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2024

YOUR  
GRATITUDE  
REPORT

# ONE DAY FOR WILDLIFE

LOCAL ACTION, GLOBAL IMPACT

Wilder  
INSTITUTE  
Calgary Zoo

This year's Gratitude Report is about one single day at your Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo. **Everything you read here happened because of you.**



# You are part of something special

Dear friend,

Memories stay with us like snapshots frozen in time. Years later, we can relive the hot summer day we saw a hippo splashing in the pool or a lemur with arms open wide basking in the sun. Zoos have the power to inspire a connection with wildlife, a power nurtured in shared memories of days when something exciting waited around every corner.

You are a part of something special. As a Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo supporter, you help drive impactful conservation efforts both locally and around the world. At the same time, you're helping people create their own lasting zoo memories.

Each year, our Gratitude Report highlights some of the most inspiring examples of your generosity in action—because your support truly makes a world of difference.

In 2024, you ensured all your zoo's residents received world-class care. You helped hatch two Critically Endangered Egyptian tortoises and supported the release of 6,127 northern leopard frog tadpoles. You funded veterinary care equipment, and helped set up

camera traps in the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary in Nigeria (which captured images of not one but two Critically Endangered Cross River gorilla silverbacks). And you inspired young people to learn more about Malayan tapirs, including 'Tanuck' and his new companion 'Sempurna', and their counterparts in the wild.

This year's Gratitude Report is about one single day at your Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo: Wednesday, July 31, 2024. We invite you to relive this day with us to see the impact you have on wildlife across the world.

Thank you—we couldn't do it without you!

With gratitude,

**Steven Ross,**  
*Chief Development &  
External Relations Officer*

# One day at your zoo

DATE → JULY 31, 2024  
LOCATION → CALGARY, ALBERTA

**F**rom inspiring education programs to on-the-ground conservation efforts, we are working to create a better future for wildlife and for us all. We can't do this work without you.



**5,357**  
people visit the zoo

**27%**  
are members

Most come from Calgary and around Alberta, but visitors also join us from British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, California, Oregon, Utah, North Carolina, Arizona, Australia, France, Mexico, England, and the United Kingdom.

**183**  
summer campers  
explore the zoo, inspiring their love of wildlife and wild places.

**610**  
guests discover conservation  
through music, movement and meaningful moments at the Conservation Parade and Conservation Concerts.

Nutritious food, including  
**43 kg** of fish  
**20 kg** of meat  
**20** branches of browse  
are delivered throughout the zoo, feeding over **4,200** animals.

**1,017**   
ice cream cones are consumed.

**282**   
people ride the carousel.

**30°C**   
high temperature with clear skies.

## FIELD NOTES

# Together for wildlife and people

DATE → JULY 31, 2024  
LOCATION → ACROSS SIX COUNTRIES



**F**or decades, the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo has advanced conservation through science, innovation, and collaboration to conserve threatened species and restore balance between wildlife and human life. In 2024, thanks to generous supporters like you, this work spanned 15 conservation

programs across six countries. From releasing head-started burrowing owls in Alberta to protecting one of the last remaining hippo populations in Ghana, these efforts reflect a shared belief that conservation works—and that together, we can create lasting change.

On July 31, 2024, critical work for conservation was happening around the world ...



# A Towering Effort

LOCATION → CALGARY, ALBERTA

In a quiet corner of the zoo, a team of Animal Care, Health & Welfare staff gathers to review the day's plans. The final piece of a long-anticipated puzzle has just clicked into place: a specialized trailer—one of the only ones in Canada—is secured. It's tall, safe, and ready to carry precious cargo across the country.

That cargo is 'Amani', a four-year-old female Masai giraffe preparing to make the journey from the Toronto Zoo to her new home in Calgary. Her move is part of the Species Survival Plan (SSP), a collaborative effort among accredited zoos to protect endangered species. With wild populations of Masai giraffes down by more than 50% in recent decades, every carefully planned move matters.

Amani is a promising match for 'Nabo'—Canada's only unrelated male Masai giraffe and, by all accounts, the most eligible bachelor in the country. Their pairing could play a vital role in the future of their species.

