



San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance

# JOURNAL

MAY/JUNE 2022

Protecting  
the Unique  
Ecosystems  
of the Pacific  
Islands





# San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance JOURNAL

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## The Safari Park Turns 50



In 2022, SDZWA has many reasons to celebrate all we collectively make possible for wildlife. This month, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the San Diego Zoo Safari Park and its indelible legacy on our San Diego community and the world. From generation to generation, the Safari Park has given us a unique and innovative place to connect with wildlife and explore the beauty of the natural world, all while creating lifelong memories, together. As we reflect on half a century of global conservation successes, we are grateful to have the steadfast support of our community by our side—including every one of you—as we continue to address the challenges of today and tomorrow. We hope you join us at the Safari Park this month as we celebrate its golden anniversary, and help us usher in the next 50 years of wildlife conservation.

As a global conservation organization, our two “front doors” at the San Diego Zoo and Safari Park help propel our efforts around the globe. We use what we learn about wildlife care here at home and take it with us as we collaborate with our partners. In this issue, we will share some of the transformative work currently underway in our Pacific Islands conservation hub, looking at efforts with the Galápagos pink iguana program and our partnership with the Hawai'i Endangered Bird Conservation Program. With insights from Maggie Reinbold, SDZWA director of community engagement, we explore the role of collaboration and community in creating unity for conservation organizations.

Each page of our *Journal* edition this month fills me with inspiration and hope for what we can accomplish for wildlife, when we work together, to create a world where all life thrives. Thank you for joining us on our journey and for being an ally for wildlife.

Onward,

Paul A. Baribault  
President and Chief Executive Officer



# May/June 2022

Vol. 2 No. 3

**Journey Through Our Conservation Work** This issue of the *San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance Journal* focuses on the Pacific Islands hub. To learn more about our collaborative conservation programs around the world, including our wildlife care at the San Diego Zoo and San Diego Zoo Safari Park, visit [sdzwa.org](http://sdzwa.org).



## Contents

- 2 President/CEO's Letter
- 3 By the Numbers
- 4 Findings
- 6 Meet Our Team
- 8 Hot Topics
- 26 Events
- 28 Wildlife Explorers Page
- 29 Last Look

## Cover Story

**10**  
**Life on the Edge**  
Living on top of a volcano isn't the only challenge facing the Galápagos pink iguana. Find out how SDZWA is helping this species maintain balance.

## Features

**14**  
**Hope Takes Wing**  
Rescue and recovery are the focus of our conservation scientists' efforts to combat Avian malaria in Hawaii's forest birds.

**18**  
**A Golden Anniversary**  
The San Diego Zoo Safari Park turns 50 this year, and its past—and future—are dedicated to wildlife conservation and connecting the community to nature.

**24**  
**Visualize It**  
Take a closer look at how SDZWA is rebuilding sustainable populations of critically endangered wildlife in the Pacific.

On the Cover: Galápagos pink iguana *Conolophus marthae*. Photo by: Tui De Roy / MINDEN PICTURES





A Golden Anniversary for the

# SAFARI PARK

# 50 YEARS

of Conservation, Community, and Connection to Wildlife

BY PEGGY SCOTT | PHOTOS BY SDZWA

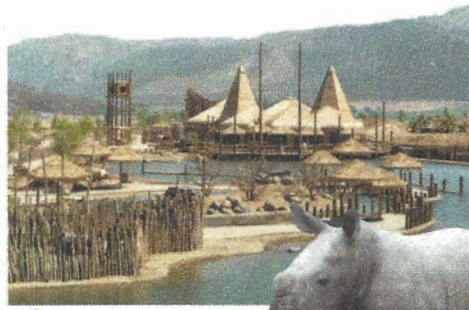
**E**ighteen-hundred acres of land in the San Pasqual Valley and a vision of what wildlife conservation could become. That's what Dr. Charles Schroeder had back in 1969 when we broke ground for the Wild Animal Park, Dr. Schroeder's "zoo of the future." As executive director of the Zoological Society of San Diego, Dr. Schroeder had big plans for his "natural environment zoo," with its expansive, multispecies savanna habitats and revolutionary approach to wildlife management that would forever change what zoos would look like.





