



Animal Tracks

FALL 2025

VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 2

ELLEN TROUT ZOO | LUFKIN, TEXAS

*Island of
Evolution*

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WILD SIDE

THE
LAUGHING

Kookaburra

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WHAT'S NEW AT THE ZOO?

Today, as I walked through the zoo, I was approached by a curious four-year-old and his friend near the Komodo dragon exhibit. After asking my name, he spent the next 20 minutes peppering me with thoughtful questions about the dragons. His curiosity reminded me why zoos are so important—not just as places to see incredible animals, but as spaces where visitors of all ages can connect with wild-life and understand why protecting wild places matters. When we'd finished talking about dragons, he demonstrated his best impression of how a rhino walks. Judging by his smile, he had a wonderful time—and I left feeling proud of what our zoo stands for.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

The zoo itself is moving forward on several exciting initiatives. Our new point-of-sale system will make buying tickets, memberships, and education programs—both in-person and online—faster and easier. This modernization will also allow us to introduce new guest experiences on our website as they become available. Members can now download the PassPlay mobile app to store and access their memberships directly from their phones.

HABITAT UPDATES

Construction is also progressing on a new home for our primates. These spacious, complex habitats will allow the De Brazza's monkeys and black-and-white ruffed lemurs to display a wider range of natural behaviors than before. They will also give our keepers more opportunities for enrichment and training. This project is funded through the City of Lufkin's Zoo Building Fund, which is supported by zoo admission fees and dedicated solely to zoo improvements.



His curiosity reminded me why zoos are so important.

Behind the scenes, we continue to lead in crocodile husbandry. Thanks to the generosity of the Friends of Ellen Trout Zoo, we have built a state-of-the-art facility for rare and endangered crocodiles. While these animals are not on public display—privacy is essential if we hope to breed them successfully—we're optimistic that one day we'll welcome hatchlings.

PLANNING AHEAD

We are also midway through a nine-month strategic planning process to guide the zoo's growth over the next five years. This includes evaluating operations, guest experience, exhibits, revenue generation, and more. The results will help us identify our strengths, address areas for improvement, and create a roadmap for the future. It's an exciting time, so stay tuned!

P.S. Big news is coming soon about a brand-new experience arriving at the zoo next year. See you at the zoo!

Ryan

Executive Director



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fall 2025

SEPTEMBER

27 Endangered Species Day

OCTOBER

04 Behind the Scenes Tour, 8:30AM
Tiger, Giraffe, Hippo, & White Rhino levels only

17-18 Zoo Boo, 6-8PM

NOVEMBER

1 FOETZ Gift Shop Enrichment Tree

22 Running Towards Conservation 5K,
8:00AM

27 Thanksgiving, CLOSED

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Jamie Zayler

Animal Tracks STAFF

ZOO DIRECTOR
Ryan Gulker

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Rebecca West

CONTRIBUTORS
Heather Hatton
Kelly O'Dell
Dr. Stormy Perry
Karina Sotelo
Lawrence Stalnaker

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Whitney Anderson
Alexandra Garcia
Crissy Garrett
Aidyn Jackson
Amanda Lyons
Kelly O'Dell
Mackenna Shores
Gary Stallard

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Rebecca West

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SEPT
NATIONAL
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MONTH