Now that the trailer is confirmed, the next phase can begin. It will be

delivered to Toronto, where Amani's care team will begin introducing her to it—slowly, gently, and with plenty of positive reinforcement. The goal is to make the experience as calm and familiar as possible before the long journey ahead.

Back in Calgary, staff begin refining transport logistics and veterinary protocols. Every detail is considered: rest stops, feeding schedules, emergency contacts, and even supplemental heat for the fall weather, when the move will take place. It will require a chase vehicle, a live-stream camera, and a team of dedicated professionals traveling alongside her.

As the day winds down, the team reflects on the progress made. The trailer is ready. The training is about to begin. The path forward is clear. It's not the day Amani arrives—but it's the day her journey truly begins.

*"We're hoping for a tall tale of romance between Amani and Nabo as a successful breeding pair. Amani's arrival is a significant boost for our tower's well-being and plays a vital role in the SSP for Masai giraffes."*

**Colleen Baird,**  
Director of Animal Care, Health & Welfare



FIELD NOTES

## World Ranger Day on Mt. Kenya

LOCATION → RAGATI-CHEHE FOREST, MT. KENYA AND NAIROBI, KENYA



Today, July 31, is World Ranger Day—a global moment to honour the dedication and bravery of rangers who protect the planet's most vulnerable ecosystems. In Kenya, these guardians of the wild are on the frontlines of conservation, and today, their work is especially visible in the Ragati-Chehe Forest of Mt. Kenya.

Patrols set out early, boots crunching along forest trails. Camera traps are checked, tracks are noted, and signs of illegal activity are recorded. At the heart of this effort is the Mountain Bongo Security Site, officially established earlier this year.

This remote base—equipped with solar power, water storage, and accommodations—has become a vital hub for this work. It allows rangers from the Kenya Forest Service, Kenya Wildlife Service, and community scouts to stay longer in the field, covering

more ground in their mission to protect the Critically Endangered mountain bongo, of which fewer than 80 remain in the wild. The site also plays a key role in preparing for the species' future reintroduction into this historic range.

Just beyond the forest edge, students in 22 schools are part of something special. Through Wildlife Nature Conservation Clubs, they're learning about the mountain bongo and the ecosystems they call home. These clubs, supported by the Kenya Mountain Bongo Partnership, blend science, storytelling, and hands-on conservation, nurturing the next generation of environmental stewards.

As the sun sets over Mt. Kenya, the spotlight shifts to Nairobi. At the Muthaiga Country Club, Donna Sheppard, Conservation Program Manager, takes the stage. Based in Kenya, Donna leads the Kenya Mountain Bongo Partnership's field-



based conservation efforts. Her talk, *Reviving a Forest Flagship Species*, shares stories from the field, insights from traditional ecological knowledge, and the power of community-driven conservation. It's a moment to reflect, to connect, and to inspire.

Today isn't a milestone day—but it's a meaningful one. A day of quiet progress, shared purpose, and unwavering commitment to a wilder future.

*"To reintroduce the mountain bongo to their former ranges in Kenya, we will have to go very slowly. First releasing a few individuals into a likely habitat. If we're able to all come together and have one vision for it, with an understanding of how this can happen gradually, then we can hope to be successful with a reintroduction."*

**Donna Sheppard,** Conservation Program Manager



# Early Risers



LOCATION → CALGARY, ALBERTA



The Horticulture team arrives early, among the first on zoo grounds, and moves through the Dorothy Harvie Gardens pruning and weeding to keep this pollinator paradise bursting with colour and life. Today, onsite compost made from zoo kitchen scraps is used to nourish the soil, helping the vibrant blooms flourish in the heart of Calgary.

Meanwhile, just across the grounds, the Commissary team is busy behind the scenes, carefully preparing meticulously balanced diets tailored to the unique needs of every species at the zoo. From chopping sweet potatoes for 'Caleefa', the African crested

porcupine, to weighing out herring and squid for the king penguins, each day's diet is tailored with precision and care. Whether it's tropical browse for the Malayan tapirs or raw meat for the big cats, every bite supports the animal's growth, health, and enrichment.

