A tower of giraffes

In April, the Oregon Zoo quietly welcomed a new Masai giraffe named Kiden — there is hope that she might eventually start a new family with Buttercup (or Butters, as he is commonly addressed by his zoo family).

With zoos everywhere facing financial pressures related to COVID-19, it looked like Kiden’s transfer from South Carolina might have to be canceled. Luckily, a generous Oregon Zoo Foundation donor stepped forward and paid for her big move.

To Julie Fitzgerald, executive director of the foundation, the gift highlighted the incredible difference one person can make. “Members, donors and corporate and foundation partners help the zoo make a difference across the region and around the world, including funding anti-poaching and community projects for giraffes in East Africa,” Fitzgerald said.

It will be some time before the zoo giraffes are ready to start a family. For now, everyone is enjoying the cuteness while Kiden gets to know Butters and Desi, along with the Speke’s gazelle and southern ground hornbills that share their habitat.

“Giraffes are very social, so we’re excited to have a new member in the herd,” said Amy Cutting, who oversees the zoo’s giraffe area. She added, “Kiden is still young and playful — it’s been fun to see her interact with her new friends.”

The Masai subspecies of giraffe is endangered, with fewer than 33,000 believed to remain in eastern Africa. Populations there have declined by more than 50% in recent years due to habitat loss, disease, civil war and unrest and poaching. As their numbers in the wild continue to dwindle, Kiden and Butters’ future offspring are important for building a stable, healthy population of these gentle giants.

(Continued on page 2)
Wild communication

While reading about giraffes, we learned some amazing things about the trees they love to snack on. Did you know acacias “talk” to each other?

On the African savanna, giraffes feed on umbrella thorn acacias, or acacia tortillis. Well-suited to harsh conditions, these trees can live in sandy soils, sometimes with less than 1.5 inches of rain per year, withstanding temperatures that rise to 122 degrees in the day and plunge below freezing at night.

Over 40 years ago, scientists noticed something unusual. When giraffes were feeding on acacias, the trees began pumping a toxin into their leaves. As this happened, the giraffes abandoned that stand of trees, and moved on. But they skipped all the other acacia trees for about 100 yards before resuming their meal.

It turns out that, in addition to the toxin, the trees emit a warning gas, carried by wind to nearby acacias, which triggers the same response. Giraffes, wise to this maneuver, avoid the trees with the toxin and find nearby trees without it. In his book *The Private Life of Plants*, David Attenborough describes how giraffes browse on one acacia in ten, avoiding trees that were downwind of the trees with the toxin.

Want to read more? Check out Peter Wohlleben’s *The Hidden Life of Trees*.

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ZooLights is back!

It wouldn’t be the holidays in Portland without a visit to ZooLights, and this year, there’s a new way to illuminate the season. A new drive-through experience lets visitors enjoy a dazzling display of 1.5 million lights from their cars.

To learn more about what to expect at this year’s ZooLights, or to purchase tickets, go to oregonzoo.org/zoolights

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GIVING TUESDAY

Save the date & spread the word!

Join us on Dec. 1 for Giving Tuesday, a global day of giving, and donate to your zoo by visiting www.oregonzoo.org/give or text OREGONZOO to 41444

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A tower of giraffes (Cont.)

Giraffes are social creatures. They live in groups of 10 to 200 in the savannas, grasslands and open woodlands of Africa. With long lips and a prehensile tongue, giraffes feed off of the leaves and shoots of trees, mainly acacias, that aren’t easily reached by other mammals. They eat up to 75 pounds of leafy browse each day, and get moisture from their diet, but will drink every two or three days if water is available.

Giraffes are so tall that when they run, at speeds up to 35 mph, their legs appear to be moving in slow motion. Early wildlife observer and giraffe expert Anne Innis Dagg wrote of giraffe movement, “They are just a symphony of perfection.”

Interested in learning more about Anne Dagg’s adventures? Watch the 2019 documentary feature *The Woman Who Loves Giraffes*. To learn more about how you can support wildlife conservation at the Oregon Zoo, email do-more@oregonzoo.org or call 503-505-5494.
Zoo care staff takes quick action during wildfires

The skies were an ominous, unearthly shade of orange. The 2020 wildfire season brought destruction on a scale never experienced in Oregon, with over a million acres burned and hundreds of homes destroyed.

