

Whitney Buchman
Curator of Education
Lee Richardson Zoo
6/16/17

Zoos across the world have many days that are celebrated for the purpose of awareness. Most people know about Earth Day, where we bring awareness to current conservation issues facing our planet and to successes that we have had fixing past conservation issues. Some may even know about Endangered Species Day where we point out the successes of species such as the bald eagle and the challenges that face the species that still need our assistance. Those two days are all encompassing, but many species and groups of species have their own day. On each of these days we draw attention through extra keeper talks, crafts, activities, and overall brightening our guests' day. Unfortunately, due to the number of species with these days are becoming more numerous. While they are fun, they are also serious. These zoo days of awareness are started because there is an issue and we may lose yet another of our world's treasures. For example, we recently celebrated World Ungulate Day (ungulates being hoofed animals) and drew attention to critically endangered species such as black rhinos, addaxes, Asian wild horses, gorals, and others; but there are more of these days of awareness just around the corner.

On June 21st from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Lee Richardson Zoo will be celebrating World Giraffe Day, the longest day of the year for the long necks. During that time you can come join our staff and volunteers to learn about the world's tallest land animal, make some crafts with the kids, and catch a keeper chat at 4:30 p.m. Unbeknownst to many, giraffes are not doing so well. While many people know about the plight of rhinos and elephants, the situation with giraffes is commonly being called the "silent extinction". Primary problems are the same as many endangered animals: habitat destruction and poaching. Want to help the wild relatives of Juani and Cleo (Lee Richardson Zoo's resident giraffes)? We suggest you visit the Giraffe Conservation Foundation at GiraffeConservation.org to learn more.

Zoos across the world bring awareness to penguins on October 8th but a number of conservation organizations, including the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, are working on an urgent penguin project. This project has been called "Invest in the Nest" and hopes to save African penguins. These penguins live on islands off the coast of southern Africa that were covered with bird poop. While this sounds disgusting, it was also important for these penguins. This caking of bird poop or guano was a material that the penguins could burrow into and create a nest to protect their eggs from heat and predators. Around the turn of the 20th century, humans began to harvest the guano for fertilizer. At the time they called it "white gold" and completely cleared off the islands. This made it difficult for the penguins to protect their eggs from predators and to regulate the temperature of their eggs. Now in the 21st century, they also have the added pressures created by climate change. The temperature is going up making it even harder to regulate their egg temperatures, and their food in the oceans is starting to dwindle. "Invest in the Nest" hopes to help alleviate one of the African penguin population's stresses by making man-made penguin nests for the African penguins. The hope is to allow the African penguin a chance to recover before it is too late. Current populations are hovering around 25,000 when they used to have over a million at the turn of the 20th century. If you want to learn more or get involved, go to Kickstarter.com and look up "Invest in the Nest". The initial goal has been reached, but all additional funds will go to more nests giving this project a better chance of success. The deadline for this project is June 22nd so don't wait too long to help these wonderful animals.

There are more "awareness days" to come, but visit Lee Richardson Zoo as often as you like. Don't wait for special events. Enjoy the antics of the animals that we care for, but while you are there

take time to read some of the information we share. Knowledge is power, the power to save lives, the power to save species.