



Wild Connections



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**ASSOCIATION
OF ZOOS &
AQUARIUMS**

Zoo Welcomes Baby Anteater

On June 16th, we welcomed the first Giant Anteater born at Miller Park Zoo! Parents Chili and Arnaud, were a recommended breeding pair by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). This significant birth will contribute to a population of less than 100 Giant Anteaters currently living in AZA facilities.

After closely monitoring the growth and health of the new baby over the past 2 months, it was determined that he is a male. "Mr. Snoot" named by generous donor, Barb Patel, continues to grow and thrive! Mom, Chili is doing well and has adapted to motherhood. Mr. Snoot will continue to ride on his mother's back for the next year. Arnaud will remain separated from mom and baby, but will rotate time spent in their outdoor habitat.

Miller Park Zoo supports Giant Anteater conservation efforts by participating in this crucial Species Survival Plan. We contribute annually to The Institute for the Conservation of Wild Animals in South America and their conservation initiative "Anteaters and Highways".



Fall 2025

Director's Message

Jay Pratte

Last newsletter we discussed the new Zoo entry sign, aesthetics, and the importance of improving the member/visitor experience at the Zoo. Our Guest Services team is always looking for ways to ensure everyone has a good time at MPZ. Our GS Manager, Sandra, spends hours analyzing trends of sales in the Concession and ZooTique (gift shop). She also listens to requests from guests, staff, and volunteers, while watching what types of amenity options are popular in other zoos. Over the past year, we have improved our gift shop (appearance, lighting, product racks for an improved experience), adjusted options for food/beverages, and improved campus signage for wayfinding & information. We also hope that visitors take a tour through the gift shop to examine the amazing products we continually update.

This isn't just about revenue for the Zoo. It's about engagement and fun! We are excited to finally release a new opportunity for our visitors: Miller Park Zoo Trading Cards! Inspired by a few other AZA zoos with similar card collections, we worked closely with our P & R Marketing team to design, edit, and produce a line of collectible cards. The cards vary in rarity, spotlight our Zoo and animals (individuals and groups), and discuss location of native habitats, conservation status, and fun facts, containing icons that match on-grounds graphics about "What I Eat". This has been a HUGE labor of love for the whole Zoo team, with the goal of providing a fun new offering for members and visitors.

The cards were announced and launched during Members' Night, since we wanted our Members to have the first chance to obtain and enjoy the collection. Our signature gold "rare" card focused on our male Red Wolf, "Moon Pie" this time around.

We are already designing the next "expansion" of cards, truly hoping that they are collected and enjoyed as much as we love creating them. So much time and attention to detail from went into these cards from the MPZ team, which we hope translates to our Members and visitors. Like the new entry sign, our goal is to provide yet another moment of joy when coming to MPZ



Carousel Update

We would like to thank everyone that has helped to contribute to the ongoing restoration of the zoo's carousel. Once restorations were underway, it was determined by the carousel restoration company that it would be a more intensive project than originally expected. We are now anticipating that the carousel will be up and running later this fall. We appreciate your patience and we can't wait for our visitors to once again be able to experience the magic of the carousel! More updates soon!

Animal Spotlight

Southern Ground Hornbill

By: Ava Porter

What animal has the face of a vulture, the eyelashes of a Sephora model, the friendliness of a dog, the intelligence of a monkey, the face of a machete, and the destructive power of an excavation team? It's not a monster created by Jim Henson, it's the fabulous Southern Ground Hornbill of Africa.

Morticia and Wednesday are Miller Park Zoo's Southern Ground Hornbills. In July, 2024 they came to Miller Park from Zoo Tampa where they were born. They are half sisters, but they are distinguishable by the markings on their orange facial skin and wattles. Wednesday has mostly orange facial skin around her eyes, while Morticia has a distinct blue stripe above her right eye and a large blue patch under her left eye. While Morticia was parent reared, Wednesday was hand reared by Zoo Tampa's keeper team for education programs. She is very social with the keepers and enjoys "helping" them clean up and maintain their habitat.

Southern Ground Hornbills (*Bucorvus leadbeteri*) are the largest member of the hornbill family. They stand about 3 feet tall and weigh around 6 pounds. They have an unusually small casque(structure on the top of the bill that gives them their name) for a hornbill. Their facial skin and wattle change color as they mature, starting pale gray and turning deep red in males and red with blue in females over the course of their first three years. Black feathers cover their entire bodies except for their primary flight feathers, which are white. Specializing in hunting small animals, they use their large powerful bills to catch and kill snakes, rodents, lizards and anything they can snatch up. Here at the zoo, it's a fun challenge to make enrichment for them to mimic the searching, digging and puzzle solving they do in the wild.