**1969**

Zoological Society of San Diego President Anderson Borthwick signs agreement with San Diego Mayor Frank Curran to establish a wildlife preserve.



**1972**

On May 10, the 1,800-acre preserve opens to the public.



**1972**

The first white rhino calf, "Zibulo," is born at the Park.

**1981**  
"Thor" is the first elephant birth at the Safari Park.



## 1970s



**1970**

Dr. Charles Schroeder lays out the route for Wgasa Bush Line Railway.

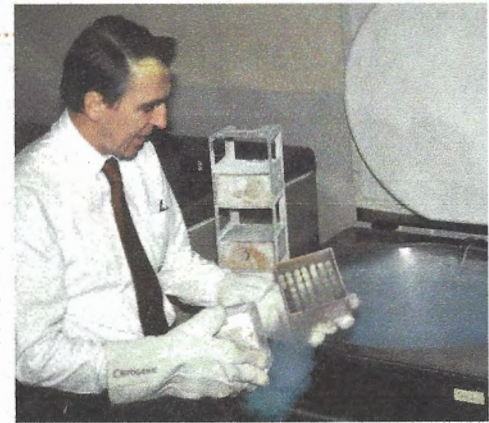
**1971**

Southern white rhinos arrive at the Wild Animal Park (now known as the San Diego Zoo Safari Park).



**1974**

The Center for the Reproduction of Endangered Species (CRES) is established at the San Diego Zoo; relocates to the Arnold and Mabel Beckman Center for Conservation Research in 2004.



## 1980s

The San Diego Zoo Safari Park, as it is now known, opened to the public on March 10, 1972, and took the industry-leading wildlife care program that made the San Diego Zoo world famous and expanded upon it, rewriting what was thought to be possible for the fields of wildlife health and conservation. The Safari Park was started on inspiration, and that foresight continues to this day.

### The Early Years

When the Safari Park opened in 1972, some 3,000 visitors attended the grand opening, and they marveled at the unique opportunity to experience wildlife offered by the Wgasa Bush Line Railway. The Wgasa monorail system took passengers into the Safari Park's savanna habitats, offering a safe, up-close way to view

an array of wildlife—including some of the Safari Park's first residents: six African savanna elephants (two more would soon join them); sable antelope, greater kudu, and gemsbok; as well as a group of 18 southern white rhinos, among them 8 that were born at the San Diego Zoo. The first white rhino calf was soon born at their new home—a male named "Zibulo" on October 11 of that year. The Safari Park's Nairobi Village was designed to complement the monorail experience, recreating a little bit of Africa right here in San Diego County.

The Safari Park experienced many firsts in its early years; quickly receiving two Bean Awards from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums for its work with North African and Abyssinian ground hornbills. The first Przewalski's horses arrived in 1973, and the

first wapiti the next year. In 1974, an expansion took place that would guide the Zoo and Safari Park—and the organization that we now call San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance—for the decades to come: the establishment of the Center for the Reproduction of Endangered Species (CRES) at the San Diego Zoo by physician and mammalian cytogenetics pioneer Dr. Kurt Benirschke, and then-San Zoo Diego Director Chuck Bieler. The foresight of our scientists back then resonates to this day.

"Fifty years ago, Dr. Kurt Benirschke began storing cells from animals in the Frozen Zoo® for purposes not yet understood," explains Dr. Nadine Lamberski, SDZWA's Chief Conservation and Wildlife Health Officer. "But he knew they would be a valuable resource one day. Today, we have increased the genetic diversity of





**1990**  
The Nativescapes Garden, Old World Succulent Garden, and Water Wise Garden open.



**1996**  
Mombasa Lagoon opens.



**2003**  
The Safari Park becomes home to seven African elephants from Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). One member of the herd, Ndulamitsi, gave birth six months later to Vus'musi, and we've welcomed 13 more calves in subsequent years.

