

# BEYOND THE ZOO

ZOO ATLANTA'S  
COMMITMENT TO  
SAVING SPECIES



# WILDLIFE AND THEIR HABITATS AROUND THE WORLD ARE IN DECLINE.

IT'S THAT SIMPLE.



The threats, however, are many and complicated, putting wild populations under extraordinary pressures that are resulting in an unprecedented mass extinction event.

The connections between people and nature are critical, yet are becoming more and more fragile - even in a global society which admires the beauties and wonders of the natural world.

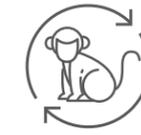
Saving a species requires commitment, dedication, tenacity, collaboration and a passion driven by the understanding that the preservation of life and habitat biodiversity is critical to the future of all living creatures on Earth, including humans.



# WHY DO ZOOS MATTER?

The global decline of species and their habitats makes it clear that we need a multifaceted approach to conservation. Zoos are a critical component of this approach, with a responsibility to be a force that drives action.

Zoos play a unique and vital role in today's complex world of conservation. We save species and their wild environments by recognizing our responsibilities as leaders in global biodiversity preservation and by excelling at the roles we are uniquely capable of playing.



We engage in successful **REINTRODUCTION** programs that introduce animals back to their native ranges in the wild.



We are **EDUCATORS**, empowering people with the knowledge and inspiration they need to make personal decisions to save wildlife.



We **OFFSET THE THREATS** to wild animal populations and their ecosystems by addressing real-world challenges for animals, plants and their wild environments.



We are vital sources of **CONSERVATION FUNDING**, helping other organizations make a difference where the difference matters most.



We **MAINTAIN ASSURANCE POPULATIONS** of species in hopes of one day repopulating the wild when current threats are eliminated.



We share **RESEARCH AND SUPPORT** the efforts of other partners, contributing to a global body of knowledge and providing aid for collaborators in the field.



We **CREATE CONNECTIONS** that inspire people to care about species and their habitats.



## WHAT WE DO

# ZOO ATLANTA CONSERVATION STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

## *Zoo Atlanta Vision:*

We envision a world where wildlife and humans flourish together.

*Zoo Atlanta Mission:* We save wildlife and their habitats through research, conservation, education and engaging experiences. Our efforts connect people to animals and inspire conservation action.

Zoo Atlanta has a long history as a conservation organization. To further strengthen the conservation key commitment, in 2017, the Zoo formalized and launched a new Conservation Strategic Action Plan. This plan will guide our conservation efforts, both locally and globally, utilizing our unique position and expertise to make an impact.



**1** *Make a demonstrable, meaningful impact to conservation by committing resources, both financial and professional.*

Our professional staff are skilled experts, and we will leverage their knowledge and ability to contribute to conservation projects that we believe can benefit from our long-term support and commitment. We will also dedicate a portion of our funds to emergency conservation issues, and we will develop diverse funding streams that will allow us to demonstrate an increase in conservation support over time.

**2** *Lead and support conservation initiatives based on science.*

Science is the foundation of effective conservation, and we will use our expertise and leadership in scientific research to guide our efforts. We will enhance collaborations with academic organizations and other nonprofit organizations to strengthen our scientifically-based programs. We will develop a system of

metrics for evaluating conservation initiatives, and we will regularly examine the effectiveness of all initiatives we undertake or support.

**3** *Educate and empower people to take conservation action.*

We will ensure that all educational experiences at Zoo Atlanta are imbedded with conservation

*The Conservation Strategic Action Plan focuses on our strengths as a conservation organization and is driven by five primary goals:*

messaging, and we will use the unique and powerful connections to our animal population to empower people of all ages to take conservation action. We will be advocates for the role of Zoo Atlanta and its fellow accredited zoological organizations in the conservation of wildlife, and we will represent the interests of wildlife and their habitats in discussions of public policy.

**4** *Amplify Zoo Atlanta's conservation impact through collaboration.*

We will maximize the power of collaboration and partnerships to amplify our conservation resources and extend our local, regional and global impact. We will maintain and build upon our commitment to cooperative breeding programs and promote individual Zoo staff leadership in these programs.

**5** *Develop, enhance, and expand Zoo Atlanta's sustainability programs and practices.*

We will implement Zoo-wide practices aimed at reducing waste, energy use and water use. We will seek LEED certification on

all new buildings and habitats on Zoo grounds. We will provide education for Zoo staff and guests on the importance of sustainability practices in place at Zoo Atlanta, and we will leverage our marketing and communications resources to highlight and raise awareness of these actions.



