

ASAG General Session – DAY 1 Tuesday, March 25 Room: Mojave Learning Center

8:00 am - 9:00 am Welcome and Icebreaker

9:00 am - 10:20 am TAG updates

- 1) *Anseriformes* 9-9:10
- 2) *CP&P* 9:10-9:20
- 3) *Coraciiformes and Bucerotiformes* 9:20-9:30
- 4) *Gruiformes/Eurypygiformes, Cariamiformes & Otidiformes* 9:30-9:45
- 5) *Raptor* 9:45-9:55
- 6) *Galliformes* 10-10:10
- 7) *Passerine* 10-10:20

10:20 am - 10:40 am BREAK

10:40 am - 11:00 am “Engaging with Enrichment: Developing a Dynamic Enrichment Program for Ambassador Birds.”, Hannah Stoeve, Assistant Curator: Wildlife Connections and Operations at the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens.

At The Living Desert Zoo & Gardens, the Wildlife Connections department oversees on-ground programming utilizing a wide variety of taxa, including many avian species. Previously, enrichment was provided through a more item-based, less regulated program. The department came together last year and decided to move past the basics and to design a complex, natural history-based experience program for our ambassador birds!

11:00 am - 11:20 am "Using Augmentative Interspecies Communication to Enhance Single Parrot Well-being," Julie Smith, Associate Professor at Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo.

We have started a research project with the support of FluentPet, involving Augmentative Interspecies Communication (AIC) devices, or buttons, to a variety of animals, including an African grey parrot. Tut has about 6 buttons now with different food items and activities that include different types of seed, corn, scratches, climb (climb up a rope), and step up. The goal is to eventually give him buttons for more activities, body parts, and time concepts to give him as much choice, control, and understanding in his environment as possible. As a single parrot who prefers human company to bird company, this form of communication could really enhance his daily life

11:20 am - 12:00 pm “What Does It Mean to “Prioritize Training”?” Chris Jenkins, Chief Operating Officer at Natural Encounters, Inc.

In a modern zoo or aquarium, animal training is no longer a practice of a small few. But while training itself is now common, so are the challenges that prevent many animal caretakers from making it a part of their regular routine. In this presentation, we'll look at "prioritizing training" as a behavior that we can make more common by arranging antecedent and consequence conditions to make training an easier, more fun, and more rewarding part of people's regular daily routine.

12:00 pm - 1:00 pm LUNCH

1:00 pm - 1:20 pm Guest Encounters as a Tool for Monitoring Animal Welfare" Emily Venkus, Lead Animal Care Specialist with Birds at Brookfield Zoo Chicago.

This presentation will illustrate Brookfield Zoo Chicago's experience with the development and implementation of

various daily guest animal encounters and the benefits gained from doing so. These benefits include providing animal care specialists with an effective method of monitoring animal welfare across various parameters, including physical, social, psychological, and environmental aspects.

1:20 pm - 1:40 pm “Enhancing Animal Introduction Plans: Ensuring Smooth Transitions and Regulatory Compliance at John Ball Zoo”- Dan Hemmann, Area Curator at John Ball Zoo.

Putting new animals together has inherent risk. A well-written and complete introduction plan is important to make things go smoothly, ensure alignment among staff, provide guidance for future introductions, and show regulatory compliance. As birds are now covered under the Animal Welfare Act, being able to show regulatory compliance has become even more important. John Ball Zoo has improved our introduction plans based on our growing needs and conversations with USDA inspectors about what critical pieces of documentation they would like to see during a review. This presentation will go over these changes and why they were made.

1:40 pm - 2:00 pm “Health and Business Risk Management of Birds Species at Disney Animal Kingdom” - Dr. Fontenot, Clinical Veterinarian, Operations Manager, Disney’s Animal Health and Leanne Blinco, Veterinary Hospital Manager at Disney’s Animal Kingdom

Using Animal Health Risks to the Business in Zoos and Aquariums Health and Business Risk of Birds Species at DAK and DAKL to drive Animal Wellness Programs: Traditionally, animal health risks to individuals or groups of animals drive the creation of animal wellness programs in zoos and aquariums. Using the lens of organizational health, we re-evaluated our animal health risks using five business lenses.