6
INTERNATIONAL
VULTURE
AWARENESS DAY

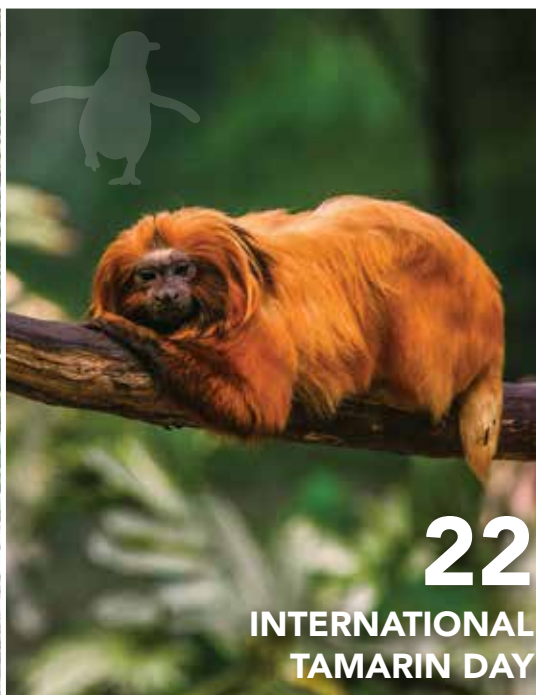


8
NATIONAL
IGUANA DAY

SEPTEMBER



22
WORLD
RHINO DAY

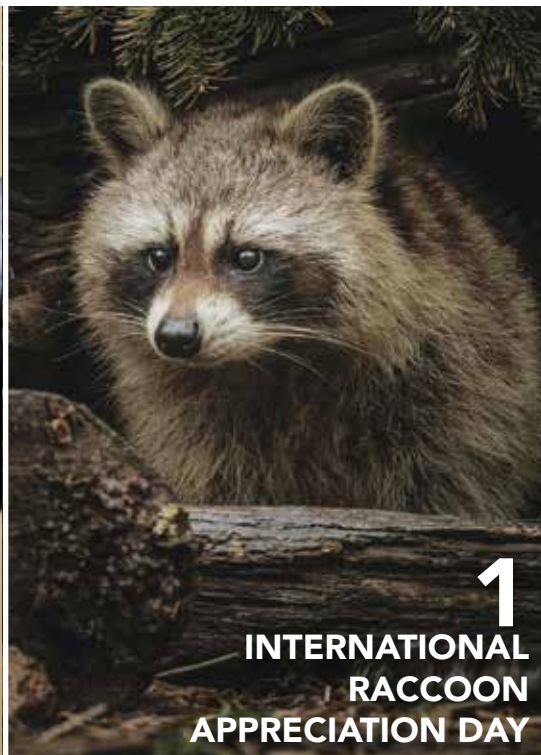


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INTERNATIONAL
TAMARIN DAY

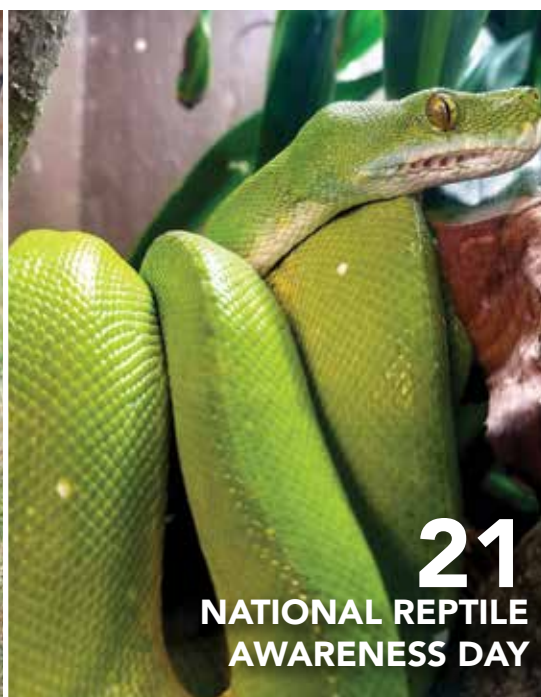


26
WORLD
CASSOWARY DAY

CONSERVATION DAYS



OCTOBER





1
NATIONAL
BISON DAY

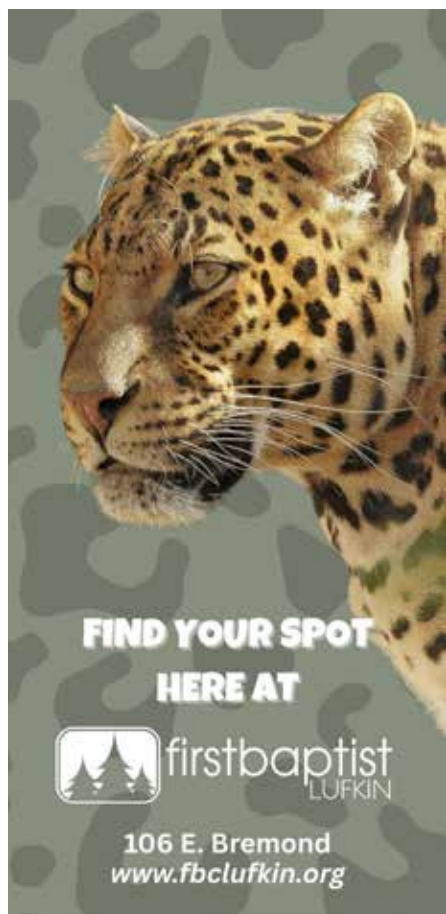


19
WORLD
ANTEATER DAY



29
INTERNATIONAL
JAGUAR DAY

NOVEMBER



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Penguin Parade



Every evening on Phillip Island in Victoria, Australia something magical happens. As the sun dips below the horizon and the waves lap gently on the sand, hundreds of little blue penguins—also known as fairy penguins—emerge from the sea. After a long day fishing, they waddle ashore in determined little lines, heading straight for their sandy burrows in the dunes. This is the Penguin Parade, and it's one of Australia's most beloved wildlife experiences.

From Ocean to Dunes

Little blue penguins spend daylight hours far out at sea, diving for small fish, squid, and krill. Just before dusk, they gather in small floating groups called rafts just beyond the surf. Safety in numbers is key—they wait until enough penguins have arrived before making the dash to shore, minimizing the risk from predators like gulls or raptors.

When the moment feels right, they paddle in, hop through the shallows, and begin their charming march up the beach. Their destination? A network of burrows and nesting boxes tucked into the coastal vegetation, where their mates or chicks are waiting.

A Thoughtful Viewing Experience

The Penguin Parade is carefully managed by Phillip Island Nature Parks to keep the focus on the birds' welfare. Visitors watch from raised boardwalks and tiered seating that keep people off the beach and away from sensitive nesting areas. Soft, penguin-friendly lighting makes it possible to see the parade clearly without disturbing the birds' natural vision.

One important rule: no photography during the parade. Even the glow from phone screens can disorient penguins, and camera flashes can cause stress. Instead, visitors are encouraged to enjoy the moment fully—and take memories home in their minds rather than on memory cards.



A Conservation Success Story

The Penguin Parade is more than just cute entertainment—it's the result of decades of conservation work. In the 1980s, the Phillip Island colony was in trouble. Habitat loss, introduced predators like foxes, and development on the Summerland Peninsula were all threatening the penguins' survival.

The Victorian government took action, buying back housing developments, removing predators, and restoring the natural dune habitat. Thanks to these efforts, the colony has rebounded. Today, more than 30,000 little blue penguins live on Phillip Island, making it the largest colony in the world.

Why It Matters

Watching a wild animal in its natural habitat is a privilege—and the Penguin Parade shows that conservation and tourism can work hand in hand. Every ticket sold helps fund research, habitat restoration, and education programs that protect not only penguins, but also other native wildlife on Phillip Island.

So, if you ever find yourself in Victoria, make time for this remarkable evening ritual. You'll leave with a smile, a warm heart, and a newfound appreciation for the world's tiniest penguins making their biggest commute.

Species Spotlight:



LITTLE BLUE PENGUINS

With their sleek blue feathers, endearing waddle, and ocean-diving skills, little blue penguins—also called fairy penguins—are proof that big personalities can come in small packages. Found along the southern coasts of Australia and New Zealand, they are the smallest penguin species in the world, standing just 12 inches tall and weighing around 2 pounds.

Life at Sea

Little blue penguins are expert swimmers, spending most of their lives in the ocean. They hunt small schooling fish like anchovies and sardines, as well as squid and krill. Using rapid wing beats, they “fly” underwater at speeds of up to 3.7 mph and can dive for over a minute to catch prey.

While they may travel dozens of kilometers in a single day, they always return to land to rest, molt, and breed.

Burrows and Breeding

These penguins nest in burrows dug into sand dunes or soil, and in rocky crevices close to the shoreline. In some areas, they also use artificial nest boxes provided by conservation groups.

Breeding season timing varies by location, but many colonies raise two clutches of eggs each year. Pairs usually mate for life, returning to the same burrow each season. Both parents share egg incubation and chick feeding duties.

Why So Blue?

The shimmering slate-blue feathers on a penguin’s back help camouflage them from above, blending into the ocean’s surface. Their white bellies disguise them from below, making it harder for predators like seals or large fish to spot them against the bright surface of the water.

Challenges They Face

While populations in protected areas like Phillip Island are stable, little blue penguins face threats from:

- Introduced predators such as foxes, dogs, and cats.
- Habitat loss from coastal development.
- Marine pollution and discarded fishing gear.
- Conservation programs focus on predator control, habitat restoration, and public education to keep colonies healthy.

Quick Facts

Scientific name: *Eudyptula minor*

Height: ~12 inches

Weight: ~2.2 lbs

Lifespan: Average 6–7 years in the wild, longer in protected colonies

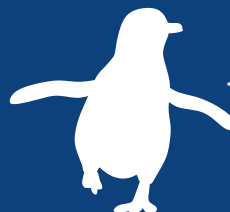
Range: Southern Australia (including Tasmania) and New Zealand

Diet: Small fish, squid, krill

Predators: Seals, sharks, foxes, dogs, cats, large gulls

Why They Matter

Little blue penguins are an important part of their marine ecosystem, helping to keep fish populations balanced. Their conservation success in places like Phillip Island shows what’s possible when communities and governments work together to protect wildlife.



Find the penguins!
Ten penguins are hidden in this issue. Can you find them all?

HANDPRINT koala

BY HEATHER HATTON, MUSEUM OF EAST TEXAS



Materials

Blue or Gray paper
Small pieces of pink,
black and green paper
2 google eyes
1 popsicle stick

Scissors
Glue stick
Lids or cups to
trace circles about 1"
and 2" in diameter.

Instructions

Trace your hand onto the blue or gray paper and cut it out.

Blue or gray: Using the 2" diameter circle (any cup or lid will work) trace one blue circle and cut it out. Trace and cut 2 circles approximately 1" diameter.

Pink: Trace 2 circles using the lid of the glue stick. Cut two smaller circles for cheeks.

Black: Draw and cut one small oval about $\frac{3}{4}$ " tall.

For the head and ears, cut a few notches in the side of the circles to give the look of fur.

Glue the face together following the example. Glue the head to the hand covering the thumb portion of the hand.

Weave the fingers around the popsicle stick and glue to the stick.

Cut small leaves out of the green paper and glue to the popsicle stick mimicking bamboo.

Join the Wild Side

Why Membership Matters

At Ellen Trout Zoo, members aren't just visitors — they're partners in protecting wildlife and strengthening our zoo. Every membership helps fund new and upgraded habitats, enhance guest amenities, and support conservation programs that safeguard endangered species both locally and globally.

Your Member Experience

Membership includes unlimited admission for a full year, giving you the freedom to stop in for a peaceful walk or spend the day discovering the zoo. Many members find their visits become a favorite way to stay active — enjoying fresh air, nature, and the satisfaction of knowing every step helps support the animals in our care.

A Gift That Lasts All Year

A zoo membership is more than a pass — it's an investment in animal care, conservation, and community connection. It's also a year of adventure for you or the perfect gift for families, animal lovers, and anyone who values the wonder of wildlife.

Member Benefits

As a member, you'll receive invitations to exclusive events, enjoy discounts at the gift shop, concessions, and select programs, and stay connected through our quarterly Animal Tracks magazine, which shares stories, updates, and behind-the-scenes insights made possible by member support.

Membership Options

From Individual to Lifetime, there's a level for every household. No matter how often you visit, your membership quickly pays for itself — and your impact continues long after you leave the zoo.

Join or Renew Today

Stop by the zoo admission window, call 936-633-0394, or visit friendsofellentroutroutzoo.com to become a member. Together, we can create a better zoo and a brighter future for wildlife.