# REINTRODUCTION

*Introducing animals back to their native ranges in the wild*

## Golden lion tamarins

Found only in a small area of the Atlantic Coastal Forest of Brazil, this small New World primate is one of the most successful examples of a back-from-the-brink species—thanks to zoos. Zoo Atlanta has been active in golden lion tamarin conservation for nearly 30 years and is a partner of the Brazil-based Golden Lion Tamarin Association.

Only 200 individuals remained in the wild in the 1970s. Over subsequent years, zoo-born golden lion tamarins, including two family groups from Zoo Atlanta, were released into the wild in Brazil, where they have produced new generations. Wild populations now number

over 3,000, with over a third of this population descending from zoo-born tamarins. Habitat fragmentation still threatens the species, but due to the conservation work of zoos, including Zoo Atlanta, golden lion tamarins were downgraded from Critically Endangered to Endangered in 2013. While this is a massive step in the right direction, conservation action remains crucial if the species is to be preserved in the long-term.

**WILD POPULATIONS  
NOW NUMBER OVER  
3,000**

Conservation action remains crucial if the species is to be preserved.

## Eastern indigo snakes

The eastern indigo snake is a keystone species of the longleaf pine wiregrass and sandhills ecosystem, but up until recently, these snakes had not been sighted in the wild in neighboring Alabama in around 50 years. A collaboration between Zoo Atlanta, the Central Florida Zoo's Orianne Center for Indigo Conservation and Auburn University has resulted in the release of more than 100 eastern indigo snakes into Conecuh National Forest. A majority of these animals have been reared at Zoo Atlanta.

Preliminary results from tracking efforts have shown that groups of eastern indigo snakes released into the national forest are surviving, thriving, and reproducing.

The goal of the project is to release 300 snakes over a 10-year period at an average of 30 snakes a year.

Additional project partners include the Alabama Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission and The Nature Conservancy.

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# CREATING CONNECTIONS

*Many people may never have the opportunity to see these animals in the wild, but connections inspire people to care about species and their habitats*

## **Gorillas**

All four subspecies of gorillas are imperiled in the wild in Africa, with some experiencing never-before-seen population declines as a result of habitat loss, poaching and disease. Zoo Atlanta is home to one of the nation's largest populations of critically endangered western lowland gorillas – the only gorilla subspecies housed in zoos. The Zoo's award-winning gorilla program dates back more than 50 years to the arrival of the legendary Willie B., who went on to become Zoo Atlanta's most famous animal ambassador.

Zoo Atlanta and its longtime partner in gorilla conservation, The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International – winner of the 2017 Association of Zoos and Aquariums' (AZA) International Conservation Award – celebrated 20 years of partnership in 2016. The Zoo provides pro-bono headquarters space, information technology support and financial support to enable the Fossey Fund to target its resources toward saving gorillas and their habitats in the wild and assisting and educating local human communities in Africa. Over the years, the Zoo has also provided critical board leadership and support for programs, as well as shared scientific staff.

The threats to gorilla populations include the production of one of humankind's most widespread and ordinary possessions: mobile phones. Cell phones and other small electronics are produced using a rare mineral called coltan. Found in only a few places on Earth, coltan is mined in the forests of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, resulting in the regular displacement and death of wild gorillas.

Zoo Atlanta has partnered with Eco-Cell on a successful cell phone recycling program and has been recognized by Eco-Cell for its efforts.

Phones are collected on Zoo grounds and from classrooms, businesses and individuals throughout the U.S. for recycling or refurbishing, helping to eliminate the demand for coltan. Funds from recycling benefit The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International.

**THE ZOO'S  
AWARD-WINNING  
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# EDUCATION

*Empowering people with the knowledge they need—and the inspiration to take action— to make personal decisions to save wildlife*

## **Palm oil crisis**

Processed from the fruit of the African oil palm tree and harvested worldwide in warm and temperate climates, palm oil is one of the planet's most commonplace commodities. It's found in over half of all household products, from foods and drinks to toothpaste, shampoo, cosmetics and pet food. Some of the planet's most concentrated regions of palm oil production are the nutrient-rich tropics of Indonesia, Malaysia and Sumatra, where entire rainforests are destroyed on the scale of 300 football fields an hour. These unsustainable activities are resulting

in catastrophic population declines for orangutans and other species.

Your choices matter. Zoo Atlanta is one of only a small number of zoos to pursue and attain membership in the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil™ (RSPO). The Zoo and many other accredited zoos are vocal advocates for encouraging the use of only sustainable palm oil, supporting only companies who use sustainably-produced oil and celebrating those who make the switch, and raising public awareness of the necessity for informed shopping.