2:00 pm - 2:20 pm “Utilizing Species Compatibility to Develop Dynamic Mixed Aviaries and Optimize Holding Space,” Blaithe Flaherty, Senior Animal Care Specialist at Brookfield Zoo Chicago.

This presentation will delve into the critical aspects of managing mixed-species aviaries, showcasing a compatibility matrix utilized by Brookfield Zoo Chicago. This matrix is based on common situations we encounter and serves as a practical guide for decision-making. The presentation will emphasize the importance of staff training in understanding species compatibility and effectively using the compatibility matrix based on the situation.

2:20 pm - 2:40 pm “Eighteen Species; Just One Penguin World”, Dr. Daniela Herrera, Lead Penguin Keeper, Antartida, Zoologico Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico

In January 2025, El Zoologico Guadalajara organized and hosted the 2025 Penguin Workshop. The Workshop was well-received and attended by penguin specialists representing Mexico, South America, and the United States. The speakers presented on penguin exhibit complexity and space, best practices in disinfection, adult and neonatal medical updates, challenges and solutions, nest establishment and management, egg incubation, and hand rearing across species. Lectures were given over three days, with a fourth day focused on hands-on best practices for penguin chick food preparation, use of rice bags for neonatal thermoregulatory management, and assessing penguin light environments. The Workshop was presented in both English and Spanish with real-time translations provided. El Zoologico Guadalajara is looking forward to hosting a penguin workshop with similar and/or additional topics in 2026.

2:40 pm - 3:00 pm BREAK

3:00 pm - 3:30 pm Plume awards

3:30 pm - 3:50 pm “Green Oropendola Breeding in a Large Walkthrough Aviary at Houston Zoo”—Bethany Shick, Bird Keeper III at Houston Zoo.

3:50 pm - 4:10 pm “Creating a Cormorant Colony”- Caitlin Morrow, Senior Wildlife Specialist at San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance.

A summary of how WCS at San Diego Zoo set up a productive breeding colony of White-breasted Cormorant, from placement and design of nest structure within the habitat, to presentation of material, interaction with other collection species, predator deterrence, acclimating birds to nest checks and fostering eggs, and protocol for supporting the parent-rearing of chicks.

4:10 pm - 4:30 pm "Updates from the Egg Data Management Working Group" Rachel Bladow, Senior Population Biologist at AZA Population Management Center at Lincoln Park Zoo.

Currently, tracking egg data varies widely by facility and species. The global Egg Data Management Working Group is developing standards for recording egg data to better manage egg-laying species. This presentation will cover why this group was formed, the basics of egg data, the benefits of standardized data, and our recommendations for the types of egg data to record. We will share how to get involved or follow our group for updates as we create guidelines for egg records.

4:30 pm - 4:50 pm "Identifying and Navigating Challenges of Yolk Sac Retention: Insights from Pearl's Journey" - Melissa Ramsey, Zoological Supervisor, Bird Department at SeaWorld San Diego.

Pearl is an Emperor Penguin that hatched from an artificially incubated egg. A rather unique presentation required full-assisted hatching from pip to externalization. In the initial stages of hand-rearing, symptoms of a retained yolk sac were then also identified. Those challenges were navigated with knowledge gained from previous experience but an overall trepidation around her being such a significant hatch for her species.

Please join us for the wine and cheese social event tonight, March 25th!

5:30-7:30, Hotel Zoso, 150 S. Indian Canyon Drive.

ASAG General Session – DAY 2 Wednesday, March 26 Room: Mojave Learning Center

8:00 am - 8:30 am General ASAG updates

8:30 am - 8:50 am "Using ZooMonitor to evaluate the management and housing of Southern Ground Hornbills and improve wellbeing" Ann Knutson, Zoological Manager of Birds at Dallas Zoo.

