



Lehigh Valley Zoo

As told by Marketing and Events Manager, Alan Raisman

By Danielle S. Tepper

Lehigh Valley Zoo is a 29-acre animal oasis tucked inside the 1,100-acre Trexler Game Preserve. The preserve, founded in 1906, introduced a small zoo in the 1940s. It became a full-fledged children's zoo in 1975. As of 2004, it became a nonprofit organization, owned by Lehigh County and managed by the Lehigh Valley Zoological Society. It rooted itself in the community and has continued to grow and thrive as a gathering place for those who want to celebrate and help protect animals. In 2015, the zoo celebrates its eleventh year of spreading awareness and education about wildlife conservation.

Today, over 175,000 people come to the zoo to visit more than 300 animals of over 125 different species, an unfortunate number of which can only be seen in zoos.

"There's a reason why they're in captivity. They're here so we can conserve wildlife and save certain species from becoming extinct," explained Alan Raisman, Marketing and Events Manager at the Lehigh Valley Zoo. "We have 22 different species that are part of our Species Survival Plan, which is governed by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums who we're accredited by. Animals such as the African penguins, Mexican gray wolf, and scimitar-horned oryx are all part of that program. The oryx is now extinct in the wild; you can only find them in zoos. If zoos did not exist, neither would they."

According to Raisman, the key focus and mission of the zoo (and most zoos) is conservation, but also rehabilitation.

"Our goal is to breed and repopulate and to one day re-release animals back into the wild, and to also be a home for any animal that needs one," said Raisman.

The Lehigh Valley Zoo's motto? Smart Fun. Not only can they come and see animals up close, they get a hands-on learning experience that they can't

receive in a classroom setting. The zoo is dedicated to streamlining their activity programs to make sure there is something for everyone. There are year-round events, such as "Party for the Planet," their annual Earth Day celebration, Endangered Species Day in May, "Zoo In Paradise," a live music concert in July featuring Parrotbeach (a Jimmy Buffet tribute band), a "Run Wild" 5K/10K family walk in August, movie nights, trick-or-treating, and much more. Each event has its own important message.

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"For example, we have our Endangered Species weekend in mid-May. We put a four-foot wall around our penguin pavilion so that adults could see them, but the children could not, because by the time today's kids reach adulthood, the penguins will be extinct unless we act now," Raisman explained. "We need to conserve wildlife today so that future generations can still see these animals, not only in zoos, but in the wild where they live and come from."

Zoo-wide activities include: Making bracelets to match the penguins' armbands, creating "Toad Abodes," which are biodegradable cups that provide shelter for toads and frogs found in your own backyard, panning for gold which provides a historical message of the American Gold Rush, and Farm in the Zoo, which shows guests the importance of agriculture, Pennsylvania's number one industry.

"That's what the zoo is about. There is more here than just visiting and seeing our animals, you can learn and have a connection with them," said Raisman. "You don't have to go to South Africa or Australia, you can see these animals right here in the Lehigh Valley and by doing so, you conserve around the world. By paying admission, by becoming a member, and by donating to your local zoo, you are helping to give back to the community and have a global impact."

The six Pennsylvania zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums join a global network of 229 total zoos all working toward a common collaborative goal, which gives the Lehigh Valley Zoo an expanded reach in terms of just how far their message can go—and they're always looking for community members to join their family and help spread the word.



The North American River Otter is threatened, but can be found in lakes, swamps, and marshes. They eat mostly fish, and because they have adapted to underwater vision, they are nearsighted on land.

There are programs available for people to become business partners, community partners, even media partners. The Zoo Reach program puts speakers and education animals right into local classrooms. Companies can sponsor programs and hold networking picnics. There are private after hours available. The zoo has hosted birthday parties, summer camps, weddings, graduation parties, and more.

"It's truly a great facility for any event," said Raisman.

Raisman has called the zoo home for the past four years. "I've done a lot of traveling and have seen these animals in the wild. I learned their conservation stories and wanted to do my part to protect them," he said. "By working at Lehigh Valley Zoo, I'm able to share my story and promote the true message of these animals and wildlife conservation—along with all of our staff."

The zoo employs approximately 50 staff members, which can swell to up to 100 during the spring and summer seasons with their internships, docent program, and volunteers. Anyone who wants to help the zoo is appreciated and considered a valuable asset to the team.

"It costs \$1,900 a day to feed and care for all of our animals," explained Raisman. "We're open year-round, but not many people visit during the winter. We still need to feed and care for the animals, even when it's cold. I encourage everyone to visit at least once a season. The animals are so much more playful in the snow! In the fall, the foliage is incredible. No day is the same around here; you get a different experience every time you come."

The zoo relies heavily on the generosity of the community, of the visitors who come and are moved to help the animals and to promote the importance of wildlife conservation.

"We're trying to show people how much they can make an impact," said Raisman. "We want everyone to have a wonderful time here, but we also want them to learn something about how they can do their part. It's amazing to see these animals up close, but even more so to know that you're helping them survive simply by visiting them."

The wildlife conservation accomplishments of Lehigh Valley Zoo are a direct result of your support. To learn more about how you can become a member, volunteer, or donate to the zoo, visit www.lvzoo.org.



ON THE COVER African penguins are endangered; their population has been reduced by about 90% in the past century and currently only about 120,000 birds remain.



Snowy owls can be found in Canada and the northern United States during the winter. They eat lemmings and mice and can turn their heads a full 270 degrees!

Lehigh Valley Zoo
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