**ZOO ATLANTA IS ONE OF ONLY A SMALL NUMBER OF ZOOS TO PURSUE AND ATTAIN MEMBERSHIP IN THE ROUNDTABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE PALM OIL™ (RSPO).**

**ZOO ATLANTA IS A PROUD PARTNER OF THE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY'S 96 ELEPHANTS CAMPAIGN.**



## **96 Elephants Campaign**

An estimated 96 elephants are slaughtered in Africa every day for the illegal ivory trade, and the U.S. is one of the world's largest markets for ivory. While a majority of informed consumers already refuse to buy ivory, this is only one important first step. Only increased pressure on policy makers to support anti-ivory legislation will help to end the demand, both in the U.S. and abroad.

Zoo Atlanta is a proud partner of the Wildlife Conservation Society's 96 Elephants Campaign. The Zoo has joined the campaign in promoting a recycling effort that allows students to have a direct impact in saving elephants by collecting electronics to be recycled with the Cartridges

for Kids program; funds from recycling support 96 Elephants. Schools, businesses and Scout troops earn rewards for participation, including conservation lessons by Zoo educators.





# PRESERVING FUTURE OPTIONS FOR WILDLIFE

*Maintaining assurance colonies of endangered species – in hopes of one day repopulating the wild when current threats are eliminated*

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## **Panamanian golden frogs**

Treasured for thousands of years as an emblem of good fortune and the national symbol of Panama, the Panamanian golden frog is now believed to be extinct in the wild as a result of habitat loss, illegal harvest for private collections, and disease caused by a deadly amphibian fungus called *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, or chytrid. The species now exists only in zoos and at the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center in Panama.

In addition to maintaining a reproducing colony of Panamanian golden frogs, Zoo Atlanta devotes staff resources and expertise to projects in the field in Panama and has supported Project Golden Frog, with an eventual goal of releasing golden frogs back into their native forests. Efforts supported have included scientific field studies, education programs, breeding programs to preserve the species' genetic diversity, and awareness-building of the Panamanian golden frog as a model for global amphibian decline.

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ZOO ATLANTA DEVOTES  
STAFF RESOURCES AND  
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# OFFSETTING THE THREATS

*Addressing real-world challenges  
for animals, plants and their  
wild environments*

## **Diamondback terrapins**

An icon of the brackish waters of Georgia's coast and the eastern seaboard of the U.S., the diamondback terrapin was once harvested nearly to extinction for turtle soup. Diamondback terrapins now face threats from highway collisions and unintentional trapping, making high mortality a major challenge for this species.

Zoo Atlanta is an active supporter of the Georgia Sea Turtle Center's Jekyll Island Causeway Conservation Program. To offset mortality rates and to give young terrapins a higher survival rate, diamondback terrapins hatched from eggs from females killed or injured by automobiles are reared at the Zoo until they are large enough to return to the Georgia Sea Turtle Center. The terrapins are then released into the wild in the island's coastal marshes.

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ZOO ATLANTA IS AN  
ACTIVE PARTNER ON  
PROJECTS TO PRESERVE  
ENDANGERED FLORA  
AND TO RESTORE  
AND PROTECT  
PRECIOUS NATURAL  
ENVIRONMENTS.

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## **Plant conservation**

Plant life is a fundamental building block of any ecosystem, and thriving animals depend on thriving plants. Within our own state of Georgia, many threatened plants—and even entire ecosystems—face extinction as a result of habitat loss, habitat degradation and the introduction of invasive species. Zoo Atlanta is an active partner on projects to preserve endangered flora and to restore and protect precious natural environments.

The mountain bog ecosystem is one of the most critically endangered natural habitats of the southern Appalachian region, including northeastern Georgia. This fragile ecosystem is home to animal and plant species found nowhere else on Earth, including critically endangered

eastern bog turtles, federally-threatened swamp pinks and state-protected montane purple pitcher plants. Horticulture experts from Zoo Atlanta partner with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and The Nature Conservancy on projects to restore these bogs.

Michaux's sumac or *Rhus michauxii*, a critically endangered dwarf sumac species, is found only in the southeastern U.S., including Georgia. Its populations have declined dramatically as a result of road construction, agriculture and other human-made activities. The green roof of Zoo Atlanta's Conservation Action Resource Center (ARC), where a population of Michaux's sumac is maintained by Zoo horticulturists, is considered a safeguarding site for the species.