# 1990s

# 2000s



**1992**  
Conservation program-bred California condors are reintroduced to their native ranges.



**1994**  
Lorikeet Landing opens at the Safari Park.

**1999**  
SDZWA opens the US's largest off-habitat bird reproduction complex near the Safari Park.

**2000**  
Condor Ridge opens.

**2004**  
Lion Camp opens.



two endangered species, the Przewalski's horse and black-footed ferret, by using biomaterials stored decades ago. What is more amazing than that?"

### Success in the Skies

To see one of the Safari Park's earliest conservation success stories, you have to look up. Once ranging from British Columbia to northern Baja California, Mexico, condor populations dipped as low as 22 individuals in the 1980s. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service brought the remaining birds into managed care at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park and the Los Angeles Zoo. Through careful breeding at the Park and by our partners, enough chicks hatched to allow the first reintroductions of

California condors in 1992. By 2001, 100 California condor chicks had hatched at the Safari Park. In 2012, California condors Sisquoc and Shatash had become the first pair that the public could view incubating an egg. Condor Cam, set up in their habitat and nesting areas at the Safari Park, gave viewers an up-close look at their daily life. Saticoy, their offspring, hatched for a live worldwide audience on March 10, 2012. Today, more than 330 California condors soar the skies of their native ranges.

### Advances in Conservation Science

As it was becoming clear that the world was losing its wildlife and habitats, the scientists at CRES focused on research to improve wildlife

population numbers via Species Survival Plans (SSPs) and breeding programs. And if there is a species that embodies the importance of maintaining a Wildlife Biodiversity Bank, it's hard to look beyond the northern white rhinoceros. While the world's living population now stands at just two survivors of this subspecies, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance's Wildlife Biodiversity Bank contains genetic material from 12 northern white rhinos. An innovative in vitro fertilization/surrogacy project at the Nikita Kahn Rhino Rescue Center at the Safari Park resulted in the birth of a healthy male southern white rhino calf, named Edward, in 2019. With his big feet and wiggly ears, Edward was more than just an adorable addition to the crash. He proved



**2007**

"Journey Into Africa"—featuring biodiesel vehicles—replaces the Wgasa Bush Line Railway.



**2018**

Walkabout Australia opens.

**2010s**

## LOOKING AHEAD

Elephant Valley

**2010**

The Wild Animal Park becomes the "San Diego Zoo Safari Park," better representing the expanding array of experiences offered.



**2014**

Tull Family Tiger Trail opens.

that the scientific process, including IVF and surrogacy, works. He is a living, breathing symbol of hope for the future genetic recovery of the northern white rhino.

### Expanding to Share the World

The initial inspiration behind the Safari Park has continued to fuel its growth through new projects and expansion. Each new experience built upon the goal of creating the most naturalistic, state-of-the-art habitats possible. The Tull Family Tiger Trail, which opened in 2014, presented a whole new way to see—and hear—tigers. Walkabout Australia, debuting in 2018, brought with it the chance to see the only two platypuses outside Australia; as well

as a walk-through, open-access area inhabited by kangaroos. The Safari Park's vision and dedication to detail did not go unnoticed, as both Tiger Trail and Walkabout Australia received the prestigious "Exhibit of the Year" award from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Even with all its accomplishments and contributions to wildlife conservation, the Safari Park—and its wildlife care experts—weren't about to rest on their laurels. There was—and is—more to come.

### Looking Ahead

As the Safari Park enters its sixth decade—and beyond—we are planning for our next immersive wildlife experience, Elephant Valley. Exemplifying the Safari Park's dedication

to connecting people to wildlife and nature, the vast, 11-acre Elephant Valley is as much a place of community as it is a habitat for the largest land mammal on Earth. Elephant Valley takes guests into the heart of the African savanna, where they will be surrounded by our family of elephants, offering the incredible opportunity to create a powerful connection that will last a lifetime. Elephant Valley is an innovative expansion of the idea of what is possible in the world of wildlife conservation. And as a place where science and biotechnology work seamlessly with groundbreaking wildlife care, along with empathy and the desire for a world where all life thrives, the outlook for Dr. Schroeder's "zoo of the future" couldn't be brighter.