



# Wild Connections



Photo Courtesy: Joel Sartore

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Rainforest Habitat- P1

Carousel Update - P2

Director's Message - P2

Animal Spotlight - P3-P4

Staff Spotlight- P5

Volunteer Spotlight - P5

Partner Appreciation - P6

Programs & Events - P7-8

Support the Zoo - P9

## Rainforest Habitat

The Zoo has hoped to bring Sloths back to the collection for some time. Knowing that this would require a new habitat, we began exploring the option to build out a portion of the Rainforest. With the help of an architect who specializes in animal habitats, a preliminary design and costs were determined. At the same time the zoo curator began the process of finding an animal available for transfer to our zoo. The next step was to begin fundraising and to determine if we could make this project a reality.

At the 2024 ZooDo Gala the project was presented and numerous donors stepped up contributing almost half the anticipated project cost! Since then, other donors have contributed, and the Zoological Society has committed to funding the project. Proceeds from two upcoming events, the Miller Park Zoo Stampede and Brews at the Zoo, will be designated to the project as needed.

A contractor has been hired, and construction will commence this winter. Steel framing will hold netting to create the habitat. Guardrails will position guests for optimum viewing and a keeper gate will be incorporated into the design for best animal and habitat care as well as keeper safety. We hope to have the project completed and the animal in its new habitat this Spring.

ACCREDITED BY THE  
**ASSOCIATION**  
OF ZOOS &  
AQUARIUMS



Spring 2025

# Carousel Set to Return

In the fall of 2023, The Miller Park Zoological Society began fundraising to refurbish the zoo's carousel. Thanks to the support of the community, we were able to begin the project in May of 2024. The carousel was dismantled and shipped to a company called Carousel Relics in Ohio. Carousel Relics has been working diligently to return the carousel back to its former glory.

The carousel is set to be returned and installed by the end of April. After it is reassembled, a new fence will be installed as well as a new ticket booth (designed and built by one of MPZS' board members). We can't wait for zoo visitors to enjoy the magic of the carousel once again this summer!

## Director's Message

### Jay Pratte

Well, I've been Zoo Director for two and a half years now, yet I feel like we've crammed in ten years' worth of growth! We have been through not one, but two AZA accreditation inspections, which led to MANY positive changes for the zoo. Thankfully, all our efforts, fully supported by the City and Society, resulted in our successful re-accreditation (awarded in Calgary, Alberta, Canada near the beautiful Rocky Mountains and two hours from where I grew up). This achievement illustrates our dedication to maintaining internationally recognized standards for zoo management and animal care. We opened new habitats (South America), while concurrently improving many others. Observable improvements include: upgrades to existing holding space and habitats, improved environmental conditioning for animals and visitors, re-opening the historic Katthoefer Animal Building, improved pathways and updated fencing, as well as introduction of new events and programs. Beyond these examples, there have been continuous improvements not readily apparent to visitors. We created new positions on our team, have repaired or improved infrastructure and equipment, improved processes for assessing animal wellbeing, all while evolving an increasingly positive workplace culture.

Sound like a lot? It is. And we're nowhere close to finished.



This year we will initiate a new Master Planning process, bring back the fully restored historic carousel, introduce new animals & programs, and so much more. We also look forward to the Stampede, Brews at the Zoo, and ZooDo, those opportunities to collaborate directly with the Society and bring the community in to enjoy our progress. As we welcome new team members, interns, volunteers, and Society Board members & leadership, each individual will bring their unique perspective to the zoo, allowing us to continue to grow and thrive. Thank you for your support as we look to the future together.

# Animal Spotlight

## Giant Anteater

By Patrick Kunst

In the heart of Miller Park Zoo, you can find two of our newest residents: Giant Anteaters, Chili and Arnaud! These two young South American mammals, aged 3 and 4, are located near our Pudu and North American River Otters on the southern half of the zoo. Chili and Arnaud can often be seen foraging through their yard looking for a variety of different snacks and treats. Giant Anteaters, native to South America and regions of Central America, are the largest of the four species of anteater. They are easily recognized by their incredibly long, tubular snout, making up the majority of the anteaters face and head. The species also boasts a large, bushy, several foot long tail that helps keep them shaded in the summer and bundled up for a cozy nap in the colder months.

The care of our Giant Anteaters is one of many efforts by Miller Park Zoo to help conserve and save wildlife species across the globe. As of 2013 the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) listed the species as “vulnerable” across South America, but no longer has any wild populations found in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Belize, or Uruguay. With an estimated decreasing population of ~5,000, their population is in significant need of assistance and intervention. While it may seem like a daunting task to help a species that lives thousands of miles from here, you can make a difference!

Starting in December 2024, we began to offer a brand-new feeding (or even painting!) experience with our anteaters, with proceeds going towards our specialized conservation fund that helps support their species in the wild.



While these feedings have been making a valuable impact on their conservation in the wild, here at Miller Park Zoo, Chili and Arnaud have been thoroughly enjoying all of the spotlight and extra attention these encounters have brought. The experiences also provide an opportunity for our keepers to continue building a relationship with the anteaters. Their participation in feedings like these helps develop a bond and mutual trust, so when it comes time to check their weight, for veterinary exams, or even ultrasounds the anteaters know keepers are safe to approach and will even get a little treat for their cooperation. These encounter sessions also provide a great source of enrichment for the two of them. They get to show off their incredible two-foot-long tongues while probing for mealworms, one of their favorite snacks...

Chili and Arnaud always know when a meal or snack is coming. Giant Anteaters are equipped with a sense of smell that is said to be 40 times stronger than a human's! Despite their poor vision, a super-charged nose allows them to locate ant nests and termite mounds in the wild from a great distance away. Once they have located a mound or hill, they will use the sharp claws on their forelegs to tear open and expose their next meal. Giant Anteaters' extra-long tongues are coated in a slimy, adhesive saliva that helps them bring invertebrates out of dense, maze-like mounds and into their mouths.

# Animal Spotlight: Giant Anteater Continued

Since we can't provide them 30,000 invertebrates to eat a day like they might in the wild, we manage to mimic their primary diet with an "insectivore smoothie", a blended mixture of a specialized insectivore pellet and warm water. (Yum!!!) If you've had the chance to stop by and see our anteaters, you may have noticed they may have a lot of different food items in their yard including a variety of fruits, vegetables, and maybe even sparkling water? Despite being primarily insectivores in the wild, Chili and Arnaud enjoy a variety of different treats throughout the day. Their favorites include avocados, coconuts, corn on the cob, and even condiments like mustard! Each of these different food items provides the opportunity for them not only to explore different flavors and textures, but a way to engage in different mediums of eating and enrichment.

On top of being some of our recent stars at the zoo, Chili and Arnaud are also a breeding pair. We regularly monitor the behavior and interactions between them, and we are hopeful they may soon produce offspring here at Miller Park! With the help of all the amazing guests that visit and contribute to Miller Park Zoo, we are able to provide Chili and Arnaud the best care we possibly can, while also doing our part as an institution to educate our incredible community, and support the conservation of Giant Anteaters!



# Staff Spotlight

*Paula Pratt*

How long have you worked here? I've just started my 7th year working for the Zoological Society (MPZS).

Area of work: As Development Director of the MPZS, I'm responsible for office operations, fundraising initiatives, event planning and some days whatever needs to be done to support the zoo. I regularly work with our knowledgeable board members and enthusiastic volunteers.

What have you enjoyed the most about working here? I've enjoyed the people I've been fortunate to work with. From zoo staff to event volunteers, they have all enriched my life and inspired me to work harder. I've also loved sharing the zoo's story with our community. When I run into someone whose first question is about the zoo it brings me joy. Another real cool perk and something I enjoy is learning about zoo life, animal care and how the zoo works with other zoos to support conservation initiatives.

My favorite animal is: The flamingos, they're such beautiful animals. I love to hear the excited guests remark about the flamingos when they walk through the entrance!