# Conservation Connections

The second round of Wild Alberta Hub festivities kicks off on the Wild Canada Lawn. Families explore Alberta's rich biodiversity through hands-on activities and learning stations that

celebrate wetlands and the incredible species that call them home—like northern leopard frogs and whooping cranes—while showcasing the conservation efforts helping to safeguard them.



The Wilder Bunch parades through the zoo, celebrating wildlife and wild places with larger-than-life puppets created by Green Fools

Theatre Society. Visitors join the 10:00 a.m. performance to spot favourites like the polar bear, burrowing owl, and whooping crane.

FIELD NOTES

# Marmot Meadows

LOCATION → VANCOUVER ISLAND, BRITISH COLUMBIA



In the stillness of a high alpine meadow, the Vancouver Island marmot field team fans out across the slope, eyes scanning the terrain for signs of life. The morning begins like many others this summer—with boots on rocky trails, gear slung over shoulders, and quiet hope tucked into every step.

Today, the team is searching for evidence of natal burrows—ones that, based on past data and expert knowledge of the colony, may be used again this year for giving birth and raising pups. They look for subtle clues: fresh soil at the entrance, a cleared

path, the absence of spider webs. These signs suggest something might be stirring below.

Vancouver Island marmots are Canada's most endangered mammal. Each pup spotted is more than a data point—it's a symbol of progress. So far this season, four litters have been confirmed across the team's seven study sites. The pups are cautious, secretive, and quick to disappear at the first sign of movement. But that only makes each sighting more rewarding.

At one site, a pup emerges briefly from the burrow, its mother close behind. The team watches quietly, noting the behaviour, the location, the moment. It's a small glimpse into a fragile world, and a reminder of why this work matters.

Each pup helps refine population estimates and informs recovery strategies. It's part of a long-term effort to bring this species back from the brink: one burrow, one pup, one field day at a time.

Alongside marmot monitoring, the team also collects alpine plants for an exciting new collaboration with the Toronto Zoo. Fourteen species known to be part of the marmot's wild diet are being analyzed for their nutritional content—insights that could help improve care for marmots living under human care.

As the sun dips behind the ridgeline, the team begins the hike out. The meadow is quiet again, but it's not empty. Somewhere beneath the rocks and roots, the next generation of marmots is just beginning to stir.



*"Anyone who has slipped and slogged their way up a mountain slope to survey a marmot meadow would likely agree—the joy of seeing Vancouver Island marmots as they lounge on boulders, munch alpine flowers, or play at the entrance to their burrow is worth every step. That joy is made possible by the dedicated efforts of so many who came together to prevent this species from disappearing. I'm proud to play a part in ensuring their future."*

**Kelly Swan, Conservation Research Associate**

# Animal Health

LOCATION → CALGARY, ALBERTA

**I**n Penguin Plunge, members of the Animal Health team perform a follow-up health check on the Humboldt penguin chick that hatched on June 26. This second exam includes a weight check, eye exam, second dose of the West Nile vaccine, and a blood draw to determine sex. The chick is then gently returned to its burrow, where penguin parents 'Penelope' and 'Chico' are waiting.



LOCATION → STRATHMORE, ALBERTA

**B**eyond the zoo gates, we care for animals in conservation programs at offsite facilities like the Archibald Biodiversity Centre (ABC).

This year's head-started cohort of burrowing owlets is settling into life at the ABC. After receiving full health exams earlier this week—including West Nile vaccines, bloodwork, and coloured leg bands for ID—today they're exploring their overwinter home and adjusting to their new surroundings.

Seventeen Vancouver Island marmot pups were born at ABC this spring. The pups are now busy learning from their parents, exploring their habitat, and enjoying a diet of greens, branches, and the occasional flower as they grow stronger each day.



The whooping cranes are getting comfortable in their fresh summer digs! This new summer habitat boasts a sloped pool, perfect for their wading and foraging needs. There is also opaque netting along the perimeter fencing to offer some privacy for nesting pairs.