While most of us sheltered in place, avoiding outside air too hazardous to breathe, 44 critically endangered California condors were evacuated from the Oregon Zoo’s Jonsson Center for Wildlife Conservation as fires threatened the offsite facility where the zoo raises the birds for wild release.

The center, located in rural Clackamas County on Metro-owned open land, was in a Level 3 evacuation zone, and zoo staff were uncertain about the facility’s future.

Moving 44 large raptors – living dinosaurs with 10-foot wingspans – is no small feat. The isolated 52-acre facility is designed to limit human contact, which maximizes the young condors’ ability to thrive in the wild once they are released.

“It was not an easy job, but it was worth it knowing all the condors were safe,” said zoo veterinarian Kelly Flaminio. “Our animal-care staff really pulled together and showed some amazing teamwork.”

The zoo temporarily relocated most of the condors to the Peregrine Fund’s World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho. The remaining condors were housed at the zoo, two on exhibit in the zoo’s Condors of the Columbia habitat, and the rest behind the scenes at the zoo’s veterinary medical center.

Most of the birds are now safely back at the Jonsson Center, and zoo staff are hopeful for another successful breeding season in 2021.

“It was not an easy job, but it was worth it knowing all the condors were safe. Our animal-care staff really pulled together and showed some amazing teamwork.”

With scarcely more than 500 California condors left in the world, each bird is vitally important to the species’ survival. The federal California Condor Recovery Program already took a big hit in August, when fire destroyed the Ventana Wildlife Society’s Big Sur sanctuary along the California coast. The Ventana facility had been one of five locations where condors raised at the Oregon Zoo and other breeding sites are sent for wild release.

Zoo conservationists characterized that loss as devastating, noting that we still don’t know the full impact of it.
We thought Buddy, the zoo’s much-loved orange tabby, would want his zoo friends to know that the Oregon Zoo Foundation’s Heart of the Oregon Zoo campaign includes $2 million for the conservation of endangered species in the Pacific Northwest.

Your zoo is working to save silverspot and checkerspot butterflies, California condors and western pond turtles.

Each initiative involves painstaking work throughout the year. In fall, field biologists collect tiny western pond turtles as they hatch from their eggs and bring them to the zoo. The zoo’s care team helps them grow over the winter, so they’ll be large enough to avoid predation from non-native bullfrogs when they are returned to the wild. When condors start laying eggs in January, the eggs are placed in an incubator and closely monitored until it’s time to return them to their parents for hatching. In the spring, silverspot butterfly larvae are roused from their slumber for a special meal of violet leaves.

There are many steps along the road to restoring habitats and conserving these unique and fascinating species, and foundation donors, sponsors and community partners play a starring role in making it all happen — from Buddy and everyone at your zoo, thank you!

Above: Western Pond Turtle
Right: Buddy

Presented by Banfield PET HOSPITAL

Helping a wild bird be wild

Condors lay eggs from January through March. Once an egg is laid, it is removed from the nest to an incubator. Keepers leave a “dummy” egg in its place and the parents don’t realize anything is missing. Around 55 days later, the chicks begin to hatch and the egg is returned to the parents.

When they are about 8 months old, hatchlings are moved from breeding pens to a fledgling flight area. There they begin their flight fitness preparations and learn to socialize with adult “mentor” condors. Young condors also receive aversion training that teaches them not to land on power poles. A mock power pole in their enclosure is rigged to provide a mild electric shock if they land on it.

All of this work takes place with careful remote monitoring via cameras and a series of trap doors so that the birds rarely encounter or see humans. Oregon-raised condors then move to field pens at release sites in Mexico’s Baja California peninsula, central and southern California and northern Arizona. After several months in the field pens, they are released into the wild.

The California condor was one of the original animals included on the 1973 Endangered Species Act and is classified as critically endangered. In 1982, only 22 individuals remained in the wild and by 1987, the last condors were brought into human care in an attempt to save the species from extinction. Thanks to recovery programs like the Oregon Zoo’s, the world’s California condor population now totals around 500 birds, most of which are flying free.

Zoo supporters provide vital equipment like ICU incubators and specialized freezers, and contribute to non-lead ammunition outreach programs to address one of the greatest threats condors face in the wild, lead poisoning. Members and donors sustain vital zoo programs by providing the financial resources to enhance and expand the zoo’s efforts in conservation, education and animal welfare. To learn more, email do-more@oregonzoo.org or call 503-505-5494
A philanthropic life – a new director of development joins foundation

For most people, the first days at a new job are nerve-wracking, with hasty introductions, piles of paperwork and a firehose of information to absorb about the culture and processes of a place. For the Oregon Zoo Foundation’s new director of development, Maria Reyes, nerve-wracking might be an understatement. She joined the team virtually, in the middle of a global pandemic and just days into a major emergency fundraising campaign for the Oregon Zoo.