# Volunteer Spotlight

*Marcia Hammerstrand*

Volunteer Start Date: I think it was at least 25 years ago. It was before they really had an established volunteer program.

Area of work: Over the years, I have done lots of different jobs, but for the last several years, I have been preparing diets for the Children's Zoo, Australia and the Rainforest. I also help with special events.

Why do you like to volunteer at Miller Park Zoo? I volunteer because I like animals and it is a way to give back. I enjoy bringing friends and family to the zoo and being able to tell them that I had a part in some of what they see there.

My favorite animal is: Probably Henry, the Salmon Crested Cockatoo. I have a military macaw at home, and some of Henry's antics are very similar to my bird's.



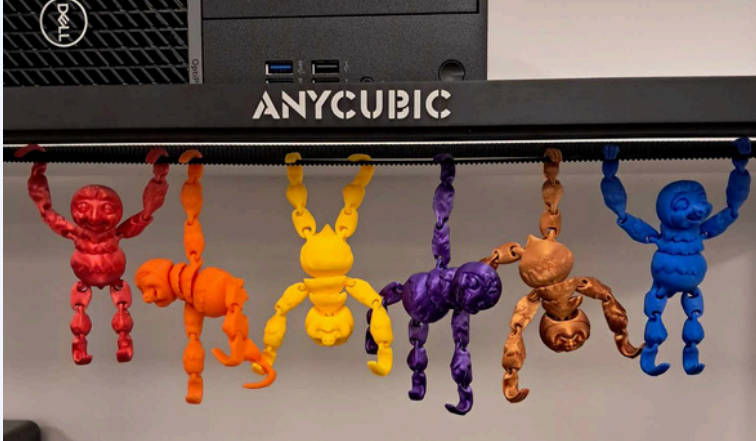
# Partner Appreciation

By Paula Pratt

Community Partners help fuel the work of the Zoological Society and often inspire us to look at things in new ways to accomplish our goals. A great example is our partnership with the Bloomington Public Library's INNOVATION LAB!

In July of 2024 the Bloomington Public Library unveiled its \$25 million expansion and renovation project, making all corners of the library feel like they are new. The project also introduced new spaces like the Innovation Lab. It's jam-packed with cutting edge tools for hands-on projects.

The creative team at the library discovered the Zoological Society was looking for an award for the kids running in the Miller Park Zoo Stampede - Kids Fun Run and that the Zoological Society wanted to feature a Sloth. This animal will be added to the zoo's collection later this year. John Wited and Gene Crunie stepped in to help turn the idea into a reality.



Shown are the 3D printed Sloths that will be given to the first 50 participants registered for the Fun Run. This event is for kids age 10 and under and the awards will be given at the kids-only after party in the Miller Park Pavilion after the race. The Zoological Society wants to thank Rhonda Massie, Library Marketing Manager, for encouraging and securing this partnership.

If you are looking for cutting-edge tools to execute your next project, visit [bit.ly/bplinnovationlab](https://bit.ly/bplinnovationlab) to learn more about the Bloomington Public Library's Innovation Lab. To register for the Kids Fun Run visit [mpzs.org/stampede](https://mpzs.org/stampede).



## We're Hiring!

### Executive Director, Miller Park Zoological Society

The Executive Director is responsible for planning, organizing, and managing all the MPZS's operations, events, and fundraising. This includes the major gifts program, planned giving, special events, projects, fundraising events, direct mail appeals, and capital campaigns.

Full Job Description at: [mpzs.org/executive-director](https://mpzs.org/executive-director)

# Programs

## Zoo Explorers

Reptile Keeper

Ages 6-11

February 17 9:00-11:00, 1:00-3:00

Zoo Explorers is a terrific 2-hour adventure that includes animal encounters, classroom learning, and hands-on experiences out at the zoo. Sessions are identical.

## ZoosDay Club

Ages 7-13

February 18 4:00-6:00

February 25 4:00-6:00

Make friends (human and animal!), join in fun activities, and learn more about wildlife at this weekly after-school club!