*Conservation breeding and head-starting efforts for burrowing owls, Vancouver Island marmots, northern leopard frogs and whooping cranes take place at the Archibald Biodiversity Centre, located just outside rural Strathmore, Alberta. The remoteness of the facility minimizes the exposure of these species to people, increasing the chances for them to survive and breed in the wild.*



## FIELD NOTES

# A Night on the Prairie

LOCATION → NEAR MEDICINE HAT, ALBERTA



**A**s daylight fades, the prairie begins to stir. While most of the world winds down, the burrowing owl field team is just getting started.

Tonight's mission is delicate and deliberate: locate fledgling owlets—both from wild nests and from head-started parents released earlier this spring—and collect the data that will help guide the future of this endangered species. With flashlights in hand and headlamps aglow, the team moves quietly across the grasslands, returning to known burrow sites mapped earlier in the season.

Burrowing owls are small, long-legged grassland birds that nest underground in abandoned burrows. They've been part of Canada's prairie ecosystem for thousands of years, but today, they occupy less than a third of their historical range. In the last four decades, their population in Canada has declined by more than 90%, due to habitat loss, low prey availability, and other pressures.

Through the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo's head-starting program, the youngest owlets—those least likely to survive—are brought into human care for the winter, then released the following spring.

This year's head-started cohort has already been taken into human care. Tonight, the team is focused on monitoring the remaining fledglings from both wild nests and those raised by head-started parents—tracking their development and collecting data that will inform future conservation strategies. When a fledgling is located, it's gently collected and processed. Under the soft glow of lights, the team records weight, feather length, and body condition. Each owl is fitted with a leg band for future identification.

It's quiet work, done under stars and moonlight. But it's essential.



Each measurement contributes to a clearer picture of how burrowing owls are doing in the wild. Each banded fledgling becomes part of a long-term effort to track survival, movement, and success.

As the night wraps up, the team gathers their equipment and begins the walk back across the prairie. The data collected tonight will help shape decisions in the months ahead—about habitat, head-starting, and how best to support this species on the brink.

*"Every year I look forward to heading out onto the prairie with the field team to start our surveys for wild owls. It's always exciting to see how many nests we find, and to see how many offspring from the previous year's head-started owls have returned."*

**Graham Dixon-MacCallum, Conservation Research Population Ecologist**

# World-Class Care

LOCATION → CALGARY, ALBERTA



## HIPPOPOTAMUS

'Lobi' opens wide for his daily dental care routine. Prone to gingivitis on his lower canines, he receives expert oral care from the Animal Care, Health & Welfare team—starting with a rinse to clear out leftover food. A gum massage and inspection follow, offering

both health benefits and a moment of relaxation. A human-sized toothbrush helps reach his gums for a deep clean, and a syringe of hydrogen peroxide keeps his teeth in top shape for one of his favourite activities: chomping.

## RED PANDAS

The red panda pack enjoys a fresh delivery of bamboo—one of their all-time favourite foods. Shipped from the West Coast and carefully stored in a climate-controlled cooler, the bundles are packed with leafy greens our red pandas love. While bamboo arrives as long, woody stalks, they are only interested in the tender leaves. Red pandas eat up to 30% of their body weight daily, and females like

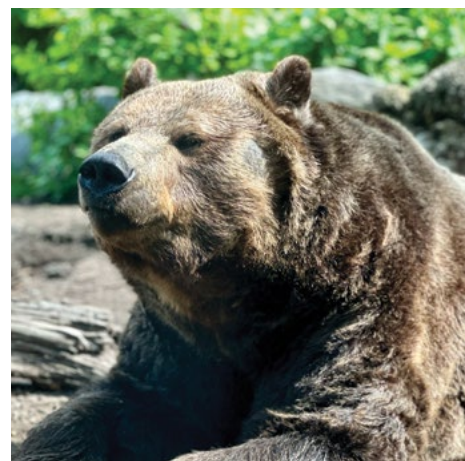


'Udaya' have been known to nibble through as many as 20,000 leaves in a single day.

## GRIZZLY BEAR

At 34 years old, 'Skoki' is considered a very senior grizzly bear—but you wouldn't know it by how quickly he trots over for training. His enthusiasm for target and injection sessions helps the Animal Care, Health & Welfare team monitor age-related concerns like arthritis and overgrown claws. While he's not currently on any medications, these trainings allow his caregivers to provide the best

possible care as he ages. Skoki especially enjoys his favourite reward, salmon oil, and his calm cooperation reflects the strong bond he shares with his care team.