Instead of walking along gorgeous zoo trails and getting to know the animals and staff in person, Maria has been working remotely, quietly getting to know her colleagues via video conference calls. It would be quite a stretch for anyone, but Maria has made it work. According to foundation executive director Julie Fitzgerald, her enthusiastic presence has been exactly what we needed.

“She is a wonderful fit for our team, and has been so thoughtful in the ways that she has navigated these first few months,” said Fitzgerald. “We’ve seen remarkable results, and she’s built a tangible sense of camaraderie with our entire team.”

We sat down with Maria to learn more about her.

What drew you to working in philanthropy?
Being a recipient of services for low-income youth sparked an interest to work in this field. I worked for the Salvation Army for over 20 years, raising funds for their human services programs. I also served as executive director of the American Red Cross in Salem, Oregon.

I was born in Honduras and immigrated to Los Angeles in 1983 with my mother and two sisters. I was 6 years old. I grew up as a typical inner-city girl in the districts of MacArthur Park and Pico-Union. In spite of our tough and poor neighborhood, my sisters and I have happy childhood memories. We spent a lot of time at the Salvation Army’s community center, and went on church outings. When we were bored at home, we would hop on a bus, head west and end up at the Santa Monica Pier to enjoy the beach.

What brought you to the zoo?
I love animals and nature. Growing up, we didn’t have any money, so watching animal shows on TV transported me to their world. Being at the zoo now feels like those old programs have come to life! I may not ever be able to travel far enough to see the natural habitats of many of our animals in the wild, but I can see them at our beautiful zoo. I love learning about our new habitats and how chimpanzees, rhinos and polar bears will thrive in their new homes, Primate Forest, Rhino Ridge and Polar Passage. We must care for these majestic creatures and conserve their species for future generations. Combining my profession with my passion is a dream come true for me—this zoo is special.

What do you hope to bring to the zoo and the foundation?
My team and I are mission-driven and incredibly focused on serving our members and donors. We are here to raise money to support the zoo’s efforts for animal welfare, conservation and education. I would like to see more people recognizing the foundation and its work on behalf of this amazing community.

As a newcomer to the zoo, can you talk about something surprising you’ve learned?
Chimps remember a person’s face if one visits them with frequency. They are also very social creatures, so during the zoo closure, they missed having social interaction with people — that made me sad, because I’m a social person too!

What do you do when you’re not attending an endless stream of virtual meetings for the foundation?
One quirky thing about me is that I have no attachment to stuff, so I am constantly thinking of all the things I have not used and need to get rid of. After all the meetings, I’m putting things in boxes to donate or throw away. If you need someone to help you throw stuff away, call me — I’m ruthless.

Do you have a favorite animal at the zoo yet?
I admire each creature, but I am a cat person. I can sit and stare at a lion for hours. They are majestic, confident. I love their shaggy mane, golden fur and those giant paws!
You are our hero!
We’re grateful for you – our members and donors

It has been a difficult year.

Every time we asked, you stepped up, giving over $1 million in emergency relief funds during the early days of the zoo’s extended closure and then helping to provide food, care and bamboo for six months with generous gifts to our red panda baby shower. We gathered virtually at Zoo Rendezvous to mark the final milestone year of our $8.5 million Heart of the Oregon Zoo campaign. It was an incredible celebration of you and your zoo – you donated, bought raffle tickets and bid in a live auction. Everyone enjoyed wonderful updates about animals and new habitats that are transforming the zoo campus. We can’t wait until we can celebrate in person together, someday soon!

In the midst of a global pandemic, a powerful movement for social change, wildfires and political turmoil, you’ve been there for us, and we will continue to be there for you, connecting you to the animals and the natural world.

Your support sustains the zoo’s global role in conservation science, and you make it possible to provide truly outstanding daily care for all the animals. We hope you enjoy the stories in this edition of ZooTracks – we hope you can see yourself in these pages, because you make all this vital work possible.

From all the animals and everyone at your zoo, thank you for being our hero!

Thanks to our signature partners: