

## **Thoughts on attending a conference and possible reasons to host a conference.**

Conferences are one of the many opportunities provided through membership in AZAD. Here is some feedback on the 2005 conference at the National Zoo in Washington, DC. Watch for tidbits from the two regional conferences in 2006 (Columbus Zoo and Arizona Senora Desert Museum). Why not consider hosting a conference?

### **Delegate Report**

By Jan Agler, Delegate, reprinted from the Nov 05 issue of **Docent Newsletter, The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium**

The conference was well organized. Every day was loaded with fun, learning and communication. The two main speakers, JoGayle Howard, DVM, PhD, and Dave Wildt, PhD, talked about artificial insemination at the zoo and in the wild involving cheetahs, giant pandas, clouded leopards, Florida panthers and black-footed ferrets. The National Zoo is involved with five breeding facilities in China for giant pandas and is working with many other scientists on different strategies to understand reproduction and to preserve some of the most endangered species on earth.

### **AZAD Conference Review**

By Jane Van Burkleo, reprinted from the Nov/Dec 2005 issue of **Condor Comments, Oklahoma City Zoo Docent Newsletter**

Docents who have never been to an AZAD Convention have asked me, "What is AZAD?"

AZAD is meeting new friends, gaining knowledge and insight into the world of animal conservation, and having fun. Two noted researchers spoke at this year's convention. JoGayle Howard, DVM, PhD, is a world-renowned scientist in the Department of Reproductive Sciences at the Smithsonian's National Zoo.

Dr. Howard has more than 20 years experience in reproductive research involving rare and endangered species. Her experience includes field studies and conservation training programs in Africa, Thailand, and China as well as collaborating with more than 40 zoos in the U.S. and abroad. Her studies generally focus on fertility, infertility, and the role of reproductive technologies in promoting reproduction. Dr. Howard has played a leadership role in developing artificial insemination protocols for rare carnivore species including the cheetah, leopard cat, puma, and black-footed ferret.

She held the audience in the "palm of her hand" as she spoke to us of her fascinating endeavors with animals.

Dave Wildt, PhD, was banquet speaker and he was equally fascinating as he spoke to us on the topic, "Zoos and Science – How does a Baby Giant Panda Contribute to Conservation?"

Today's zoos serve as "science centers," resources for studying thousands of species that never are studied in usual venues such as universities or government agencies. Zoo science is a special discipline because of the varied and unique species involved, but also the opportunity to cooperate and work in some of the most interesting and remote wild places on the planet.

From his decade of experience in China, Dr. Wildt discussed how animals in zoos (including the new infant panda in Washington) are contributing to the conservation of one of the world's most beloved species – the giant panda and its habitat in China.

Both of these featured speakers were great choices not only for their expertise in animal research, but because their communication skills were superb.

I have been interested in the Golden Lion Tamarin Conservation Program sponsored by the National Zoo since I first heard about it in 1995 while attending my first AZAD Convention in Portland, OR.

The zoo is one of five zoos participating in this program, which consists of a designated area on the zoo grounds being marked as GLT (Golden Lion Tamarin) territory. Zookeepers place nesting boxes in this

spacious area and the GLTs are allowed to free range. No physical barriers exist so occasionally one will wander “out of bounds” but a tiny microchip has been placed under the skin to signal keepers of their location(s). With the aid of volunteer behavior observers, the National Zoo has been able to collect valuable data on captive GLTs before they are reintroduced back into the Brazilian Rain Forest. Over 1,200 GLTs are in the wild because of these combined efforts.

An AZAD participant can go away “stuffed” with new knowledge about animal conservation in just three days of meetings and speakers because of the variety and range of animal topics.

*This was my ninth AZAD Convention and in many ways, the best!*

### **Volunteer Connections, Nov 2005 Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens**

Betty Choate

We heard inspiring messages from noted conservationists at the opening and closing sessions and at especially arranged luncheons. We attended workshops and papers. We met and shared experiences with old friends and new from across the country. We spent one day at the fabulous National Zoo viewing their extensive collection (including the new mother Panda and the free ranging Golden Lion Tamarins) and attending special programs throughout the park. We took tours in and around Washington and still had time to shop in the well-stock Wildside Room and take chances on the sweepstakes and raffle items in the Hospitality Room. If there was any free time left we were right at the edge of the Mall and could visit the wonderful museums and monuments that DC is noted for. It was a great conference. I would encourage all Educators to attend future ones.

**Volunteer Voice** (the monthly newsletter of, by and for the volunteers of the **Denver Zoological Foundation**) Nov 2005  
Anne Nickerson

The theme of the 2005 National Conference was “Celebrate, Study and Protect!” One of our volunteers told me a subtitle could have been “Sex! Sex! Sex!” I would add “in the Animal Kingdom.” Of course, this was all related to the conservation, protection and reproduction of endangered and other species. The importance of this was stressed by keynote speakers, nineteen workshops and papers presented by the various zoo volunteers, and twelve pre- and post-conference trips.

AZAD conferences are a wonderful way to see the “big picture” of the variety of duties and the organization of volunteers around the country. For instance, at the Smithsonian National Zoo, anyone who gives time at the zoo is called a Volunteer. Their training is either as an Exhibit Interpreter, which is very specific training for only one exhibit, or Zoo Guide, with is more general training. It is very interesting to meet and visit with other volunteers and compare notes. Other details such as training requirements and time commitments were discussed and information exchanged.