*Your adventure
starts here.*

EMU

facts

HABITAT

They prefer open plains, grasslands, and eucalyptus forests, and are known to travel long distances in search of food and water.

WHAT A *runner!*

Emus have long, powerful legs with three toes on each foot. They can sprint up to 30 miles per hour and cover nearly 10 feet in a single stride. These birds are excellent endurance runners too—they can trot for miles!



A group of emus is called a **MOB**

BACK IN

1932

Australia faced an unexpected foe: emus. After World War I, farmers in Western Australia struggled as thousands of emus began invading farmlands during migration. The government actually sent in soldiers—with machine guns—to try and control the population. The result? The emus outran and outsmarted the military, scattering before they could be targeted effectively. The “war” ended in a humiliating defeat for the humans, and the emus were declared the winners. Today, the Great Emu War is remembered as a famously bizarre moment in Australian history.

They are native to Australia, and are well adapted to both arid and semi-tropical regions. Their range spans most of the continent, though they avoid very dense forests and extremely dry deserts.



WHERE ARE THEY?



Emus are listed as a species of Least Concern, meaning they are not currently threatened in the wild. They are well-adapted and widely distributed across Australia, though local populations can decline due to drought, habitat loss, or predation of eggs and chicks.

Because they lack teeth, emus swallow small rocks—called gastroliths—to help grind up food in their gizzard.

SIZE



Emus are the second largest birds in the world, after ostriches. Adults typically stand 5 to 6 feet tall and can weigh between 80 and 120 pounds. Despite their size, they're fast on their feet!



SAY WHAT?

Emus make deep drumming and booming sounds using an inflatable throat pouch. These low-frequency calls can be heard over a mile away—and even felt through the ground!

Meet Papa & Cadbury!

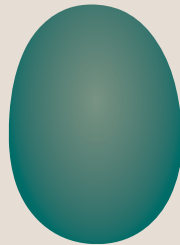
Ellen Trout Zoo is home to two emus, who share their habitat with our wallaby. Papa, our older male, is an impressive 42 years old and has been part of the zoo family since 1983. Cadbury, our 32-year-old female, was hatched right here at the zoo — and Papa is her father. Over the years, the pair have become well-known to keepers and guests alike for their curious nature and the way they often stay close together as they explore their space. They are quick to investigate any changes to their habitat, whether it's a new branch, a tasty treat, or the welcome spray of a sprinkler on a hot afternoon. Cooling off under the water is one of their favorite pastimes, and it's not unusual to see them standing together in the spray, soaking up the refreshment before heading off to forage again.

Kelly O'Dell
PRIMARY KEEPER

ELLEN TROUT ZOO
ADOPT
AN ANIMAL



Emus lay large, dark green eggs—each about the size of a softball! A female can lay up to 15 eggs in a single clutch. Once she's done laying, the male takes over, incubating the eggs for about 8 weeks without eating, drinking, or leaving the nest. After hatching, dad raises the striped chicks for up to 6 months.



DIET



Emus have a unique feature, a double rachis emerging from a single shaft, which gives them a shaggy appearance. These feathers help insulate them against both heat and cold, and the matte brown-gray coloring provides excellent camouflage in the Australian outback.



Emu chicks are adorably striped, with cream-and-brown bands that help them blend into their surroundings. This camouflage fades as they grow older.



The Laughing

Kookaburra

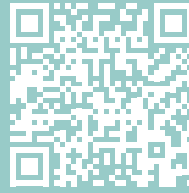
Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree,
Merry merry king of the bush is he.
Laugh, Kookaburra, laugh, Kookaburra,
Gay your life must be!

Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree
Eating all the gumdrops he can see
Stop, Kookaburra, Stop, Kookaburra
Leave some there for me.

Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree,
Counting all the monkeys he can see
Stop, Kookaburra, Stop, Kookaburra,
That's no monkey, that's me.

Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree
BY MARION SINCLAIR

What Do You Hear?



If you've ever been in the Australian bush at dawn or dusk, you may have heard a sound that starts as a low chuckle and crescendos into a full-blown, infectious laugh. That unmistakable call belongs to the laughing kookaburra, one of Australia's most beloved birds.

Meet the Kookaburra

Kookaburras are members of the kingfisher family, though unlike their fish-eating relatives, they prefer land-based meals like insects, worms, small reptiles, and even the occasional mouse or frog. With their sturdy bodies, large heads, and powerful beaks, kookaburras are well-equipped hunters of the Australian forests and woodlands.

They're instantly recognizable not just by their appearance, but by their incredible vocalizations. Their "laugh" is a social call that can be heard up to two miles away, echoing through the trees like a bushland alarm clock.

Why Do They Laugh?

The kookaburra's laugh isn't because they find something funny—it's actually territorial communication. Family groups use the loud, rolling call to mark their territory, letting rival kookaburras know, "This spot is taken!" Other kookaburras respond with their own chorus, and before long, the forest rings with their booming laughter.

However, every time someone mimics the kookaburra's call, the bird interprets it as a real intruder. Believing a rival is encroaching on its territory, the kookaburra will call back in defense—over and over again. When it's unable to drive away the "rival," the persistent conflict can leave the kookaburra feeling defeated and stressed out.

A Family Affair

Kookaburras live in cooperative family groups, with older siblings helping parents raise new chicks. Their social nature makes the laughing chorus even more dramatic, as several birds often join in at once, producing a sound that can fool newcomers into thinking it's a group of humans having a good laugh together.

Fun Facts About Their Famous Laugh

Kookaburras are often used in movies to represent tropical jungle sounds, even in films set far from Australia.

They're most vocal at sunrise and sunset, a behavior known as the "bushman's clock."

Their call can carry over 3 miles, thanks to their powerful lungs and resonant vocal structure.

Why We Love Them

There's something undeniably joyful about a kookaburra's laugh. It connects people to the wild, vibrant life of the Australian bush and reminds us of nature's own sense of character and community. Whether you're lucky enough to hear one in person or just on a recording, the kookaburra's laugh is sure to bring a smile.

So next time you hear that rollicking "hoo-hoo-ha-ha-ha," imagine a family of kookaburras proudly announcing their presence, filling the forest with their cheerful energy—proof that sometimes, the best soundtrack to the great outdoors is nature itself.

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ESSENTIAL GEAR FOR YOUR Outback Adventure

Find everything you need for a full weekend of exploring right here in Lufkin.

BY KARINA SOTELO, VISIT LUFKIN

Before heading into the piney woods or wandering through the Ellen Trout Zoo, it's important to pack smart. From practical footwear to family-friendly extras, we've mapped out local stops where you can gear up for a day of outdoor discovery. Use this as your Lufkin-sourced checklist—complete with some visual inspiration to bring your page to life.

1 Dress the Part

Whether you're navigating the shaded trails of Kit McConnico or walking past wallabies at the zoo, start your journey with the right footwear and apparel. At Brown's Shoe Fit Co., located right in town, you'll find high-quality hiking and walking shoes perfect for comfort and support. Pair those with moisture-wicking clothing or a breathable daypack from Academy Sports + Outdoors, and you're adventure-ready.

2 Weather Ready Accessories

The Texas sun waits for no one—so don't forget protection. Salt & Honey Marketplace, a local boutique in downtown Lufkin, offers adorable and practical options for little explorers including sun hats, baby shoes, and even swaddle cloths with a rustic touch. You'll also find stylish sunglasses and straw hats at SPRUCE, making downtown Lufkin a one-stop shop for sunny day essentials.



3

Power Up & Capture the Moments

Don't let a dead battery stop your adventure. 1st Street Wireless, just off the brick-lined streets of downtown, has waterproof phone cases, portable power banks, and durable charging cords—everything you need to stay powered up for trail maps and photos. From snapping giraffe selfies at the Ellen Trout Zoo to recording a peaceful trail moment, this gear keeps you connected and ready to share your journey. Tag your best moments with #VisitLufkin and become part of the story.