# RESEARCH & SUPPORT

*Contributing to a global body of knowledge and providing aid for our partners in the field*

## **Giant pandas**

Zoo Atlanta is one of only four zoos in the U.S. housing giant pandas, and this species represents the Zoo's most significant long-term investment in wildlife conservation. The Zoo's giant panda program dates to the mid-1990s, prior to the arrival of giant panda pair Lun Lun and Yang Yang in 1999, and Zoo Atlanta has contributed well over \$10 million in support of wild giant pandas in China.

Although the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) downgraded the giant panda's status from Endangered to Vulnerable in 2016, the species remains heavily reliant on conservation efforts. Fewer than 1,900 individuals are estimated to remain in the wild, and more than half of these inhabit nature preserves. Research projects on eight of these reserves have been supported by Zoo Atlanta, which has also provided support for reforestation projects, conservation education programs, giant panda nurseries and field research programs and supplies.

Research has long been a hallmark of Zoo Atlanta's giant panda program and is a highlight of the Zoo's long and productive partnership with the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in China. Focus topics of research done by Zoo Atlanta have included giant panda vocalizations; color vision and spatial memory; pregnancy detection and monitoring; and maternal and developmental behavior. These studies continue to be used to improve the care of giant pandas in zoological settings, as well as improve knowledge of wild giant pandas.

## **Apes**

Zoo Atlanta is a Platinum Supporter of the AZA Ape Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) Conservation Initiative. The Zoo is one of only a select few AZA zoos contributing \$10,000 a year to this collective effort to preserve wild ape populations and to increase and sustain financial support from zoos for their conservation.

The AZA TAG Conservation Initiative differs from many other conservation collaborations in that its funding comes almost exclusively from zoos. Wild populations benefiting from funds awarded by the initiative have included chimpanzees in Kibale National Park and Sapo National Park; gorillas in Rwanda's Virunga Mountains; orangutans in Malaysia and Indonesia; and gibbons in Vietnam.

## **Elephants**

On a global stage where the price of ivory continues to skyrocket, poaching is an imminent threat to the existence of Earth's largest living land mammals. Poachers are joining the high-tech era, becoming savvier and more elusive to law enforcement.

In an important step toward increased leadership in the conservation of African elephants, Zoo Atlanta has entered into a five-year commitment to partner with Conservation South Luangwa to protect elephants and other species impacted by wildlife trafficking in Zambia. The project uses anti-poaching patrols, aerial surveillance and

trained detection dogs to identify and prevent black-market animal trade. The dogs have been successfully used to detect ivory, skins and parts from animals killed for bushmeat, ammunition and firearms at border checks and roadblocks.

A second key focus of Conservation South Luangwa is anti-conflict mitigation. Over half of the people inhabiting this area make a living from agriculture and the region's natural resources, making human-wildlife conflict another regular and pressing threat for elephants. Conservation South Luangwa works directly with local people to safeguard their crops and livelihoods while engaging new advocates for wildlife conservation.



# CONSERVATION FUNDING

*Helping other organizations make a difference where the difference matters most*

## Quarters for Conservation

Zoo Atlanta joined the Quarters for Conservation effort in 2016, launching an initiative to contribute 25 cents of every general admission ticket to programs for wildlife. Quarters for Conservation was introduced to expand the Zoo's existing financial contributions to conservation while engaging Members and visitors in three new programs each year.

Efforts benefiting from Quarters for Conservation's first two years of program support included Elephants for Africa; the Golden Lion Tamarin Association; Project Golden Frog; the East Africa Vulture Project; Project Bush Dog; and the Tiger Conservation Campaign.

More than 20 accredited zoos around the U.S. facilitate Quarters for Conservation programs,

and the impact is substantial. Between 2015 and 2017 alone, these programs collectively raised nearly \$9.5 million, one quarter at a time.

## The Mabel Dorn Reeder Conservation Endowment Fund

Through the Mabel Dorn Reeder Conservation Endowment Fund, Zoo Atlanta supports organizations working in the field to make a meaningful impact on reversing species decline around the world.

Projects are submitted by Zoo staff and Volunteers for consideration on an annual basis. Species supported by this funding have included flamingos in Chile and Argentina; gopher frogs in Georgia and Alabama; red pandas in Nepal; and many more.