I had three main goals for this conference. Some of the activities related to achieving these goals were:

1. To gain current information and updates about animals. The Pittsburgh docents presented a workshop on the active participation of the volunteers in the birth-watch for the baby giraffe and African baby elephants at their zoo. Volunteers covered the hours that the keepers were not at work (4 p.m. to 8 a.m.), using four four-hour shifts to cover those hours. This was definitely a gratifying joint effort by the keepers and the volunteers. They also showed a video of the successful birth of their second baby elephant, born in 1999. Their previous baby elephant was born in 1997, so each year they have a zoo wide birthday party celebration for both elephants, with the zoo guests in attendance.

In addition, I was lucky to spend a day at the Smithsonian’s National Zoo Conservation and Research Center, which is a premier research and breeding facility. This was limited to only 70 registrants, and they had about 150 requests. The Center is only open one day a year to the public, but we were given a special day behind

the scenes. We saw maned wolves, scimitar horned oryx, Bali mynahs, red pandas and clouded leopards. We also had special guided tours of the facility, which is on 3,200 acres. We visited the hospital, reproductive science labs, and other research programs. One of their scientists did a special presentation about their activities in trying to understand and conserve endangered species and their habitats.

2. To gain information about other volunteer programs. This was accomplished by workshops and the informal networking with the other participants. "Are We Bored Yet? Giving the Effective Animal Chat," was presented by the Central Park Zoo (NYC) docents and described their programs, which were very similar to our Ask Me program, but more structured. Another workshop by the Smithsonian's National Zoo volunteers shared information about the evaluation techniques and tools they use for staff and volunteers. These tools include self-assessment, peer assessment (like our mentoring programs), interpretation techniques, and the public feedback.

Another workshop by the Smithsonian's National Zoo gave ideas for effective and fun interpretative training. Their keys to effective interpretation included: to have strong command of the subject matter, to know your audience and have the ability to relate to them, and to have the techniques to best reach and engage your audience. Materials were given out about different games and activities that can be used in training volunteers to improve their interpretive skills.

The informal networking that is done throughout the conference is also essential, fun and informative. These discussions and our interest in each other's programs go on at meals, bus and metro rides to activities, between sessions, or any time a group forms of volunteers from more than one zoo. We like to share information.

3. To have fun

Actually, all of the above activities contributed to meeting his goal. Some specific activities, though, included the Ice Breaker and Zoo Day. This year, the Ice Breaker was in the evening at the National Museum of Natural History. This dessert event gave us the opportunity to stroll privately through the many premier exhibits, and to shop at the Museum shops. We were even able to see the famous Hope Diamond - - "up close and personal!"

The Zoo Day is always, to me, a highlight of the conference. This is the day that our host zoo gives us a full day of special keeper talks and behind the scenes activities, as well as lunch at the zoo and snacks. In addition, the volunteers wear their zoo uniforms. Our uniforms were of positive interest to other volunteers. They liked our vests, especially when we shared the Council action this summer of making vest optional from Memorial Day to Labor Day - as long as we have on the official shirt. The other part of the fun was the wonderful sightseeing opportunities that Washington, D.C., offers, including the government buildings, monuments, wonderful museums, historic sites, and attending a play at the historic Ford Theater.

This only relates a small part of what is involved in a National Conference of AZAD. More details are available in Conference Proceedings, a book that contains the conference papers.

### **Docent Doings, Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium**

Nov 2005

Betty Borgman

Our AZAD delegation certainly enjoyed our journey to the nation's capital. The pandas were a special treat. The cub was not on direct view while we were there, but live video feeds were shown in several spots through the zoo.

Tian Tian, the male, was quite active during our visit. We all got quite a view of him chomping away and then climbing into his tree to take a siesta.

It is always so interesting and energizing to hear about other docent programs and methods.

## **Utah's Hogle Zoo**

### **The Volunteer Connection** Oct 2005

Suzanne Blockburger, Volunteer Coordinator

The AZAD conference was an educational and fun experience, and it was great to meet so many volunteers from across the country. Over 600 people were in attendance from 57 zoos and aquariums!

The Docents and I went on one of the pre-conference trips to the National Aquarium in Baltimore, which employs great interpretive theming. Each small exhibit is devoted to different adaptations – mouth parts, movement, defense, camouflage – rather than the more typical “coral reef” displays you generally see. Working your way up through the building, you emerge at the top in a rain forest exhibit. From there, an escalator takes you from the high rain forest to the seashore, and then plunges you into their big Atlantic reef exhibit. As you descend, the ambient sounds change from birds and monkeys to crashing surf. The large reef tanks are donut-shaped, allowing the visitors to spiral their way down the middle on a ramp, surrounded on all sides by water. You make your way down reaching the open ocean where you are surrounded by sharks and rays.

Zoo Day was held at the Smithsonian's National Zoo. The poor zoo guests were so confused that day, trying to determine which Docents work there, and which were merely visiting! Unfortunately, we were not able to see the baby panda but we were able to see so many different animals. Many are species our zoos have in common – cheetah, golden lion tamarins, Grevy's zebra, butterflies – but we also enjoyed seeing leaf-cutting ants, the Komodo dragon, Asian elephants and naked mole rates. One really exciting exhibit houses orb-weaving spiders but without any type of barrier between you and the spider. I was very interested to see it, although not interested in lingering.

The Friends of National Zoo (FONZ) did a great job of putting on the conference, and I wish I had been able to see more of the papers presented. The theme was “Celebrate, Study, Protect” and you can tell this is a philosophy the National Zoo embraces.