite!

Google Meet joining info | 813-527-3669 PIN: 849 440 264#

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/kka-zbvm-bnt>

Why Zoos? – Wed. June 28, 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

Join the conversation as we explore why accredited zoos matter and what it means to be an accredited zoo in 2023. We will look briefly at the history of zoos from menageries to the beginning of the zoological park as well as explore some of the conservation legislation and changes to popular thinking that shaped zoos as they are today. Zoos can do a lot for conservation if we all work together!

Google Meet joining info | 484-352-2260 PIN: 718 623 440#

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/aaj-dtks-fdm>

What is Accreditation and Why Do We Want It? Wed. Sept. 27, 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

Join our conversation this month to learn what it means for a zoo to be accredited. In the United States, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is the main body in charge of accreditation and setting professional standards for zoos and aquariums. The AZA and its accreditation committee are made up of industry professionals who care deeply about the welfare of zoo staff and animals and will always advocate for the best care. Join our discussion this month to learn about how accreditation works, past zoo practices and animal care today.

Google Meet joining info | 307-264-0157 PIN: 530 023 935#

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/xfx-tvow-oes>



To Learn More About Modern Zoos and Their Policies:

Other Zoos To Check Out

- [Association of Zoos & Aquariums](#) (check [here](#) for a list of all AZA-accredited facilities!)
- [Woodland Park Zoo](#)
- [San Diego Zoo](#)
- [Indianapolis Zoo](#)
- [National Zoo](#)

In Print

- [“West with Giraffes”](#) by Lynda Rutledge (fictionalized story of [Lofty and Patches](#), the first two giraffes at the San Diego Zoo)
- [“The Loneliest Polar Bear”](#) by Kale Williams
- [“The Rhino with Glue-On Shoes: And Other Surprising True Stories of Zoo Vets and Their Patients”](#) edited by Lucy H. Spelman and Ted Y. Mashima
- [“Tenacious Beasts: Wildlife Recoveries That Change How We Think about Animals”](#) by Christopher J. Preston
- [“Amadou’s Zoo”](#) by Rebecca Walsh
- [“The Truth About Zoos: Annie’s Awesome Adventures”](#) written by Kim Allgeier and illustrated by J. L. R. Harrington

On Social Media

- Follow your favorite zoo on their social media!
- Searching for specific animals or topics like [#wildlifeconservation](#) or [#redpanda](#) can lead to some amazing images and videos
- Follow nature education centers like the [Salato Wildlife Education Center](#) in Frankfurt

Audio and Film Media

- [Cincinnati Zoo Tales](#) is the Cincinnati Zoo’s official podcast
- [Amazing Wildlife: A San Diego Zoo Podcast](#)
- [Paws for a Moment with Brevard Zoo](#)
- [AquatiZoo Podcast](#)
- [One Wild Podcast](#)
- [Secrets of the Zoo](#)
- [The Zoo](#)
- [Australia Zoo’s YouTube Channel](#)

