

Zoo To You Article

Kristi Newland, Zoo Director

18 April 2018

Topic: Saving the species while caring for the individual.

Whether it's Curious George visiting the Animal Hospital, or Winnie the Pooh getting stuck in Rabbit's hole while entering Rabbit's house for a visit, from the time we're little we have an understanding that animals can face many problems in their lives just like we can. In the wild, those issues can trouble an individual or go so far as to imperil a species. These issues can range from disease or drought to illegal hunting (including getting stuck in illegal snares) or loss of habitat, and more.

Many times when we face an issue, from splinters we can't get out alone to unemployment, we need others to pitch in to help us find a solution. Educational programs at Lee Richardson Zoo engage and empower our guests to pitch in to address the issues affecting wildlife on a species level. The Zoo's Education Division, with the assistance of the Ambassador animals, the Animal Care staff and the Maintenance crew, work every day to ensure our guests have safe, enjoyable visits to the zoo. During their stay, visitors can connect with nature and learn how to become better stewards of the Earth focusing on helping to address the situations that negatively affect species around the world. The Education Division also shares these messages outside the zoo through outreach programs such as ZooMobiles and programs offered via video conferencing technology for those who reside further from Garden City.

By participating in cooperatively managed programs for the species that live at the zoo, staff also work to help preserve those species. Sometimes the programs involve moving animals between zoos to arrange pairings that will benefit the population genetically. Other moves result in groupings which are more natural for the animals involved. For a social species, this would mean companionship as opposed to solitary living which is appropriate for some species. The day to day efforts directly related to the residents of the zoo focus on caring for the individuals and through those efforts we help to save the species as a whole.

Animal Care staff, with the help of the rest of the team at the zoo, strive every day to make sure the residents at the zoo have long and happy lives. Many residents at the zoo live well past the average life expectancy of their conspecifics in the wild. That's due to the lack of many of the threats faced in the wild, and to the quality of care they receive at the zoo. Zoo residents can still have issues though. Old

age and pregnancy, along with other life events or stages, can bring about complications no matter where one lives.

One complication not usually found in the wild that zoos work hard to address is overweight animals. Through diet changes, enrichment and modified habitat design which can both encourage more activity, such issues can generally be resolved. Sound familiar? Eat more of the right foods (i.e. fruits and vegetables) and get more exercise applies to more than just you and me for a healthy life.

In spite of regular cleaning, daily observations, and veterinary check-ups, health issues can still arise among the zoo residents. When these do occur, the staff work hard to treat whatever issues come up. Through professional networks, including that of zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, we can take advantage of many experts ready and willing to advise if needed.

A big part of being able to provide appropriate medical care for the residents at the zoo is the relationship established by the Animal Care staff with the individual animals. In the wild many species benefit from hiding illnesses or weakness of any form. It makes it less likely that they will become the target of a predator. That same behavior often makes it difficult to diagnose a problem until it's well developed. Animal Care staff spend much of their time learning what normal behavior for each individual in their care is, so when the slightest variation occurs, they'll recognize it. Does a slight change mean there's a big problem lurking? Not necessarily but it heightens staff awareness for further signs of possible issues. Through relationships of trust, staff are able to perform hoof trims with animals like giraffe and takin participating voluntarily. Leopards, cougars, and other zoo residents voluntarily lean closer to a safety barrier allowing injections to be delivered by hand. This way staff and animal alike avoid the stress related to darting an animal to deliver medication or an anesthetic for a veterinary procedure.

The relationships established by the Animal Care staff and the rest of the team at the zoo makes it painful when zoo residents pass away; they're part of the family after all. It also makes it joyous when animals are born, and reach the various milestones during their lives. The tie with the individuals also extends to species level events in the wild. Through our efforts caring for individuals, we also become invested in the species. Lee Richardson Zoo staff invite you to visit and become invested in wildlife.