5

A Touch of Local Charm

Need a break from the heat? Stop by Kurth Memorial Library, a bright and welcoming spot where you can browse gently used books, including local wildlife guides and East Texas stories. It's a great way to cool off and learn more about the landscapes you've explored.

4

Fuel for the Journey

Exploration is hungry work. Before you set out, swing by Brookshire Brothers to pack up trail mix, fruit, and fresh deli bites. On weekends, wander through the Downtown Farmers Market and pick up local honey sticks or home-made granola bars for a sweet energy boost. You'll thank yourself at mile two.

6

Gear for the Trail (or Zoo path)

No adventure is complete without a few essentials in your pack. Academy Sports stocks tents, foldable chairs, sleeping bags, and daypacks if you're turning this into a full weekend experience. For affordable options, explore local pawn shops in Lufkin where you can score gently used gear—perfect for the budget-conscious or spontaneous adventurer.

Final Tip: Adventure Starts Here

Gear up, grab your map, and step into East Texas with confidence. Whether you're trekking through the pines, enjoying the zoo, or simply picnicking in Cotton Square, every great adventure starts with the right preparation—and the right places to shop.

Support local. Explore Lufkin. And don't forget to

Visit Lufkin!





ISLAND OF EVOLUTION

HOW ISOLATION SHAPED AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE



Step into the wilds of Australia, and you'll find a world unlike any other. Kangaroos hop across open plains, koalas cling to eucalyptus trees, and the duck-billed platypus paddles through freshwater creeks. From echidnas to emus, sugar gliders to wombats, Australia's wildlife seems to follow its own set of evolutionary rules—and that's because it does.

Australia is a continent shaped by isolation. For more than 50 million years, it has remained geographically separate from the rest of the world. That ancient solitude created the perfect conditions for evolution to take unexpected turns, allowing unique adaptations to take root and flourish in ways that would have been impossible elsewhere.

BREAKING AWAY FROM THE PACK

To understand why Australia is so biologically distinct, we have to go back in time—way back. Around 180 million years ago, the supercontinent Gondwana began to break apart. South America, Africa, Antarctica, and eventually Australia drifted off on their own tectonic journeys. But while most continents experienced new waves of animals and plants crossing in and out over land bridges or narrow seas, Australia stayed isolated.

Roughly 50 million years ago, Australia separated completely from Antarctica and began drifting northward. From that moment on, it became a natural laboratory—cut off from the rest of the world and free to evolve life in its own direction.

THE RISE OF THE MARSUPIALS

One of the most iconic results of this isolation is the dominance of marsupials—mammals that give birth to tiny, underdeveloped young that continue to grow in a pouch. While marsupials once existed on many continents, they've largely disappeared elsewhere due to competition with placental mammals (like cats, dogs, and primates). But in Australia, marsupials never faced that competition and instead became ecological all-stars.

Over time, marsupials diversified to fill nearly every niche. Kangaroos evolved for speed and efficiency on vast grasslands. Koalas became specialists in eucalyptus trees, developing tough digestive systems and low-energy lifestyles to survive on leaves that most animals can't digest. Carnivorous marsupials like quolls and Tasmanian devils emerged as top predators.

Even the now-extinct Tasmanian tiger, or thylacine,

was a marsupial that looked and acted much like a wolf—an example of convergent evolution, where unrelated species evolve similar traits to solve the same ecological problems.

EGG-LAYING MAMMALS AND OTHER ODDITIES

Australia's isolation also preserved one of the planet's strangest evolutionary lineages: the monotremes. This rare group of egg-laying mammals includes the platypus and echidna, and they truly defy categories. The platypus, for example, has the bill of a duck, the tail of a beaver, webbed feet, and even venomous spurs on its ankles. It hunts underwater using electroreception—a biological sonar that detects the electrical signals of prey.

Monotremes likely represent an ancient branch of mammalian evolution that disappeared elsewhere. But in the safe haven of Australia, they've survived and adapted, giving scientists an extraordinary glimpse into evolutionary history.

AVIAN GIANTS AND GLIDERS

Australia's birdlife is just as unique. The emu, a towering, flightless bird, fills a similar ecological role to the ostrich in Africa, while the kookaburra, known for its laugh-like call, is part of the kingfisher family but behaves more like a terrestrial predator. Parrots like cockatoos, lorikeets, and galahs are widespread and vividly colored, thanks to the abundance of flowering trees and open habitats.

Then there are the gliders—small marsupials that resemble squirrels but can soar through the treetops using membranes stretched between their limbs. From the tiny sugar glider to the cat-sized greater glider, these animals showcase how Australia's forests became vertical playgrounds where flightless mammals took to the air—at least in their own way.

SURVIVAL THROUGH SPECIALIZATION

Because Australia's ecosystems developed in isolation and often under harsh conditions—arid outback, fire-prone forests, and nutri-

ent-poor soils—many animals became highly specialized. This helped them survive in specific environments, but it also made them vulnerable to sudden change.

For example, koalas eat almost exclusively eucalyptus leaves and are extremely sensitive to habitat loss. Many marsupials, including bet-tongs and bandicoots, once played critical roles in maintaining soil health and seed dispersal but are now threatened due to invasive predators and land clearing.

MODERN CHALLENGES FOR AN ANCIENT ECOSYSTEM

Australia's evolutionary marvels now face modern threats. The arrival of humans brought fire and habitat change; European colonization added foxes, rabbits, cats, and livestock, which decimated native populations. Climate change is altering rainfall patterns and increasing the frequency of bushfires—both of which pose major risks to species already on the edge.

More than 1,900 plant and animal species in Australia are listed as threatened. National efforts like Threatened Species Day (September 7) and conservation programs led by organizations like ZCOG and AZA SAFE are vital to reversing that trend.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE ISLAND OF EVOLUTION

Australia offers a living case study in how isolation, time, and ecological pressures shape life. Its animals may seem strange at first glance—but they're brilliant examples of nature's creativity and resilience.

Zoos like Ellen Trout Zoo play an important role in connecting people to these far-off species. Whether it's observing the curious gait of a wallaby or hearing a kookaburra laugh, visitors have a chance to experience Australia's wildlife up close—and develop the empathy and curiosity needed to protect it.

Australia's animals are survivors. But their future depends on awareness, education, and action. After all, evolution can take millions of years—but extinction can happen in a heart-beat.