## ROCK HYRAX

First-time mom 'Oshana' continues to show strong maternal instincts as she cares for her lively trio of rock hyrax pups, now just under four weeks old. While the pups are still nursing, they've already started

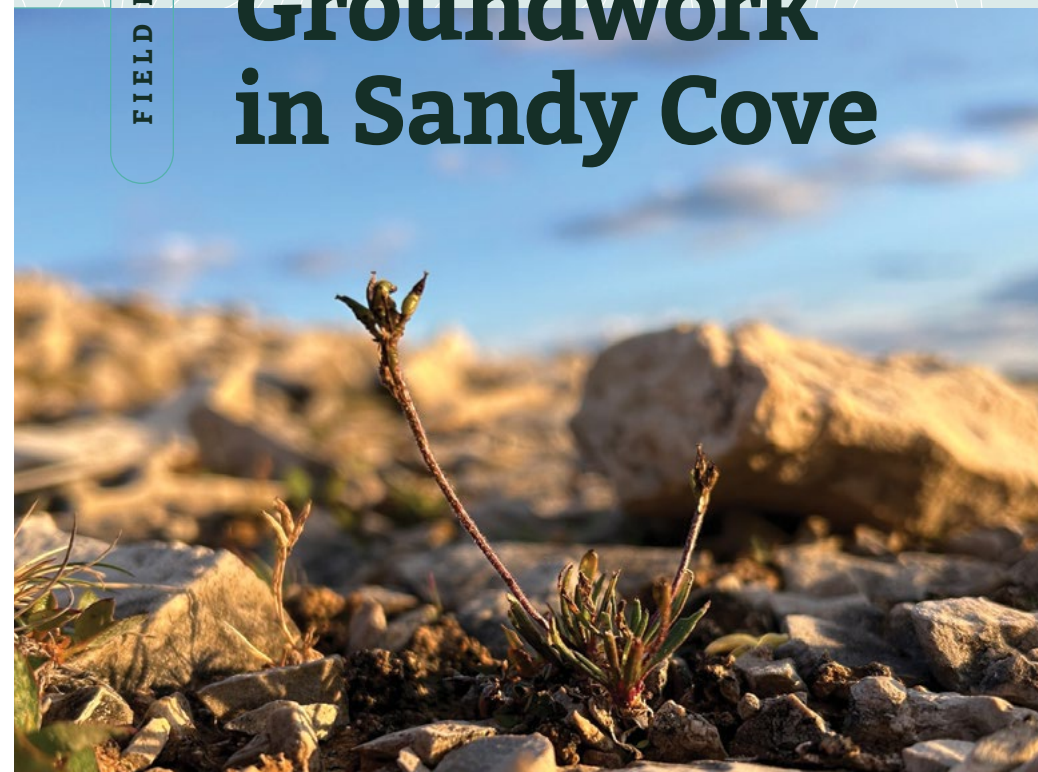
nibbling on grasses, leaves, and shoots. First-time dad 'Kenickie' keeps a patient watch over his energetic offspring—sneaking in the occasional nap or snack break (something we can all relate to).



FIELD NOTES

# Laying Groundwork in Sandy Cove

LOCATION → SANDY COVE, NEWFOUNDLAND



survive. They talk through logistics: how to remove debris and unusable soil, plans on collecting seeds and clippings to test propagation techniques, and how to prepare the site for future planting.

This is the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo's first dedicated priority conservation program for plants—and the first step in a long-term effort to restore one of Canada's most fragile ecosystems. This project is not just about restoring the land but also about reconnecting communities with cultural practices tied to the landscape and building relationships with our new partners who have been working to preserve this incredible ecosystem for more than 20 years. The project hasn't been publicly announced yet, but the groundwork is underway.

Back at the trailhead, Donnell pauses to look out over the limestone flats. The site is quiet now, but the potential is clear. With the right conditions—and the right care—this landscape can support life that exists nowhere else. And that work starts here.

