

The Delaware Zoological Society

Strategic Plan

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The Delaware Zoological Society (DZS) was established in 1979, initially for the purpose of supporting and promoting interests in wildlife in the State of Delaware. At the time, New Castle County was operating the Zoo. From its inception, the DZS had fundraising responsibilities, targeting major Zoo improvements, including exhibits and educational spaces. Soon it became integral to the success and future of the Brandywine Zoo. Today, the DZS operates the business administration and membership aspects of the Zoo which, in turn, support its considerable education and conservation initiatives.

For example, the Zoo Education Program promotes science with Zoo-related STEM activities, reaching students from Delaware's underserved communities through subsidized school field trips or in-class visits from the Traveling Zoo. Children who might otherwise never be exposed to wildlife and conservation develop an understanding of and appreciation for our natural world. In addition, the Traveling Zoo also offers education and support outside the classroom throughout the year with a variety of targeted programs specifically designed for venues that include schools, libraries, day care centers, senior communities, sporting events and festivals.

Mission

The Delaware Zoological Society is a dedicated partner of the Brandywine Zoo and supports its mission to engage in, and inspire wildlife conservation.

Vision

For every guest and every visit, we strive to inspire awe and action for wildlife.

DZS Core Values

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – essential to us is providing extraordinary experiences that are affordable, empowering, accessible, and create a just environment that is welcoming to all.

Stewardship – we are committed to live our conservation values which are executed in empathy-driven programs, our operations, and financial stewardship.

Community – we aim to address everyday challenges in environmental conservation holistically and recognize that collaboration with community partners is critical to empowering wildlife conservation, both individually or collectively.

Conservation – we support and participate in initiatives and programs that make conservation an everyday priority, connect people more deeply to wildlife, and support vital conservation research.

Inspiration – ignite action for conservation through extraordinary, immersive, relevant experiences.

Financial Stability - we manage our financial resources and development goals in ways that inspire trust and demonstrate accountability to the community.

Staff Empowerment - we are committed to cultivating talented, diverse staff who will become leaders in our field.

Brandywine Zoo History—Key Milestones

The Brandywine Zoo started with a different name and over the years, its boundaries have changed. In 1886, following the recommendations of a survey by Frederick Law Olmstead, the renowned landscape architect, the Wilmington Board of Park Commissioners began planning Brandywine Park under the direction of Samuel Canby and Theodore A. Leisen. While some animals existed in zoological gardens in the Park as early as 1903, a concerted plan to improve the zoo in Brandywine Park began in 1905, largely through the efforts of Dr. James Morgan and Samuel H. Baynard. Initially, the civic association of the residential area behind the Zoo helped manage it, but in 1905 the organization changed its name to the Wilmington Free Zoological Association and the Wilmington Zoo was born.

Through the years, a wide diversity of large and small, local and exotic animals were added, including quite a few endangered species. In the 1950's a Children's Zoo was created through the efforts of the Wilmington Lion's Club, and remained a popular parallel attraction (it was operated separately) until the 1970's, even as the Zoo itself fell into disrepair. In 1971, New Castle County took over management of the Zoo and launched a series of improvements and expansion.

In 1986, thanks in part to the large financial investments in infrastructure and animals by the DZS, the Brandywine Zoo became accredited by the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, today known as the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), and has maintained this accreditation from 1986 to the present. To be accredited, the Brandywine Zoo undergoes a thorough application and inspection process every five years to ensure it has and will continue to meet ever-rising standards in animal care and welfare, veterinary programs, conservation, education, governance, business soundness, and public safety.

In 1998, the Delaware Division of Parks & Recreation, a division of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), took over management of the Brandywine Zoo from New Castle County. In this capacity, it assumed responsibility for the care and management of the Zoo's physical operations, administration, land, and animals. Today, the Brandywine Zoo, encompassing almost 5 acres, is a family zoo where guests can see and experience exotic species from all over the world, many of whom are endangered and participating in conservation breeding programs.

As we continue to grow, the Brandywine Zoo will continue its steady transformation in tandem with other world-class, AZA-accredited zoos as well as with those occurring in Brandywine Park. By keeping pace with changes in our sister State Park as well as improvements in modern practices in animal care, education and conservation, the Zoo will continue to be a significant community asset.

DNREC/DZS Relationship

DNREC's Department of Parks and Recreation funds Zoo operations including animal care, keeper, education and conservation staff, vehicles, and funding and maintenance of the physical facilities. Parks and Recreation also provides a volunteer manager to run the Zoo's robust volunteer and intern program as well as funding for intern positions.

The Delaware Zoological Society markets the Brandywine Zoo to the public. The goal of the Society is to promote diverse educational programs and recreational activities, and wildlife conservations programs to support the Brandywine Zoo's growth and plans, while fostering an appreciation and concern for all living things. In addition to

promoting interest in wildlife in the State of Delaware, especially the species housed at the Zoo, the DZS's role is to financially support the education and conservation efforts of the Zoo through fee collection and retail sales, membership opportunities, seeking grants, sponsorship, donations, and other fundraising opportunities.