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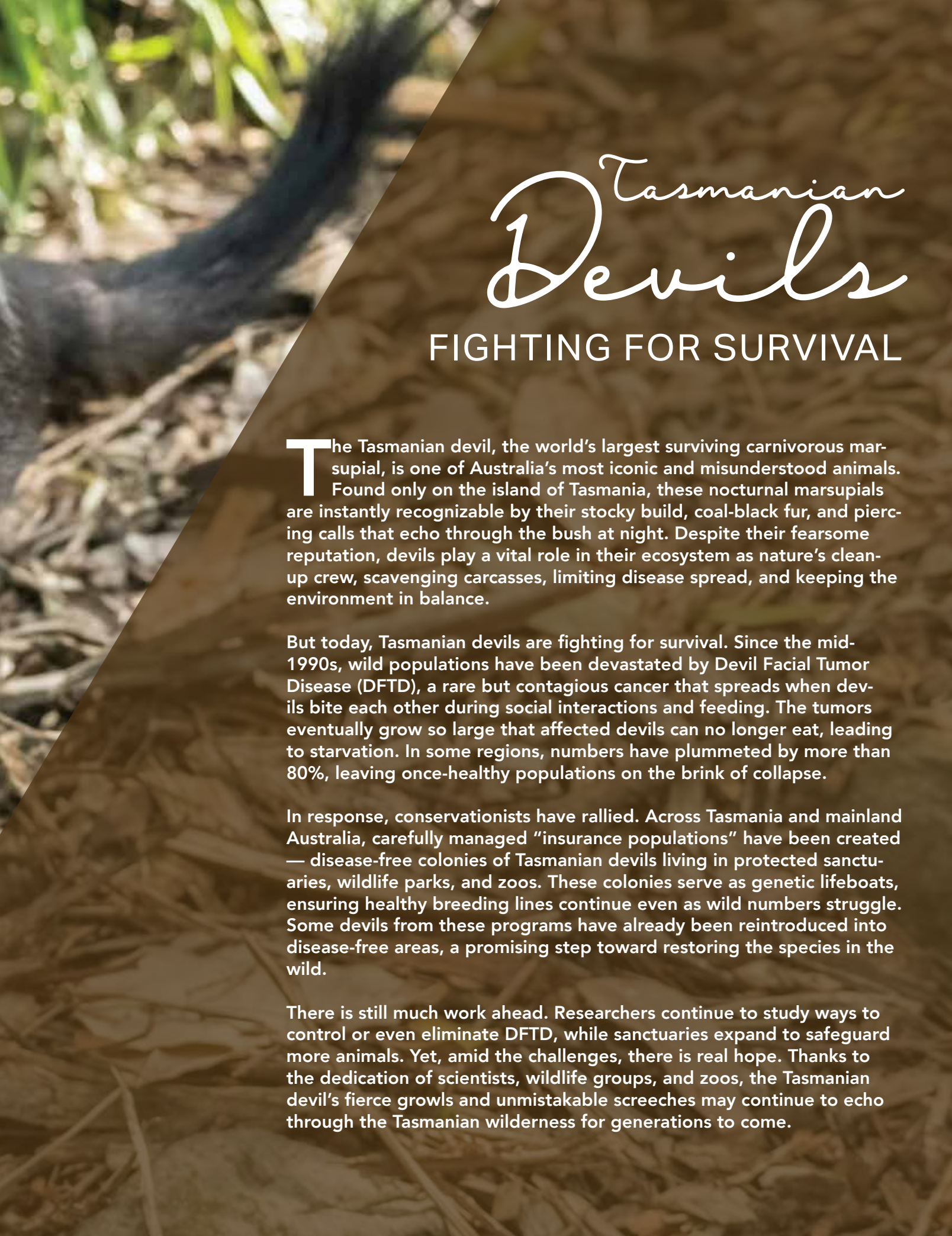
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Tasmanian Devils

FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

The Tasmanian devil, the world's largest surviving carnivorous marsupial, is one of Australia's most iconic and misunderstood animals. Found only on the island of Tasmania, these nocturnal marsupials are instantly recognizable by their stocky build, coal-black fur, and piercing calls that echo through the bush at night. Despite their fearsome reputation, devils play a vital role in their ecosystem as nature's clean-up crew, scavenging carcasses, limiting disease spread, and keeping the environment in balance.

But today, Tasmanian devils are fighting for survival. Since the mid-1990s, wild populations have been devastated by Devil Facial Tumor Disease (DFTD), a rare but contagious cancer that spreads when devils bite each other during social interactions and feeding. The tumors eventually grow so large that affected devils can no longer eat, leading to starvation. In some regions, numbers have plummeted by more than 80%, leaving once-healthy populations on the brink of collapse.

In response, conservationists have rallied. Across Tasmania and mainland Australia, carefully managed "insurance populations" have been created — disease-free colonies of Tasmanian devils living in protected sanctuaries, wildlife parks, and zoos. These colonies serve as genetic lifeboats, ensuring healthy breeding lines continue even as wild numbers struggle. Some devils from these programs have already been reintroduced into disease-free areas, a promising step toward restoring the species in the wild.

There is still much work ahead. Researchers continue to study ways to control or even eliminate DFTD, while sanctuaries expand to safeguard more animals. Yet, amid the challenges, there is real hope. Thanks to the dedication of scientists, wildlife groups, and zoos, the Tasmanian devil's fierce growls and unmistakable screeches may continue to echo through the Tasmanian wilderness for generations to come.

BENNETT'S WALLABY

Facts

HABITAT

They live in coastal scrublands, forests, and open grasslands. They are adaptable and can thrive in both wild and semi-rural environments with plenty of cover and fresh vegetation.



One-of-a-Kind NOSEPRINT

Like fingerprints in humans, wallaby nose patterns are unique to each individual and could potentially be used for ID purposes.



Bennett's wallaby is also known as the red-necked wallaby due to the reddish fur around its shoulders. It's the most cold-tolerant wallaby, thanks to its thick fur — it can even survive light snow in Tasmania!



WHERE ARE THEY?

They are native to the eastern and southeastern coasts of Australia and the island of Tasmania. They have also been introduced to parts of New Zealand and England, where small feral populations exist.

DIET



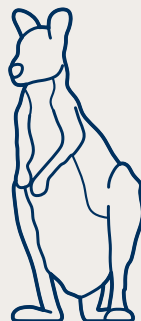
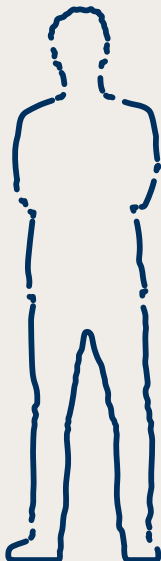
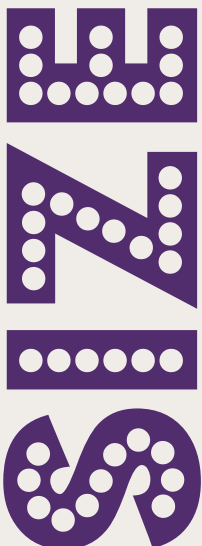
The Bennett's wallaby is classified as Least Concern due to its stable population and wide range. However, habitat fragmentation and vehicle collisions remain ongoing concerns in some areas.

SHY BUT *Social*

While they tend to live and forage alone, Bennett's wallabies form loose groups called mobs for protection. They're most active at dawn and dusk, a behavior called crepuscular activity — helping them avoid predators and stay cool.



When threatened, they will flee in a zigzag pattern to confuse predators.



Adult males weigh around 30–40 lbs and stand about 3 feet tall. Females are smaller and lighter.

SAY WHAT?

thump their feet as a warning, similar to rabbits. A strong hind-leg thump signals danger to other wallabies nearby.

Meet HEATH

ELLEN TROUT ZOO
ADOPT
AN ANIMAL

Ellen Trout Zoo is currently home to one Bennett's wallaby named Heath. Now 7 years old, Heath was born right here at the zoo and has been a favorite among guests ever since. He has a particular fondness for snacking on banana leaves from the trees in his habitat, stripping them neatly from the branches. While he can be active and alert, especially in the early morning or late afternoon, Heath is most often spotted lounging in the shady back area of his habitat, where he enjoys long naps and watching the world go by.

Kelly O'Dell
PRIMARY KEEPER



They often clean their forepaws and face like a cat, especially after eating or grooming.

On hot days, wallabies will lick their forearms where blood vessels are close to the skin. As the saliva evaporates, it cools their blood — a natural built-in air conditioner!

A group of wallabies is called a

mob

Their powerful hind legs and muscular tails are used for hopping and balance.

Wallabies are exceptional jumpers. A single leap can cover up to 6 feet in height and 25 feet in length!