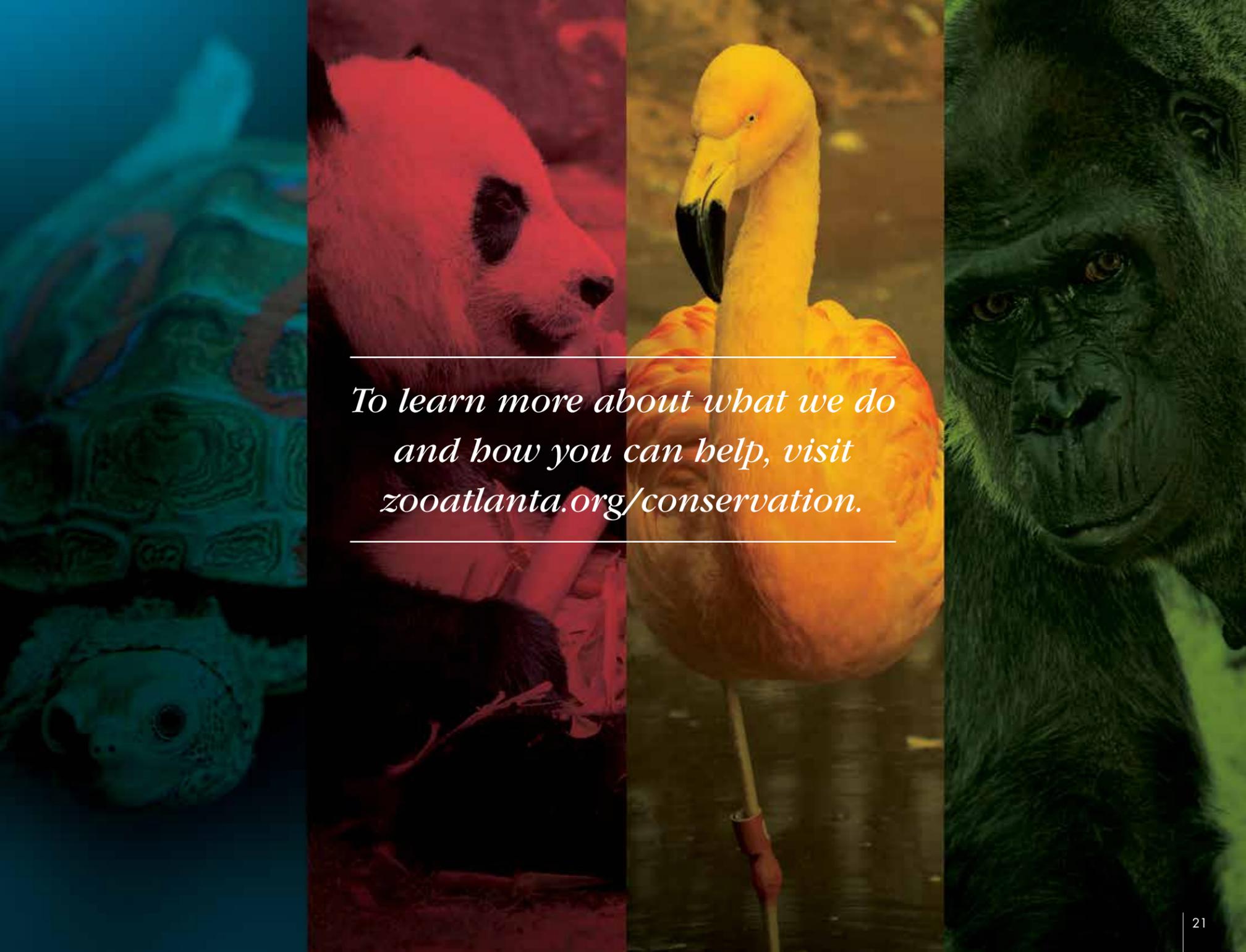
# WE PLAY ALL OF THESE ROLES, IN ALL OF THESE PLACES.

In an era in which wild species are being harvested, hunted, and displaced to the brink of extinction all over the globe, at a time when humans are becoming more and more tuned-out to nature, it's easy to assume that there is no hope. But where would endangered species be without hope and action, and where would hope and action be without zoos?

More than 195 million people visit AZA zoos and aquariums each year, and AZA-accredited institutions contribute a collective \$160 million a year to field conservation programs. Zoo-based conservation projects are running now in more than 100 countries. Because accredited zoos are

also centers of scientific expertise and research, the work of zoos helps us better understand the needs and behaviors of wild animals, and that understanding helps everyone do a better job of preserving them in the wild. And the connections fostered by zoos between people and animals have an intrinsic value that cannot be overstated.

Without organizations like Zoo Atlanta, there is more of nothing, and less of everything. This is not the world we wish to leave behind for wildlife, and this is not the world we wish to leave behind for the human generations who follow us. Hope remains for all of them, because of all of us – and because of all of you.



*To learn more about what we do and how you can help, visit [zooatlanta.org/conservation](http://zooatlanta.org/conservation).*



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