The wind is steady off the Strait of Belle Isle as Donnell Gasbarrini, Conservation Program Manager (Eastern Canada), steps onto the rocky terrain near Sandy Cove, Newfoundland. She's here with partners from Memorial University of Newfoundland and the Limestone

exposed, and nutrient-poor, they support a surprising diversity of life, including three endangered plants found nowhere else on Earth: Long's Braya, Fernald's Braya, and the Barrens Willow.

Along with these three species, there are seven other plant species-at-risk that have specialized adaptations for life on the limestone barrens.

In addition to being globally rare, this ecosystem faces significant threats—from construction, quarrying, and oil exploration to biological challenges like invasive species and climate change. Decades of disturbance have left parts of the landscape damaged and overgrown with

species that don't belong.

Today's visit is about building partnerships and planning. Donnell and the team walk the site, take notes, and discuss how to re-establish the barren conditions these rare plants need to

Barrens Species at Risk Recovery Team, on which she serves, to assess a former quarry site—one that will soon become the focus of a major restoration effort.

The limestone barrens are unlike any other ecosystem in Canada. Harsh,

*"I've always been interested in the ability of life to exist under extreme conditions. These plant species are fascinating because of their unique ability to survive in a, by definition, "barren" landscape, where their adaptations enable them to thrive where most species could not even survive. As climate change continues to alter the world, there will be a lot to learn from these species, but first we must ensure that they do not disappear in the meantime."*

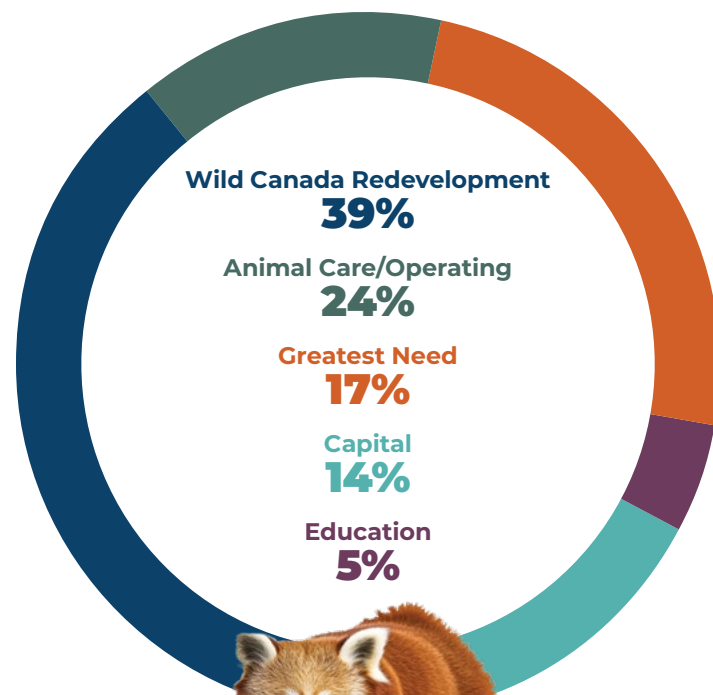
**Donnell Gasbarrini, Conservation Program Manager (Eastern Canada)**

# Not only does the work you support span the globe—our supporters do too.

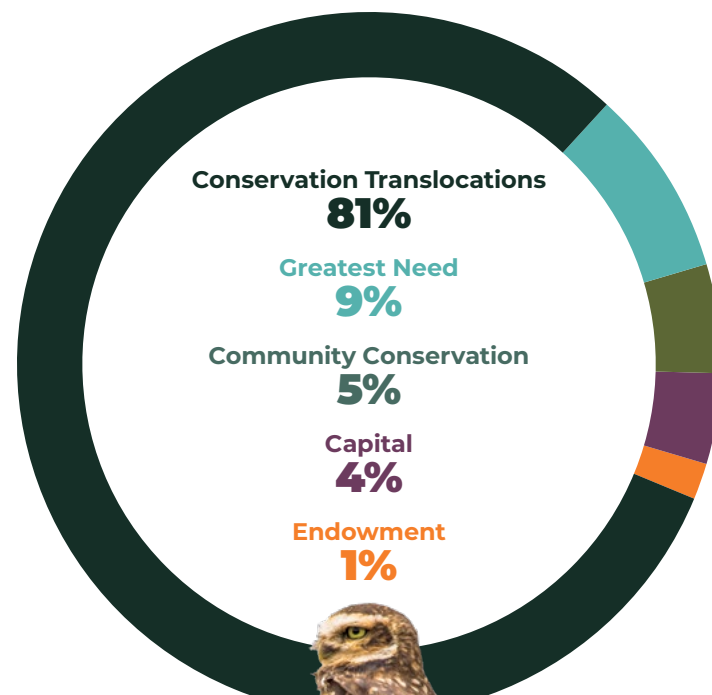
While this report highlights just one ordinary day—July 31—your generosity reflects a much bigger story. In 2024, donors came together from 7 countries, 10 Canadian provinces, two territories, and 28 states. A powerful reminder that protecting wildlife is truly a global effort.

Together you gave **\$11,305,257**

Total Calgary Zoological Society Giving  
**\$8,880,601**



Total Wilder Institute Giving  
**\$2,424,656**



## Together for Wildlife

In this year's report, we set out to tell the story of one day at your Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo. Nothing was unusual or different about July 31. There were the same animals to care for and details to manage to help thousands of visitors create lifelong memories and experience the wonder of our natural world.

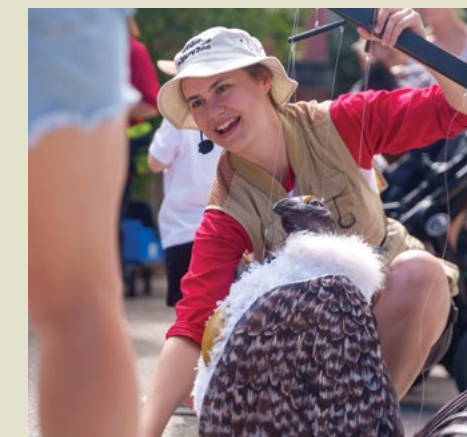


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On any given day, work crews are enhancing habitats to support animal welfare and enrich visitor experiences. This year alone, Penguin Plunge received upgrades including new flooring, lighting, and a filtration system. Water filtration was improved

in the Malayan tapir habitat, viewing windows were replaced and repaired in the indoor western lowland gorilla space, and a major revitalization of the African Savannah Yard was launched to create new facilities for Hartmann's mountain zebras, ostriches, and more.

And on any given day, people are coming together to advocate for wildlife—meeting with elected officials to encourage support for important legislation, collaborating with Indigenous knowledge holders and local landowners, and helping to ferry tiny tadpoles back out into the wild.



On any given day, volunteers create memorable moments and exceptional visitor experiences. They offer directions, share biofacts, support school programs, and even take 'Sheldon' the leopard tortoise out for a stroll. Whether helping with special events or habitat care, their passion is felt in every corner of the zoo.

From right here in your backyard to Kenya and beyond, we are working to create a better future for wildlife. While this report focuses on a single day, conservation work takes place 365 days a year and YOU make it all possible.

### A YEAR OF MILESTONES AND MEMORIES

This report captures just a glimpse of all that unfolded in 2024. It was a year marked by new beginnings, heartfelt farewells, and enduring legacies. Joy and hope arrived in the form of remarkable births and hatches, while new arrivals from accredited zoos across North America enriched the diversity of our zoo family. We also bid

fond farewells to animals embarking on new adventures, and shared heartfelt goodbyes with cherished individuals, young and old, who touched countless lives and inspired action for their species. Their legacies live on through our unwavering commitment to learn, improve, and pursue excellence in animal welfare and conservation.



# WAYS TO GIVE

Financial support for the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo can be provided in a variety of ways: from annual gifts and ZooCare contributions, to donations for special projects and planned gifts. We invite you to review our projects and programs to see what might interest you.

[WILDERINSTITUTE.ORG](http://WILDERINSTITUTE.ORG)

[CALGARYZOO.COM](http://CALGARYZOO.COM)

For more information, please contact  
the Development Office at the  
Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo.



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