MARSUPIAL MAGIC

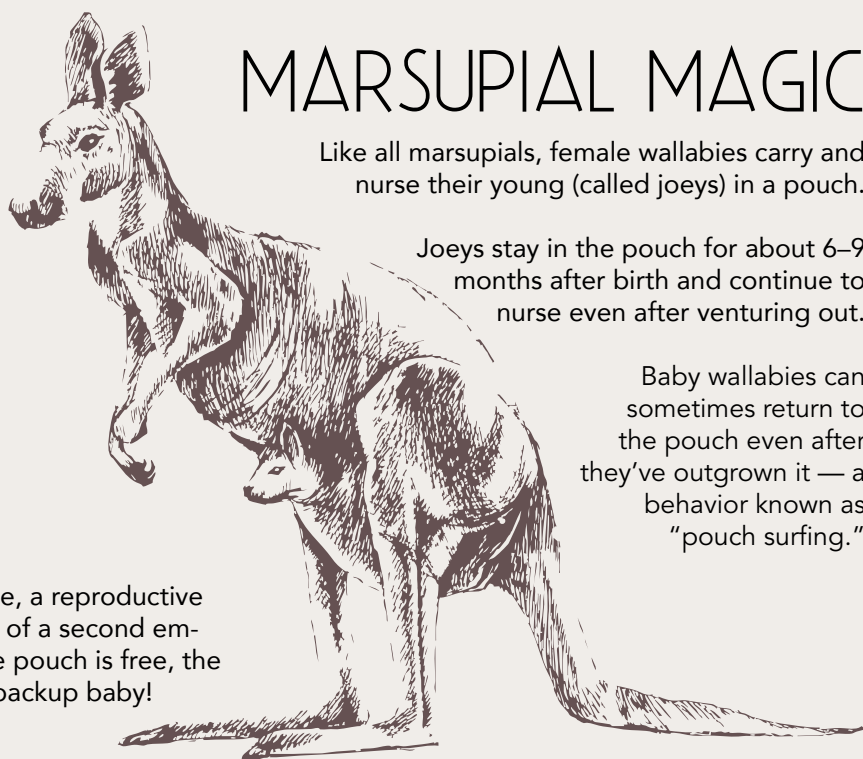
Like all marsupials, female wallabies carry and nurse their young (called joeys) in a pouch.

Joeys stay in the pouch for about 6–9 months after birth and continue to nurse even after venturing out.

Baby wallabies can sometimes return to the pouch even after they've outgrown it — a behavior known as "pouch surfing."

DOUBLE BABIES?

Female wallabies can exhibit embryonic diapause, a reproductive superpower where they pause the development of a second embryo while nursing a joey in the pouch. Once the pouch is free, the embryo resumes development — like a built-in backup baby!





WILD MEDICINE

BY DR. STORMY PERRY, DVM

Australian animals come with their own unique physiologies, anatomy, and diseases. You may encounter a whole host of species, including some of the most venomous snakes to the only egg-laying mammals on the planet! A common class of Australian animals that you may encounter in zoological facilities are marsupials, which include kangaroos, wallabies and koalas (fun fact – the only marsupial found in the United States is the Virginia Opossum). Marsupials are characterized by their pouch, which is used to nurture their young. The Ellen Trout Zoo is home to a Bennett's wallaby named Heath, which are similar to kangaroos but smaller in size. Caring for wallabies present their own unique challenge, but there is an important pathogen that is a threat to wallabies and humans, Toxoplasmosis.

Toxoplasmosis, caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, can be transmitted through contaminated food/water or surfaces. This parasite's main host are felids, both domestic and wild, and is spread through their feces. Toxoplasmosis is considered a zoonotic disease, which means humans can get it from animals. Most healthy people will not have any clinical signs, but those who are at risk, such as those with weakened immune systems or pregnant people, can develop serious illness. Prevention involves avoiding raw or undercooked food, wearing gloves when gardening and washing your hands after cleaning up after your cat. Another risk factor is flushing cat feces which can then contaminate the water supply and infect susceptible wild-life species and contribute to further spread. It is better to scoop up feces (or use an automatic scooper) and dispose of it in the trash.

Toxoplasmosis can be seen in zoo-housed felines (i.e. lions, tigers, cougars) and will generally not cause clinical disease. However, it can spread to more susceptible animals, such as non-human primates and our focus, wallabies. Toxoplasmosis can cause severe and even fatal disease in wallabies and prevention is the key to keeping our animals safe. This can include reducing exposure of wallabies to cats (both zoo-housed and feral), reducing rodent populations, proper disinfection, and regular health monitoring in susceptible species. A proactive approach not only protects animal welfare but also ensures the health and safety of zookeepers and the public.

Zoo Tots!



For curious little minds and budding animal lovers, Zoo Tots offers a wild start to early education.





Zoo Tots is a hands-on preschool program designed just for ages 2 to 4, combining play, creativity, and up-close animal encounters to inspire a lifelong love of nature and science.

Each class focuses on a different animal group— amphibians, reptiles, birds, or mammals. Tots learn about the animal group of the day by interacting with touchable real biofacts like snake sheds, tortoise shells, and feathers. Each session also features a creative craft or activity that complements the animal theme, encouraging fine motor skills, imagination, and learning through play.

And of course, no Zoo Tots class would be complete without a visit from a live animal ambassador! These up-close encounters are a highlight for many tots, offering a safe and memorable way to meet the animal ambassador of the day.

Zoo Tots runs as a month-long session, meeting twice a week:

Either Monday/Wednesday
or Tuesday/Thursday

Class times at 9 - 9:30 am
or 10 - 10:30 am

Zoo Tot classes are only offered in September, October, November, February, March, and April. While animal themes repeat each month, the crafts and activities change, making it a fresh experience for returning families. Many tots come back again and again!

Whether your child is taking their first steps into science or already loves animals, Zoo Tots offers the perfect blend of learning and fun.

*Join us and watch your
child's curiosity grow wild!*

ANIMAL APPETITES



Dingo

AUSTRALIA'S WILD CANINE

Dingoes are opportunistic carnivores that prey on kangaroos, wallabies, birds, and small mammals. They can hunt alone to catch rabbits or lizards, but when pursuing larger prey, they work together in packs. Using teamwork and strategy, dingoes will tire out and corner their target before moving in for the kill. Although not originally native to Australia, they arrived by ship over 5,000 years ago and have since become a vital part of the ecosystem, helping to keep herbivore populations in check and prevent overgrazing.



Platypus

UNDERWATER INSECT HUNTER

The platypus uses its sensitive, duck-like bill to detect the tiny electric signals of prey underwater, a skill called electroreception. It hunts with its eyes, ears, and nostrils closed, relying entirely on touch and electrical signals to find insect larvae, worms, and freshwater crustaceans hiding in the mud. After gathering food in its cheek pouches, the platypus surfaces to chew and swallow. Adults lose their teeth, so they grind food with rough pads inside their mouths. This strange mammal needs to eat about 20% of its body weight daily to keep up with its active hunting lifestyle.

Australia is home to some of the most unusual animals on Earth—and they have diets to match! From ant-eating mammals to birds that snack on snakes, Aussie wildlife has developed some truly unique tastes to survive in their diverse habitats.



Kookaburra

SNAKES, LIZARDS, AND MORE

Famous for its laughing call, the kookaburra is also a skilled predator. These kingfishers eat small reptiles, insects, frogs, and even snakes. They perch on branches, watching for movement below, and then swoop down to snatch their prey. After catching something, kookaburras use their strong beaks to bash it against a branch or rock to kill it or break it into pieces before swallowing it whole. Family groups cooperate to defend territories, and older siblings often help feed the younger chicks.



Echidna

ANTS AND TERMITES ON TAP

Echidnas may look like hedgehogs, but they have a very different way of eating. With no teeth, they rely on a long, sticky tongue—up to 7 inches long!—to scoop up ants and termites from logs and anthills. Their powerful claws help them dig for their favorite crunchy snacks. Because they have no teeth, they use hard pads in their mouths and strong muscles in their stomachs to grind up their food. Echidnas can eat thousands of ants in one meal and play an important role in keeping insect populations in check. In winter, they can slow down their metabolism, surviving on stored fat when ants are scarce.



Cassowary

THE FRUIT-LOVING GIANT

Despite its fierce reputation, the cassowary is mostly a frugivore—it loves to eat fruit! Cassowaries swallow many fruits whole, including some with very large seeds that few other animals can eat. As they travel through the rainforest, they deposit these seeds far from the parent trees, making them important seed dispersers and helping plants grow in new areas. Cassowaries will also occasionally eat fungi, small animals, and carrion, but fruit makes up most of their diet. Without cassowaries, many rainforest plants would struggle to spread and thrive.



Koala

EUCALYPTUS ENTHUSIAST

Koalas are famously picky eaters, dining almost exclusively on eucalyptus leaves. They are so selective that they won't just feed from any eucalyptus tree — instead, they carefully pick and choose which trees to eat from. These leaves are tough, fibrous, and even toxic to most animals, but koalas have a special gut filled with bacteria that break down the toxins. Because their food is low in energy, koalas conserve strength by sleeping 18-22 hours a day. Their slow metabolic rate helps them extract most of the nutrition from the leaves. They tend to prefer the youngest, most tender leaves, which are higher in nutrients and water.



Rainbow Lorikeet

NECTAR SIPPER

Rainbow lorikeets feed on nectar and pollen, using their brush-tipped tongues to lap up the sweet liquid from flowers. They zip from tree to tree, playing an important role as pollinators for many native plants. They also eat soft fruits, seeds, and occasionally insects to round out their diet. Their lively colors and noisy chatter make them one of the most recognizable birds in Australian suburbs and forests alike.



Saltwater Crocodile

APEX PREDATOR

Australia's saltwater crocodile is the largest reptile in the world and an apex predator at the top of the food chain. It feeds on fish, birds, turtles, and even large mammals like water buffalo. Crocodiles are ambush hunters, waiting near the water's edge for the right moment to strike. With explosive power, they lunge at prey, dragging it underwater and using a "death roll" to subdue and tear it apart. They can go weeks or even months between meals thanks to their efficient metabolism.



Snake Neck Turtle

AMBUSH PREDATOR

The snake-necked turtle has a neck as long as its shell, which it folds sideways for protection. It hides in shallow water, waiting for fish, frogs, or insects to swim by. With a lightning-fast strike, it snatches prey using suction and sharp movements of its neck. These turtles are both hunters and scavengers, helping keep waterways clean by eating carrion as well.



Thorny Devil

ANT GOURMET

Covered in spikes, the thorny devil is a harmless lizard with a one-track mind: ants. It can eat thousands of ants in a single day! Thorny devils position themselves along ant trails and flick their sticky tongues rapidly to catch their tiny prey. They have another fascinating adaptation—their skin can channel dew and rain directly to their mouths through a network of grooves between their scales.

From carnivores like dingoes and crocodiles to plant lovers like koalas and nectar-feeding lorikeets, Australia's animals have evolved incredible ways to find food in deserts, rainforests, rivers, and coastlines. Each diet tells a story about survival in one of the world's most diverse and challenging environments. Next time you think about Australian wildlife, remember—what they eat is just as fascinating as how they look!

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Remembering

THE WILDLIFE WARRIOR WHO CHANGED THE WORLD

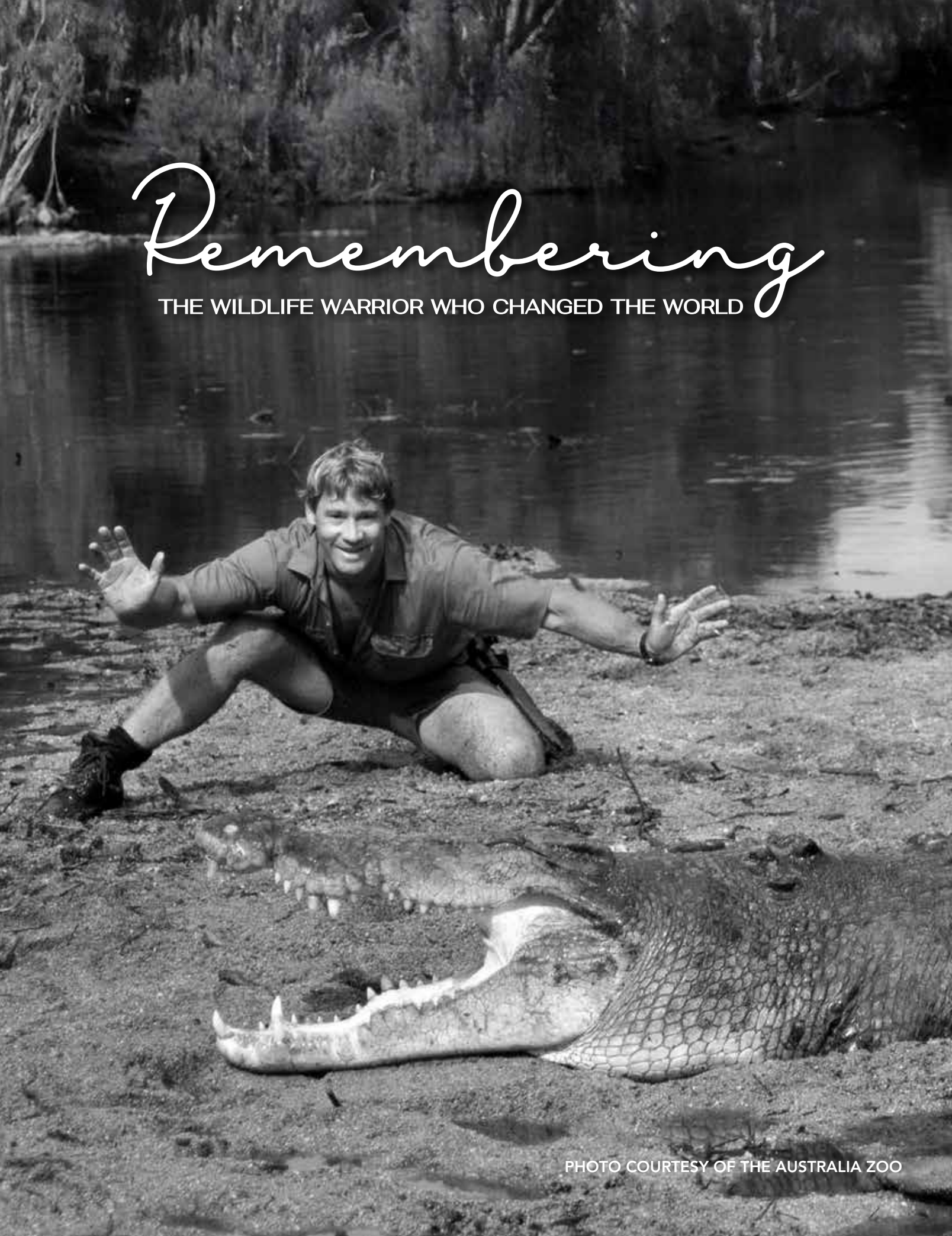


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIA ZOO

It's almost impossible to think about Australia and wildlife conservation without thinking of Steve Irwin—the khaki-clad Australian whose energy, passion, and fearlessness made him a global icon. Known to millions as The Crocodile Hunter, Irwin wasn't just a television personality. He was a dedicated conservationist who used his platform to educate, inspire, and advocate for wildlife around the world.

Born in 1962 in Essendon, Victoria, Steve Irwin grew up around animals. His parents founded the Beerwah Reptile Park, which would later become the world-renowned Australia Zoo. From a young age, Steve showed a special connection with animals—especially reptiles. He caught his first venomous snake at age six and was helping with crocodile relocations by the time he was a teenager.

In 1996, Irwin skyrocketed to international fame with the launch of The Crocodile Hunter television series. With his signature catchphrase—“Crikey!”—and unshakable enthusiasm, he brought audiences face to face with some of the world's most misunderstood and dangerous animals. But behind the thrill was always a mission: to show people that animals, even the scariest ones, deserve respect and protection.

Steve and his wife Terri transformed Australia Zoo into a center for education, conservation, and rescue. They launched the Wildlife Warriors foundation, supporting conservation projects across the globe, including habitat protection, anti-poaching efforts, and veterinary care for injured wildlife. Irwin also advocated passionately against wildlife exploitation and habitat destruction.

Tragically, Steve Irwin died in 2006 after a stingray accident while filming a documentary. The news shocked the world, but his legacy didn't end there. Terri and their children, Bindi and Robert, have continued his work, expanding conservation efforts and educating new generations about wildlife.

Irwin's influence is still felt today. He changed the way people view reptiles and dangerous animals—not as monsters, but as vital parts of the ecosystem. He made conservation exciting, accessible, and personal. Schools, zoos, and documentaries around the world still cite him as a major inspiration.

Steve Irwin once said, “I believe that education is all about being excited about something. Seeing passion and enthusiasm helps push an educational message.” And that's exactly what he did—he made the world excited about wildlife.