Unlike most hornbills, they spend up to 70% of their day walking. With a wingspan of up to 6 feet, they are capable fliers, but they much prefer to search for prey on the ground. They are incredibly social and intelligent birds. They form family groups comprised of a dominant breeding pair and other family members who help to raise the chicks. As social birds, they have many fascinating behaviors that govern their social interactions. Presenting food items in their bills is a way of asserting dominance over flock mates. They engage in various forms of play, such as tug of war, chase, and play fighting. Sunbathing together and Allopreening, (preening other members of their flock) is another way that they bond with each other. They usually lay two eggs each nesting cycle. The first one to hatch typically outcompetes the other, leaving only one survivor. The entire flock gathers food for the mother and helps protect and teach the chick as it grows.

They are threatened in their native range. They require large territories and nesting sites to live and reproduce. They are viewed by some as pests and killed for their destructive behavior towards property. Organizations like the Ground Hornbill Project provide and monitor nesting boxes on private reserves to help increase their numbers.

I hope you have a chance visit these chaotically wonderful animals here at Miller Park Zoo, and marvel at their intelligence, quirkiness and beauty.

How long have you worked at the zoo and what interested you about working here?

I have been a guest services staff since April of 2023 and was promoted to building supervisor in September of 2024! I was most interested in this job because I grew up as a frequent flyer of Miller Park Zoo and participated in many educational programs like Animal Crackers, so the love runs deep!

What is one of your favorite things you get to do as a guest services staff member?

My favorite aspect about my position is truly the guest interactions, I love small moments that can make someone's day! I've also had the exciting opportunity to begin presenting our tortoise feeding experiences! These really make my day as it gives me a chance to talk one on one with guests and get them interested not only in the Galapagos Tortoises, but other parts of our zoo as well.

What are you up to when you aren't working at the Zoo?

I am currently getting my associates degree in earth sciences, so a lot of my time outside of the zoo is spent learning! Outside of my studies, I love to spend quality time with my partner, family, and friends. Cooking, playing games, and watching movies are some other things I do in my downtime!

Who is your favorite animal at the zoo?

My favorites are the Galapagos Tortoises, Gala and Pagos! As I've done more tortoise feeding experiences I feel like we have become familiar and I'm always happy to see them, and they're always happy to see sweet potatoes! I also have a soft spot for our Bald Eagle, Beauty.

Staff Spotlight

Ivy Hoeniges



Volunteer Spotlight

Collette Kensinger

Volunteer Start Date:

19 years ago

Area of work:

Most work is done in the Australia habitat. This includes, cleaning, pulling weeds and preparing diets for the wallaroos. I also help maintain the flamingo habitat and help the zookeepers as needed.

My favorite animal is:

Irwin the wallaroo.



Stitching Together a Wild Cause

Sneak Peak of ZooDo live auction item

By Loren Singer & Beverly Beauford

We're thrilled to highlight one of the incredible items featured in our ZooDo live auction—an exquisite handmade quilt created by one of our talented members, Beverly Beauford. This year's ZooDo, our annual gala, will take place at Miller Park Zoo on September 20th from 5–9 PM, and Beverly's quilt is sure to be a standout piece. The photos truly don't do it justice—you'll want to see it in person!

I recently spoke with Beverly about her inspiration and the creative process behind this beautiful project. If you're a fan of our animals at Miller Park Zoo, this quilt is a must-have!

How long have you've been a member and/or been involved with the zoo?

I started coming to the zoo routinely as soon as I heard about the active seniors walking tour which was before Covid. It became a monthly ritual with me. I discovered I was not too old to learn! I loved learning about individual species, habitats, conservation efforts and even their names! I have only been a member for a few years. I wish I had done it sooner.

Do you have a favorite animal that you visit?

I have several favorite animals. Being a cat person, I always check in with the big cats, especially Rojo. The red wolves are favorites, and who doesn't love to watch the otters play?

What is your most treasured memory of Miller Park?

When I moved to Bloomington, I did not have much spare time because of the amount of hours my job required, so going to Miller Park Zoo itself was my treasured memory.



How long did it take to create this beautiful quilt?

I really do not know how much time I spent in the making of this quilt, but it was many months. It takes a long time to gather photos, size them and transfer the images to the paper I needed to use. Sewing the individual pieces is the easy part.

Was there a part of that process that you enjoyed more than the others?

The fun part for me was matching the individual animal with just the right colors. I have been quilting for a long time, so I had lots of scraps to go through. Lots of possibilities!

This quilt has a lot of unique and special images. Which is your favorite?

Romeo the White-Faced Saki Monkey sticking out his tongue. Cracks me up!

Is there anything else you would like us to know about the quilt?

I tried to use some historical photos since Miller Park Zoo has a rich history, and I love to use bright colors in most of my quilts. Hope everyone enjoys!

Programs

Animal Crackers

Ages 3-5 with Adult

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.