## Animal Crackers

Ages 3-5 with an adult

February 21 10:00-11:00, 1:00-2:00, 5:00-6:00

February 22 9:00-10:00, 10:30-11:30, 1:00-2:00

Animal Crackers is a Miller Park Zoo classic! Join us once each month for a story, animal encounter, craft, & snack. Our topic is always a surprise...we have a great time guessing which animal will visit! One adult accompanies each child to class but does not pay an additional registration fee. The registration fee includes admission to the Zoo for the participating child & one adult on the day of class. Sessions are identical.

## Senior Tours

Ages 55+

March 12 8:30-9:30 AM

April 9 8:30-9:30 AM

Grab your coffee and join other seniors for a brisk morning walk. Our trained volunteer tour guide will guide you through the zoo, highlighting 2 different animals. Tickets are \$5 at the door and free for members. We ask that large groups please call ahead to register.



## Junior Zookeeper

Ages 5th Grade+

Informational Meeting- Miller Park Pavilion

March 4, 5 or 6 at 6:30-7:30

The Junior Zookeeper program is for young people who want to learn more about wildlife and how a zoo works. JZKs begin by attending a one-week educational summer camp and can eventually become volunteers at Miller Park Zoo! Students currently in 5th grade or higher are eligible to begin this summer. Space in the program is limited, all interested students and their parent/guardian must attend one informational meeting in order to receive application materials. Doors will close and no one may enter after 6:35PM. Choose the meeting date that fits your schedule; no reservation is required.

## FlexZOObility

Ages 5+

March 1 8:30-9:30 AM

April 5 8:30-9:30 AM

May 3 8:30-9:30 AM

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have a yoga session at the Zoo? Join the animals and Nonny, owner of Universe Yoga and Healing. She is certified to teach yoga to all ages. Nonny is certified in Reiki/Chakra balancing/Crystal Healing. Her group class sessions are in a gentle, safe form, and environment.

# Events



**Stampede 5K, 3K and Kids Fun Run**  
**March 1st, Miller Park Pavilion**  
**9:30 & 10:00 AM**

The race is held in historic Miller Park, the surrounding neighborhood and the zoo. The Stampede is the first on the Lake Run Club circuit calendar and features a USATF certified course.

Kids 10 and under will enjoy the 1/4 mile fun run through the zoo, followed by an after party with a fun animal encounter!

**[REGISTER](#)**

**Party for the Planet & Art Sculpture Contest**  
**April 19, 12:00-4:00 PM**



Join us as we celebrate Earth Day! There will be fun activities to help us celebrate our amazing planet.

The event will include a recycled art sculpture contest, in which zoo guests will be able to vote for their favorites. To submit a project for the contest, please contact Silvia Schuh at [sschuh@cityblm.org](mailto:sschuh@cityblm.org).

**Pollinators Rock**  
**May 3rd, 12:00-2:00 PM**

Come out and learn about the importance of persevering our local pollinators and endangered plant species from our area. You will learn what Miller Park Zoo is doing to attract and preserve local pollinators and local endangered plant species.

**Save the Date: Brews at the Zoo**  
**June 7, 2025**







## Support the Zoo

There are many ways you can show your support!

- Volunteer
- Join a committee
- Sponsor an event or exhibit
- Purchase a Membership
- Make a donation
- ZooDoption

Visit [mpzs.org](http://mpzs.org) to learn more

Show your support for the zoo  
by purchasing a Miller Park  
Zoo calendar in the gift shop  
for just \$10.99!

## ZooDoption

By symbolically adopting an animal, you are helping to directly support and care for the animals at Miller Park Zoo.

ZooDoption packages include a personalized certificate, photo, zoo passes and more!

## Recent ZooDoptions

Remy Matthews, *Gila Monster*

Darlene Jacobs, *Sumatran Tiger*

Adrian Quarles, *Red Panda*

Logan, *Lionhead Rabbit*

Kathleen Chmielewski, *American Alligator*

Gracey Ingram, *Galapagos Tortoise*

Helen Byerly, *Salmon Crested Cockatoo*

[mpzs.org/animal-zoodoption](http://mpzs.org/animal-zoodoption)