This study compares the behaviors of southern ground hornbills (SGH) housed either singly (n=2) or in groups (paired or family groups, n=5) across four institutions, using ZooMonitor for data collection.

8:50 am - 9:10 am "The Houston Zoo's Birds of the World Complex—A Bird's Eye View of Working with Architects and Contractors." Brent Nelton, Houston Zoo

The Birds of the World project took over 3 years of planning, spans 1.3 acres, and includes three covered aviaries: a North American Songbird Aviary, African Savanna, and South American Wetlands. These aviaries are home to over 40 different species and roughly 150 individuals. The project also included a new Avian Conservation Environment, known by many in this room as the ACE Building. This included a new keeper area, expanded incubation room, and climate-controlled brooder rooms. Many times, projects are driven by architects with no animal experience. This time, I hope that it was different.

9:10 am - 9:30 am "The Greatest Showman, the Return of Coconut," Matt Detjen, Animal Care Technician 3 at Minnesota Zoo.

Coconut, our Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, went from performing in front of large crowds for many years to a stark difference of no one in the stands and began showing self-destructive and aggressive behavior. After moving to

different locations within the zoo and beginning a study of his behavior, training, and hormone level, he is now returning to shows almost 5 years later.

9:30 am - 9:50 am “Great Blue Turaco: From hand-rearing to co-parenting” Quinton Pyle, Bird Supervisor at San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance and Shelley Norris, Bird Supervisor at Nashville Zoo
Moving from a successful hand-rearing protocol to a co-parenting protocol to reduce imprinting and better placement of offspring. Utilizing the co-parenting protocol, facilities with smaller staff can be successful at rearing this historically difficult species.

9:50 am - 10:20 am BREAK

10:20 am - 10:40 am ASAG’s Mary Healy Grant Recipient: “Breeding North American Songbirds: Lessons Learned” Stacy Hill, Animal Keeper at Smithsonian’s National Zoo & Conservation Biology Institute
At the Smithsonian’s National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute, we have dedicated our new Bird House to migratory bird species of North America and have had landmark successes in breeding 15 different songbirds. Managing the reproduction of these birds requires careful observations and quickly pivoting to address perceived challenges as they arise.

10:40 am - 11:00 am ASAG’s BIPOC Grant Recipient: “Benefits of Hand-rearing Flamingos at the Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance” Anton Morrison, Animal Care Specialist at Denver Zoo
Hand-reared flamingos represent a significant advancement in avian care, offering diverse benefits across several domains, including animal wellness, guest experience, conservation, and international collaboration. This presentation explores the advantages of hand-rearing these iconic birds, focusing on how this practice enhances their overall health and wellness by providing tailored care and individualized attention that is often difficult to achieve in traditional settings.

11:00 am - 11:30 am “Sihek Recovery Project”—Scott Newland, Director and CEO of Sedgwick County Zoo, and Erica Royer, Aviculturist at Sedgwick County Zoo.
A summary of the first translocation and release of Guam sihek as well as an update on the status of released birds. The update will include lessons learned and the plans for the 2025 translocation season.

11:30 am - 12:00 pm “12 years of the Hornbill Nest Adoption Program: Safeguarding Hornbills in the Indian Eastern Himalaya, Dr. Aparajita Datta, Senior Scientist, Nature Conservation Foundation, and Co-Chair (Asia) IUCN Hornbill Specialist Group.

12:00 pm - 1:00 pm LUNCH

1:00 pm - 1:20 pm “Ground-hornbills and beyond—a call to arms” Dr. Lucy Kemp, Director at Mabula Ground Hornbill Project/IUCN SSC Hornbill Specialist Group
Our work on Southern Ground-hornbills is bearing fruit, largely because of the massive support from the AZA community. I will present our work leading multiple national and regional threat reduction programs and some very scary preliminary results from our pioneering work on the enigma of the North: the barely understood Abyssinian Ground-hornbill. In the face of rising trade in African hornbills, both live and for parts, has sparked a greater interest and support for African hornbills. We share our work on creating a global network for the supporting research, conservation, and capacity building to bring African hornbills to the level of attention they need to secure a future, for themselves and for their African forests.

