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NOW - LABOR DAY

White Alligator

PUBLISHED FOR FRIENDS OF ROGER WILLIAMS PARK ZOO
The tag line for our new seasonal exhibit, Shades of Nature featuring Elsa, a rare albino alligator is “Why blend in when you can stand out!” Our zoo and the people that work here clearly have taken this to heart and truly stand out among our peers in the zoo world. Whether it is our Director of Conservation Lou Perrotti who was named a Recovery Champion, a prestigious award given by the US Fish & Wildlife Service to outstanding individuals who are directly responsible for the recovery of endangered species in this country, our educators who inspire the next generation or our keepers who provide care and love for our animals, our staff really stands out!

In addition to adding exciting new animals this year, our operations staff has been busier than ever improving your zoo. Thanks to a generous grant from the Champlin Foundation, the zoo has been repaving pathways, replacing roofs, upgrading our HVAC units, and making many other improvements to make sure that your visit remains a pleasant one. As part of these improvements, we will be giving Wilderness Plaza a total makeover this fall to further enhance your experience.

Our zoo would not be here without you and we look forward to seeing you at the zoo!

By Jeremy Goodman, DVM
Executive Director, RWP Zoo and RI Zoological Society

Get up close and personal with your favorite zoo animal by booking a Wild Connection encounter!

Click to donate!
A huge congratulations to our Director of Conservation Programs Lou Perrotti for being recognized as a 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Recovery Champion for his dedication and ongoing efforts to support the recovery of the rare American burying beetle.

The nationally recognized Recovery Champion Award celebrates the contributions and achievements of USFWS staff and partners whose work is advancing the recovery of endangered and threatened species.

“Lou’s work on behalf of the American burying beetle is an inspiration to our partners in conservation throughout southern New England and across the entire range of the species,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service North Atlantic-Appalachian Regional Director Wendi Weber. “Just as important, he has also inspired the public to care about the American burying beetle by sharing his passion with the next generation.”

“This honor belongs as much to the zoo as it belongs to me,” Perrotti said. “Everyone from our vet staff to the keepers who take care of our animals every day, to all of our partners and NGOs that we work with. We should all be honored that this award is going to sit in our cabinet.”

Perrotti has worked with collaborators from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, the Maria Mitchell Association, and the Service on science-based solutions to improve the trajectory for this species, including releasing thousands
of beetles on the island of Nantucket to reestablish a self-sustaining population, and monitoring their productivity through trapping and tagging.

"It is a great privilege and honor to have Lou as an integral part of our Zoo family. We couldn’t be more thrilled to have the USFWS recognize him as a Recovery Champion,” said Roger Williams Park Zoo Executive Director Jeremy Goodman. “His unwavering commitment to the protection and recovery of endangered species extends far beyond the American burying beetle.”

From his work with the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center in Panama, to conserving local timber rattlesnake populations, Perrotti has influenced conservation near and far.

“We are grateful for the incredible impact he has made on the future of animal species across the globe,” Goodman said. “It is thanks to passionate people like Lou that we can inspire others to care for the wild world we share.”

Congratulations Lou and thank you for making a difference for the future of this species and all those you work to protect!

**Did You Know?**

The largest of North America’s carrion beetles – meaning those that consume dead animals – the American burying beetle can bury the carcass of bird like a quail in less than 24 hours. The species is also unique in the insect world for their equal sharing of parental duties. Both the male and the female help rear the young.

**THE BEETLE’S BIGGEST FAN**

**BY BRIDGET MACDONALD**

Every June, Lou Perrotti packs his bags for Nantucket, a small island off the coast of Massachusetts known as a summer beach destination.

He isn’t going for the beaches. He’s going for the beetles.

Over the past 25 years, Perrotti, the director of conservation for the Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence, Rhode Island, has worked with partners to release thousands of American burying beetles on Nantucket in an effort to reestablish a self-sustaining population of the species on the eastern edge its range.

Once widely distributed as far west as Montana, the beetles’ numbers plummeted in the 20th century due to rapid land-use changes that fragmented its habitat. By the time the species was listed as federally endangered in 1989, it was hanging on in just few places in the Midwest and on Block Island, off the coast of Rhode Island.

The beetles Perrotti releases on Nantucket are descendants of beetles captured on Block Island starting in the early 1990s to seed a groundbreaking captive-rearing program, which he has led for more than two decades.

“When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approached the zoo to ask if we wanted to rear American burying beetle, we said: ‘Yes! This is amazing,’” Perrotti recalled. “We knew invertebrate conservation was going to be the future.”

Since then, he has collaborated with the USFWS, state agencies and local partners to ensure a future for this species. This spring, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognized Perrotti with a Recovery Champion award for his dedication to advancing conservation for the American burying beetle, which was downlisted from endangered to threatened in 2020.

For Perrotti, who has always been drawn to overlooked or underappreciated wildlife, working with the beetle has been a dream come true.

“I was one of those kids that instead of playing baseball, was
flipping over rocks and stones, looking for critters,” he said.

Soon, he was raising critters at home, with support from parents who encouraged his passion — and made space for snakes. He bred his first boa constrictor at age 11, and gradually matured into a self-made reptile expert in the days before online tutorials, forums, and wikis.

As an adult, he began to lead educational outreach programs with snakes at libraries, schools, and even at the Roger Williams Park Zoo, in his spare time. He wasn’t a professional herpetologist. He was a retail manager working to support his young family, while finding outlets for his expertise in hard-to-love creatures.

“I was the guy who would get a call when the state police found a boa in an abandoned apartment or an alligator in a parking lot,” Perrotti explained.

Eventually, his passion paid off. When the zoo was looking to hire a keeper with reptile experience, friends encouraged him to apply.

He got the job, and soon after, got the life-changing assignment to raise beetles.

No stone unturned

Perrotti’s dedication to the American burying beetle has earned him renown in the international conservation community, regular hand-written notes from Dr. Jane Goodall — she wrote about his work in her book “Hope for Animals and Their World” — and an inspiring career.

He is the only person in the history of the Roger Williams Park Zoo to go from zookeeper directly to senior management and the only person to hold the position of director of conservation without an advanced degree. He is probably the only person anywhere with a larger-than-life American burying beetle tattoo on his arm — a badge of honor acquired when he was designated as the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Species Survival Plan coordinator for the species in 2006.

Perhaps most impressive, he has converted countless others into admirers of a giant insect whose claim to fame is burying carcasses of dead animals to feed its young. After he introduced a local third-grade class to the beetle in 2015, the students spearheaded a successful campaign to have the species named as the official state insect of Rhode Island.

“When I saw what those third graders did, I thought, there is hope for this world,” Perrotti said.

He considers nurturing hope in the next generation the most important part of his work.

“I remember as a kid looking through National Geographic at these amazing, beautiful places throughout the world, and worrying that by the time I grew up, they would be gone,” he said. “Now here I am in a position where I can help save species in those beautiful places.”

He has found opportunities to do just that, thanks to his unique expertise. When a conservation group in Panama was struggling to sustain a native amphibian rescue project, he helped set up a local food system. “I traveled there to learn what the frogs eat in the wild, set up the infrastructure for captive rearing, and helped them secure funding so they could breed colonies of native insects,” he explained.

As a result, the frogs’ natural reproduction increased, as did their lifespans.

But Perrotti remains dedicated to overlooked species closer to home. In addition to working to conserve the American burying beetle, he has captive reared New England cottontail, timber rattlesnake, and Karner blue butterfly — all species that are native to the Northeast and elusive by nature.

Now Perrotti is focusing on another Northeast species that needs attention. He was recently named the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Species Survival Plan coordinator for the North American wood turtle, which like many other turtles species, is gravely threatened by illegal collection.

“People tend to think turtles are everywhere,” he said. “But poachers who know what they are doing can remove an entire population in a weekend.”

In his coordinator role, Perrotti will work with partners to find solutions to the new challenges illegal collection creates for animals that are already threatened by habitat loss, climate change, and car strikes when crossing roads.

And knowing Perrotti, he will leave no stone unturned.

Bridget Macdonald is public affairs specialist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s North Atlantic-Appalachian Region, which works with partners from Maine to Kentucky to conserve fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.
WORLD ELEPHANT DAY
THURSDAY, AUGUST 12TH
This World Elephant Day, take a moment to appreciate one of the world’s most magnificent and majestic gentle giants. Created to raise awareness about the danger’s elephants face, these beloved animals are facing the very serious threat of extinction due to habitat loss and poaching fueled by the illegal trade. It is up to all of us to continue to build awareness and push for change.

Our zoo is home to three female African elephants, Alice, Ginny and Kate. Having these wonderful creatures in our zoo not only brings people closer to nature, but also makes it possible for us to educate the public on elephant conservation issues.

On a mission to conserve wildlife and wild places, the zoo continues to contribute to global elephant conservation projects including AZA Elephant Welfare Initiative, International Elephant Foundation, and the Tarangire Elephant Project.

You can help by:

- Join the millions of people around the world who have pledged to protect elephants by committing to never buy ivory.
- Support policies that protect elephants and other wildlife. Be aware of policy changes that may have a negative impact on laws created to protect species and their habitats.
- If traveling to Africa or to other parts of the world, engage in responsible eco-tourism that helps sustain local communities. If shopping or dining abroad, do your research before purchasing items that may support the illegal wildlife trade.
- We encourage you to learn more and help spread the word!

FUN FACTS:

- Elephants don’t have sweat glands, so they cover their skin in mud to keep cool from the hot sun. Clever!
- Here’s an easy way to tell African elephants apart from their Asian cousins – their ears! African elephants have large ears shaped like the continent of Africa, while Asian elephants have smaller, round ears.
- The tusks are actually enlarged incisor teeth, which are formed entirely of dentine (ivory) with no enamel; the rest of the teeth are molars. They grow six sets of molars throughout their lifetime.
- Elephants have around 150,000 muscle units in their trunk. They use their trunks to suck up water to drink – holding up to 8 liters! They also use their trunks as a snorkel when swimming. Cool, huh?
- Elephants can make a variety of sounds to communicate in a variety of ways including seismic communication – sounds that create vibrations in the ground – which they may detect through their bones.
MEET THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF OUR ZOO FAMILY!

BACTRIAN CAMELS:

New to the zoo, these camels will be your welcoming party as you first set foot on the Marco Polo Adventure Trek. Native to parts of Central Asia, these camels can brave the scorching heat, freezing cold, and drought of the deserts and the steppes, and have served as pack animals to people of the region for thousands of years.

The newest members of Roger Williams Park Zoo’s camel family are Popcorn and Marshmallow, two one-year-old females who joined us from Keystone Safari in Pennsylvania.

OSTRICH:

As you make your way through the Plains of Africa, you may notice some new friends sharing their habitat with the aoudad. Meet Beaky and Rube, a pair of ostriches who joined us this spring.

The largest and heaviest of all living birds, ostriches are native to the savannas and open plains of Africa, where they use their long, powerful legs to propel themselves at speeds reaching upwards of 40 miles per hour. In fact, ostriches are the fastest two-legged animals on the planet!

FUN FACT:

Ostriches have three stomachs that they use to help them digest the tough plant matter that they eat.

WHITE ALLIGATOR:

Meet Elsa! This beautiful lady has made her home in the zoo’s newest temporary exhibit, Shades of Nature, located in our freshly renovated greenhouse. As an albino American alligator, she lacks melanin, a pigment that provides color to animals and people.

Visit Elsa and a few more reptile friends in their new habitat open daily now through Labor Day.

FUN FACT:

Alligators are more closely related to birds and dinosaurs than to most other reptiles.

FUN FACT:

Camels can go without water for weeks at a time, and can go without food for several months, living off the energy from the fat stored in their humps!
Supplies you will need:

- Blue and yellow construction paper
- Scissors (with adult supervision)
- Glue
- Markers
- Paper plate
- Sponge
- Blue, Green and Purple paint
- googly eyes (optional)

Directions:

1. Create the peacock’s face out of paper, cut it out (with adult supervision) then paste it to a paper plate.
2. Draw on eyes and add a beak! (optional: use googly eyes for extra fun).
3. Cut a sponge in several pieces and prepare your paint.
4. Dip sponges into the paint and make prints on the plate to represent your peacock’s feathers!

Try this:

Use different colored paper or paints to create your own bird. It could be a bird you’ve seen in nature or even something straight out of your imagination!
Congratulations Winners!

A huge round of applause to our 2021 Endangered Species Youth Art Contest winners. The Zoo’s 4th annual contest, co-sponsored by Jerry’s Artarama of Providence, received over 330 art submissions from talented students and homeschoolers from across New England – the most entries to date!

Thank you to everyone that took part and helped us raise awareness for endangered and threatened species.

2021 GRAND PRIZE WINNER:

Red-faced spider monkey  - Ke Qing Tan (9-12)

Why is saving this species important to you?

The population of the red-faced spider monkey has declined more than 30% in recent years, fueled by the destruction of tropical rainforests and hunting. They play a crucial role in seed dispersal, helping to diversify the plants in their environment. We must contribute to conservation efforts and raise awareness to prevent this fascinating species from becoming more endangered than they already are.
2021 WINNING ENTRIES
BY GRADE CATEGORY:

K-2 GRADE CATEGORY WINNER
Alia Koasanto K-2 Aye-aye

3-5 GRADE CATEGORY WINNER
Olivia Nowak 3-5 Blue-throated macaw

6-8 GRADE CATEGORY WINNER
Samantha Thibeault 6-8 Red Panda

9-12 GRADE CATEGORY WINNER
Genevieve Steever 9-12 Phillipine Crocodile Tiger

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