“My job, my mission, the reason I've been put onto this planet,
is to save wildlife. And I thank you for comin' with me.”

- Steve Irwin

GREEN TREE PYTHON

facts

HABITAT

They prefer tropical rainforests, edges of wetlands, and monsoon forests. They spend most of their lives in trees, especially in areas with dense canopy cover.

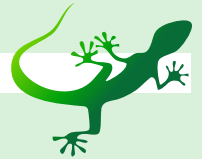
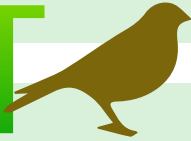
The green tree python is listed as Least Concern but habitat loss and illegal collection for the pet trade are local threats.

LC

Green tree pythons are mostly solitary but a group is called a

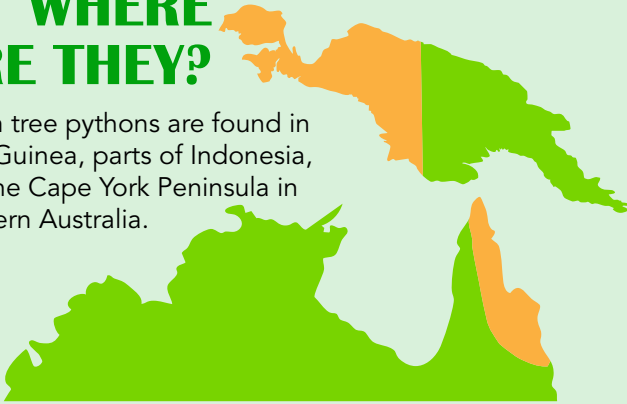
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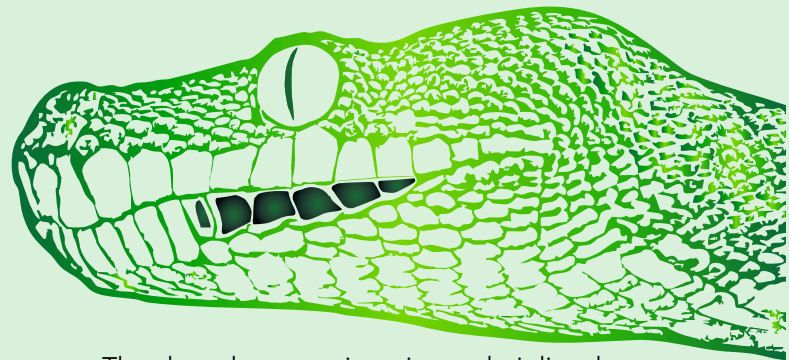
WHERE ARE THEY?

Green tree pythons are found in New Guinea, parts of Indonesia, and the Cape York Peninsula in northern Australia.



COLOR CHANGE

Young pythons hatch in bright colors — often neon yellow or brick red — before changing to green over the first year of life. This helps camouflage them at different life stages.



They have heat-sensing pits on their lips that detect warm-blooded prey even in total darkness.

SIZE

LENGTH: Adults usually measure between 4 and 6 feet, but can reach up to 7 feet.

WEIGHT: Typically 2 to 5 pounds.



STRIKE!

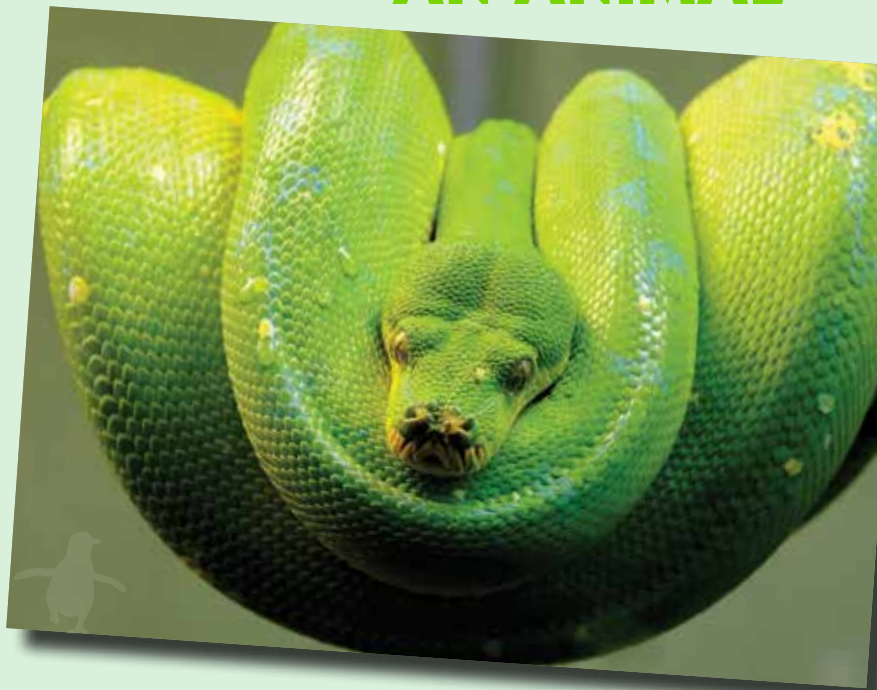
A green tree python's prehensile tail acts like an extra limb, helping it anchor to branches while striking.

Meet Agro & Mori!

Ellen Trout Zoo is home to two green tree pythons, Agro and Mori. Both arrived in November 2009 from the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, Texas. Although they were not from the same clutch, both snakes recently turned 16 on July 23. Agro lives in our SOLAR room, often coiled on a branch, while Mori resides behind the scenes. Like most green tree pythons, they spend their days asleep and become active after nightfall. Both enjoy playing with their favorite PVC elbow — sometimes curling up inside it for a nap — and can often be seen exploring or climbing the wooden branches their keepers provide.

Lawrence Stalnaker

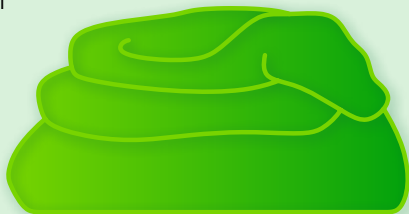
PRIMARY KEEPER



They're ambush predators, often holding the same position for hours waiting for prey to pass by.

They're excellent climbers and rarely come to the ground once they reach adulthood.

Females lay clutches of 6–30 eggs in a hidden spot, often in tree hollows or sheltered branches. The mother coils around the eggs to protect them and regulate their temperature until they hatch.



SAY CHEESE!

Their long, slender body and bright color make them one of the most photographed snakes in the world.

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WILD ADOPT

animals depend on people too

Our goal is to continue to connect everyone to the world we live in, and to bring joy to not only the animals, but the surrounding communities as well. Your ADOPT

Sponsorship helps provide new or improved homes and enrichment for the animal of your choice and all the animals at the Zoo.





Each year on September 7, Australia observes National Threatened Species Day—a time to reflect on the country’s extraordinary wildlife and the urgent need to protect species at risk. The date marks the death of the last known Tasmanian tiger (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*) in 1936, a powerful symbol of what can be lost forever without conservation action.

Australia is known for its incredibly diverse and often unusual animals. From echidnas and koalas to bilbies, rock wallabies, and sugar gliders, many of these species are found nowhere else in the world. But over 1,900 Australian plant and animal species are now listed as threatened due to habitat destruction, invasive species, bushfires, and climate change.

National Threatened Species Day raises awareness about these growing challenges and encourages people to get involved—from habitat restoration and citizen science projects to supporting wildlife organizations and learning more about endangered animals.

Zoos play a vital role in this effort by supporting conservation research, breeding programs, and education. Species like the echidna and kookaburra, which may be familiar to zoo visitors, serve as ambassadors for their wild counterparts and remind us why protecting biodiversity matters.

By learning about threatened species, we help ensure that future generations can still hear a kookaburra laugh or watch a wallaby hop. Every voice—and every action—matters.

FUN FACT

IN THE 1980S, FEWER THAN 50 WESTERN SWAMP TORTOISES REMAINED. CAPTIVE BREEDING HAS BOOSTED THE WILD POPULATION TO AROUND 1,500.

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