1:20 pm - 1:40 pm “Proyecto Paujil: Community-Driven Conservation of the Blue-billed Curassow,” Kyle

Waites, Senior Keeper at Phoenix Zoo.

Proyecto Paujil is a community-driven conservation initiative dedicated to researching and implementing data-supported strategies to protect the critically endangered Blue-billed Curassow in northern Colombia. Launched in 2018, the project has successfully engaged local communities through capacity-building programs and education, empowering them to play an active role in the conservation of this vital species. This presentation will highlight key insights discovered about this species from our survey efforts and provide an update on the project's latest efforts and findings.

1:40 pm - 2:00 pm “Guam Rail (Ko’Ko’) Population update”- Scott Newland, Director and CEO of Sedgwick County Zoo and Leanne Blinco, Veterinary Hospital Manager at Sedgwick County Zoo

A summary of the current population of Guam Rail (Ko’Ko’) on Guam and in AZA zoological institutions. Current bird holders and potential next steps for the population.

2:00 pm - 2:30 pm "Choice, Control, and Collaboration with Avian Ambassadors” Ann Knutson, Zoological Manager of Birds at Dallas Zoo; Shawn Brehob, Curator of Wild Encounters at Columbus Zoo; and Debra Swank, Ambassador Area Supervisor at Akron Zoo

4 different stories will be shared about giving choice and control in ambassador animals.

2:30 pm - 2:50 pm “Ambassador Bird/Trainer Relationship Facilitates Training for Improved Welfare”

Lauren Wilson, Curator of Birds at Zoo Atlanta; Tarah Cornelius, Director of Animal Care at Houston Zoo; and Nicki Boyd, Curator of Mammals, Ambassadors, and Applied Behavior at San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance.

Three different stories will be shared about ambassador animals’ voluntary participation in their own medical needs.

2:50 pm - 3:10 pm “Artificial Incubation of Steller’s Eider Eggs” Jacob Kramer, Aviary Director at Pinola Conservancy

After several years of failed attempts at artificially incubating Steller’s Eider eggs, Pinola Conservancy experienced a breakthrough year in 2024 in our hatching success for the species, by incorporating a mix of old and new approaches and becoming comfortable in uncomfortable scenarios

3:10 pm - 3:30 pm Break

3:30 pm - 5:00 pm “USDA and birds”, Dr. Kelly Helmick, Senior Veterinary Medical Officer-Avian Specialist with USDA

Dr. Helmick from USDA will be joining us to discuss avian USDA regulations.

ASAG Workshop
Friday, March 28
Room: Mojave Learning Center

ASAG Workshop: How to Identify Keeper-Level Field Conservation Opportunities and What is Involved.

1:00 pm *Welcome & Intros*

1:05 pm *“Kea conservation” Jessica Meehan-Denver Zoo*

1:30 pm *“Red-breasted goose and Emperor goose opportunities” Joanna Klass -Woodland Park Zoo*

1:50 pm *“AAZK Keeper Conservation course” Marisa Boyd & Kyle Waites-Phoenix Zoo*

2:25 pm *“Trumpeter Swan coordination” Tiffany Mayo-Cleveland Metroparks*

2:45 pm *“Keeper participation in conservation and how they manage who goes” Rich Bergl-North Carolina Zoo*

3:00 pm *10 min BREAK*

3:10 pm *“Piping Plover program coordination” Bonnie Van Dam-Detroit Zoo*

3:40 pm *“John Ball Zoo’s keeper participation in conservation and a swing position to cover while they are gone” Rhiannon Mulligan-John Ball Zoo*

4:00 pm *“Community outreach & capacity building at Mexican zoos” Bobby Brett-San Diego Zoo*

4:20 pm *“SAFE fieldwork opportunities” Katey Leban-AZA SAFE*

4:40 pm *Moderate questions and closing remarks*



QR Code to ASAG’s 2025 midyear survey