The Art of Animals: Scary Sketches

Ages 8-17

Science meets art in this creative class. Instructor Jill Wallace, artist and naturalist, will guide you through the process of art journaling October edition... scary sketches! You will visit exhibits in the zoo, then you'll bring your journal back to the classroom & use your notes to create realistic drawings to take home. You will even get to meet some creeping, crawling creatures up close!

Classes will take place at Miller Park Zoo. All art materials and a snack will be provided.

Zoo Explorers

Animal Defenses

Herbivores

Ages 6-11

Zoo Explorers is a terrific 2-hour adventure that includes animal encounters, classroom learning, and hands-on experiences out in the Zoo.



Winter Wilds Day Camp: Night and Day

Ages 6-11

At this camp, we will explore the lives of diurnal animals to see the special abilities they need for being active in daytime. Then, we'll flip the switch & investigate nocturnal animals' nighttime powers! Along the way, we'll meet some Zoo animals, make a craft, & enjoy fun, educational activities. A snack will be provided. An animal video will be played during lunch between morning and afternoon activities. Please bring a sack lunch & wear play clothes.

Animal Encounter Field Trips

This is an opportunity to meet three of the zoo's residents, learning about their natural history & daily life at the zoo. Students will see the animals at close range & have the opportunity for hands-on interaction. We can focus on a particular theme or simply have a "show & tell". Programs last 45-60 minutes for 1st-12th graders, after which you'll visit the zoo at your own pace. (Preschool- kindergarten programs last 30-45 minutes).

The fee for a program at the zoo is \$9.00 per person for students and adult chaperones. \$150 minimum.

Max#: 40 per program

ZooToYou!

Let us bring our animals to YOUR classroom!

We can bring our animal encounter program to you! Choose a topic that fits your curriculum or we can just "show & tell"! Maximum group size is 40 students. But individual accommodations can be made, dependent on locations. Also available to community groups, senior facilities, and libraries in McLean and adjacent counties. ZooToYou prices vary and are dependent upon facility location.

Contact Julia for prices, information, and reservations at jbenzel@cityblm.org or (309)434-2256.

Events



Arts for Conservation September 13th 10-4

Miller Park Zoo will host their annual arts and crafts fair! If you are a local artisan or crafter and would like to attend this event as a vendor or need more information, please reach out to Silvia Schuh at sschuh@cityblm.org. All types of art vendors and crafters are encouraged to register. There is a registration fee of \$50 per booth. Registration for this event closes on September 8.

Destination ZooDo: Annual Gala September 20th 5-9 pm

Please join us on an exciting adventure! As you journey through the zoo, grab a cocktail and immerse yourself in captivating cultural art experiences, including live performances and interactive exhibits. The voyage continues to the historic Miller Park Pavilion for a magnificent feast! The night will feature an exciting live auction with exclusive items and experiences, along with a silent auction full of treasures waiting to be discovered. You won't want to miss out on this one-of-a-kind trip! Get event and raffle tickets [HERE!](#)



Haunted Twilight Mini Golf October 4th 7-9 pm

Join us for the final night of Twilight Mini Golf for the year. It will be a fun night with glow-in-the-dark golf balls and festive Halloween decorations! To keep the line moving, we will offer two 9-course games. Costumes are highly encouraged. The last tee time will be at 8:15PM.
Fee: \$7/person

Dia de Las Monarcas October 11th 12-3 pm

Celebrate the importance of Monarch Conservation! Learn about the Monarch Tag and Release program at Miller Park Zoo with a demonstration, as well as the importance of Monarchs to the Latino communities of the world. There will be Latino music, crafts, dance tutorials, and face painting. All activities are free with admission. If you would like to participate as a guest vendor, please contact Silvia Schuh at sschuh@cityblm.org.



Howlabaloo October 25th 5-8 pm October 26th 12-3 pm

It's Halloween time! Get into the spirit at Miller Park Zoo's annual Halloween party! The evening event may be a little eerie, but still a lot of fun for all ages! Local organizations and businesses will host booths with crafts, games, and face painting. Hayride tickets will also be available for \$4/person (weather permitting).

Fee: Saturday- \$10, Members \$5

Sunday- Regular zoo admission, free to members.



Become a Member

Membership Includes:

- **Unlimited FREE admission**
- **Discounts on concessions, zootique purchases and birthday parties**
- **Discounted entry to certain events**
- **Free or discounted admission to other participating AZA zoos & aquariums**
- **Invitation to members only events**
- **Discounts on camps and classes (restrictions apply)**

Visit mpzs.org to learn more

New Donor Club Members
Cynthia Drozd

ZooDoption

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

ZooDoptions are the perfect gift for the animal lover in your life!

Packages include a personalized certificate, photo, zoo passes and more!

mpzs.org/animal-zoodoption

Recent ZooDoptions

Peggy Hundley -Giant Anteater