The Delaware Zoological Society also supports and conducts wildlife research, with specific focus on local and urban wildlife conservation within the region. Further, the DZS supports international wildlife conservation projects and partners that focus on habitat conservation, capacity building, public education, wildlife research and more.

A true public-private partnership, DNREC and DZS combine their considerable talents and resources so that the Brandywine Zoo can continue to offer residents of Delaware and surrounding areas the most awesome and enjoyable wildlife experience possible - one that inspires future action and involvement. As an example of this side-by-side teamwork, the DZS and the Brandywine Zoo continue to work with the Department of Parks and Recreation on joint efforts to meet goals of Zoo advancement in education and guest experience, community outreach and conservation, and currently the Zoo's multi-phased \$30 million Master Plan.

Capital Campaign

DNREC has already committed more than \$10 million towards the first two phases of the Master Plan. **Phase 1**, included a new condor viewing area, improved honey bee display, and farm animal barnyard; **Phase 2** included the Madagascar habitat featuring lemurs and other Madagascan species, and a new Animal Care Center. Looking ahead, in further support of the Master Plan, DZS is fundraising to upgrade two existing and dated habitats into a new multi-species habitat complete with winter holding building with a viewing window for the public. Also planned is a redesigned ADA entryway featuring a new South American Wetlands habitat. As mentioned, DNREC, the Zoo and DZS are working closely together to make this transformation happen. Our re-imagined Brandywine Zoo will move forward with improvements and renovations that will help it remain one of the preeminent attractions in the region.

S.W.O.T. Analysis

Strengths

- Small, intimate size
- Convenient, beautiful location
- High-caliber Education programs
- Excellent Family programs
- Community engagement
- Quiet, inclusive atmosphere
- Seen as safe for young children
- Sensory kits available to help with sensory needs for adults and kids
- Lemur Attraction
- Skilled, knowledgeable staff
- Award-winning conservation programs, including Urban wildlife monitoring, bog turtles
- AZA accredited zoo
- Only zoo in Delaware
- Affordable/small commitment (time and cost)

Weaknesses

- Limited parking
- Seasonal & weather limitations
- Perceived safety concerns outside of zoo grounds
- Revolving membership - family membership ages out
- Limited animal collection
- Nostalgia for former collection (e.g., otters)
- Small exhibits
- Aged infrastructure
- Low awareness of our conservation efforts
- Hard to find (off “beaten path”)
- Lack of diversity/diverse community outreach
- Limited space for new attractions (e.g., carnival rides)

Opportunities

- Promote conservation messages
- Increase digital presence/awareness
- Corporate sponsors/advocates
- Promote zoo rental
- Working more with Wilmington State Parks and Friends group
- Niche, diverse, inclusive audiences (Hispanic, seniors, adults)
- On-line learning and video classes
- Craft and promote “small size but big impact” message
- Family history - generational - old memories create new memories
- Tap into community groups - Rotaries, etc.
- Community engagement/sponsorship
- Develop programming/internships for teenagers/young adults

Threats

- Inflation produces an economic pinch
- Global warming has an adverse effect on an outside venue
- No shortage of other organizations/venues that appeal to our audience
- Competition for funding for other deserving organizations
- Animal Rights trends/attitudes
- Social media/virtual reality may replace in-person learning

Objectives

Maintain AZA re-accreditation (2027 and beyond).

Achieve fund-raising goal for capital projects that are mutually agreed upon with DNREC.

Expand and promote our wildlife conservation and educational programming efforts.

Develop programming that explains why zoos matter; inspire awe and action for wildlife.

Be recognized as a premiere family-venue within the state of Delaware.

Cultivate next generation of Zoo “families” (Gen Z).

Provide affordable educational programming to underserved communities.

Action Plan (2024-2027)

Secure funds to complete the multi-species habitat (2025); once completed, turn attention to next project identified in the Master Plan (ADA compliant entryway)

1. Expand BOD expertise in fund-raising ability (including new members)

2. Hire Development Director

With new MOU in-place, establish 4 major Operating Committees comprised of DZS, Zoo Operations, DNREC staff:

1. Conservation/Education

2. Marketing/Visitor Services

3. Fundraising

4. Environmental Justice/Diversity Equity and Inclusion

Continue with and develop new partnerships with other organizations that are in alignment with our mission:

1. Membership: Delaware Museum of Nature and Science, Delaware Children’s Museum, others

2. Programming: DMNS, DCM, Hagley, The Delaware Contemporary.

Identify sponsorship opportunities with companies that share our values

Develop programming that supports and expands our conservation and animal care mission

Offer affordable programming and reduced admissions through our membership in the Arts ACCESS program (a community initiative developed to make arts and cultural spaces more accessible and affordable) and by holding Family Fun Nights (\$2 admissions).

Increase funding for Title 1 school scholarships.

Measure guest satisfaction through survey collection on grounds and follow-up surveys for all significant programming events (Brew at the Zoo, Sip & Strolls, etc). Share feedback quarterly at “all hands” staff meetings. Set measurable goals for staff.