Animal Conservation Stories

**Bald Eagle**  Of all America’s wildlife, eagles hold perhaps the most revered place in our national history and culture. The Bald Eagle’s recovery is an American success story. Forty years ago, the Bald Eagle, our national symbol, was in danger of extinction throughout most of its range. Habitat destruction and degradation, illegal shooting, and the contamination of its food source, due to use of the pesticide DDT, decimated the eagle population. Habitat protection afforded by the Endangered Species Act, the federal government’s banning of DDT, and conservation actions taken by the American public helped Bald Eagles make a remarkable recovery. Bald Eagles have flourished to the point where they no longer need the protection of the Endangered Species Act. Their population is healthy, revered and growing but are still protected under multiple federal laws and regulations. The two Bald Eagles at the Miller Park Zoo were both injured in Alaska and brought to Bloomington to be their forever home. Neither bird has the ability to fly so they could not have survived in the wild. If it wasn’t for the Miller Park Zoo, it is possible these two birds could have been euthanized. Did you know that after Alaska, Illinois has the most Bald Eagles in the United States?

**Greater Flamingo**  The Greater Flamingo is the most widespread and largest species of flamingo, standing about 5 feet tall. These famous pink birds can be found in warm, watery regions on many continents. They favor environments like estuaries and saline or alkaline lakes. Considering their appearance, flamingos are surprisingly fluid swimmers, but really thrive on the extensive mud flats where they breed and feed. Did you know that flamingos get their color from what they eat? It comes from the algae and smaller species that consume algae. Greater Flamingos are lighter in color because they eat more invertebrates and less algae. Guests are first greeted by the Greater Flamingo flock as they enter the Zoo. The Zoo participates in the Greater Flamingo Species Survival Plan (SSP) and has a breeding flock. The exhibit is designed for a breeding flock with the small dirt area against the building. Flamingos like to nest where they feel secure so by almost completely surrounding the nesting area with the pool, it naturally creates a great place for a nest. All by design.

**North American River Otters**  Today North American River Otters (NARO) claim a large and varied landscape as their habitat, from as far south as the Rio Grande all the way up to some arctic territories of Canada and Alaska. They are an extremely adaptable species that can survive in high mountainous elevations and lowland territories, and in a variety of climate conditions. Five out of the thirteen otter species are endangered, but NARO are currently in healthy populations in the wild. However, the species still face threats in their natural habitat. These threats include pollution of waterways, overfishing of food chain supply, and trapping. NARO’s territory often overlaps with beaver species, and traps intended for beavers currently account for the highest fatality rate in NARO populations. Conservation work continues today to protect NARO. Legislation like the 1972 Clean Water Act have laid the groundwork for federal protection of waters from pollution, a benefit to general wildlife ecosystems. Starting in 1976 twenty-two states have participated in reintroduction programs to bring NAROs back to their local habitats from which they have been displaced. NAROs are also monitored as part of the American Zoological Association’s (AZA) Species Survival Plan Program, in which the AZA collaborates with zoos across the country to manage the population and conserve the species’ natural environment. The NARO has not bred well in zoos and aquariums. The Miller Park Zoo has had multiple litters (nearly every year) over the last decade. The Zoo helps the conservation breeding program to be more sustainable.

**Sumatran Tiger**  Sumatran tigers live in Indonesia, on the island of Sumatra, and are critically endangered. The main threat to the Sumatran population is habitat loss due to agricultural development. Palm oil plantations are the most pervasive agricultural industry impacting these natural habitats. Aside from habitat loss, threats to Sumatran tigers include poaching, prey depletion, disease, and tiger-human conflict. Tigers have suffered a significant decline in population over the last century; starting in 1900 more than 95% of Asia’s wild tigers have disappeared. Wild tigers are currently an endangered species mostly due to rapid habitat loss. Tiger subspecies like the Sumatran Tiger are even more at risk, because they already have less habitat to lose. Countries participating in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) have banned international trade of tigers and tiger parts in 1987, and in 2007 denounced the practice of breeding tigers for trade. Even with these conservation efforts, more work need to be done to protect critically endangered species like Sumatran Tigers. The Miller Park Zoo has contributed to conservation work being done in Sumatra regarding tiger and prey research. Also, staff of the Miller Park Zoo serve on the steering committee of the Tiger Species Survival Plan (SSP) which provides leadership in the conservation breeding program. The Miller Park Zoo exhibits the only Sumatran Tiger in Illinois.