



# ROAR

News From Essex County Turtle Back Zoo

Spring/Summer 2024

**Oh Baby!  
Spring at the Zoo**

**Partners in Wildlife  
Protection**

**Inspiring the Next  
Generation of  
Zookeepers**

**ESSEX COUNTY  
TURTLE BACK**



## MISSION STATEMENT

Essex County Turtle Back Zoo is committed to providing an enriching recreational experience that fosters excellence in wildlife education and wildlife conservation, so that present and future generations are inspired to understand, appreciate and protect the fragile interdependence of all living things.



## MEETING OUR MISSION

The Rote Island snake-necked turtle, also commonly known as McCord's snake-neck turtle, is a critically endangered turtle species.

As a member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Turtle Back Zoo is breeding the Rote Island snake-necked turtle, as well as other animals, that will be reintroduced into protected habitats.



## IN THIS ISSUE



### PARTNERS IN WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Learn about the Wildlife Trafficking Alliance coalition and in what current initiatives the Zoo is involved.



### OH BABY!

Reminisce on some favorite animal babies plus learn about the role zoos take in maintaining healthy and balanced animal populations.

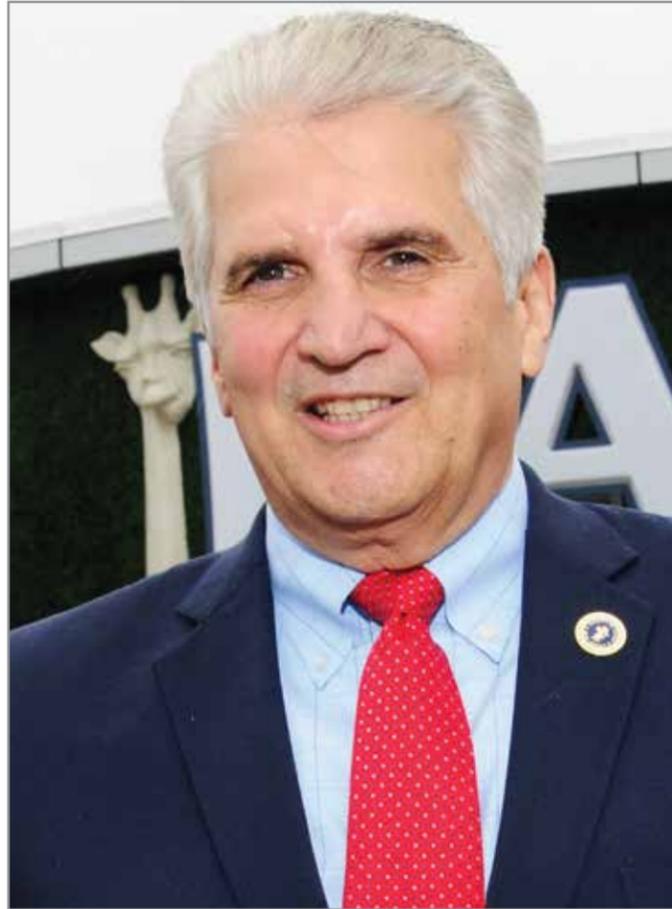


### INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ZOOKEEPERS

Have you ever wondered what it takes to be a zookeeper? Our partnership with a local high school offers students a unique look behind the scenes at the Zoo.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Community Update.....	4
Turtle Back Report.....	5
Member Connection .....	6
Partners in Wildlife Protection.....	7-9
Oh Baby!.....	10-12
Inspiring the Next Generation of Zookeepers.....	14-15
Homeschooling at the Zoo.....	16
Creature Feature.....	17
New at the Zoo.....	18
Keepers Korner .....	19
Zoo Happenings.....	20
Construction Update.....	22
Way Back at Turtle Back .....	23



**Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.,**  
Essex County Executive

The Board of County Commissioners and  
The Department of Parks, Recreation and  
Cultural Affairs



**Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.**  
Essex County Executive



**Daniel K. Salvante**  
Director of Parks, Recreation and  
Cultural Affairs

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

During the last two decades, my administration has made it a priority to make sure the right investments are being made in Essex County Turtle Back Zoo to enhance the care of our animals and provide the best experience for our visitors. Our new exhibits replicate our animals' natural habitats so visitors can see giraffes walk in a Sahara-like setting, alligators float in the Bayou and Gibbons swing in the rain forest. Our hands-on educational experiences bring guests behind the scenes to see what goes into caring for our animals and summer camps immerse participants in their own wild experiences.

Our current project to build the new Barry H. Ostrowsky Animal Wellness Center is an example of how we are continually transforming Turtle Back to fulfill our mission of conservation and education. The new facility will enable us to provide the most up-to-date medical care for our animal family and support our involvement in the AZA Species Survival Plan. Additionally, the medical facility will become an educational exhibit itself, allowing visitors to see inside as animal exams are being conducted and surgeries are being performed. This behind-the-scenes look will allow us to share and raise awareness about the high level of animal care and treatment we provide.

Of course, zoos are places where children and people of all ages can see exotic animals to which they otherwise would not have access. But today zoos fill a larger role and Turtle Back Zoo is proud to have a part. Some of our animals were injured and can no longer be able to care of or protect themselves in the wild. Other animals are endangered and our work at Turtle Back is helping to grow their populations, so they are not lost forever.

We look forward to you experiencing your own wild adventure at Turtle Back Zoo and taking advantage of the extraordinary educational opportunities we offer.

Together we will continue *Putting Essex County and Turtle Back Zoo First.*

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.

Essex County Executive



## FROM THE DESK OF THE ZOO DIRECTOR

**Here at Essex County Turtle Back Zoo, we have five core principles-Safety, Communication, Animal Welfare, Inspiration, and Collaboration-that influence all of the goals we set as an institution and shape our culture.**

In this issue you will see a focus on our Animal Welfare core principle. At TBZ, we believe that welfare begins with "WE," and that means having everyone involved, even our guests! We are focused on how new and ongoing multidisciplinary animal welfare science can inform our animal care to ensure animals are thriving.

We know animals can not thrive without the highest levels of preventative medical care and disease management. To that end, we recently began construction on the new state-of-the-art Barry H. Ostrowsky Animal Wellness Center (AWC). The AWC will bring the wellbeing of our animal population to the forefront of our guest experience, highlighting the 5 domains of welfare beginning with health and nutrition but also including behavior, environment, and mental state. These are the pillars of our holistic approach to caring for our animals. Our guests will have a front row seat to the action; able to observe procedures and surgeries and giving us the ability to demonstrate the incredible care that our animal family receives each and every day right here at TBZ by our veterinary and animal care teams. This opportunity is available at less than a dozen zoos around the country.

The wellness center will not only enhance the education of our guests, but multiply the opportunities we can offer to educate future conservationists. We will expand existing partnerships with high school interns from West Caldwell School of Technology as well as connections with Montclair State and Cornell universities. We will attract academic talent, scientists and researchers who can learn from our team right here at TBZ.

At TBZ, we realize that we are a part of something larger and longer lasting than any one of us. We are striving to conserve the biodiversity of this planet by caring for its most imperiled and precious species. We invite you to join us on our mission, visit the zoo, become a member and join our community to create a sustainable future together.

Jilian Fazio  
Zoo Director

## MEMBER CONNECTION



## MEMBER ONLY EVENTS

### TURTLE BACK BLOOMS

We are proud to announce this year's signature conservation effort, TURTLE BACK BLOOMS. In our efforts to support pollinator species, we've partnered with AZA Monarch SAFE and the Monarch Joint Venture to plant a milkweed seedling for every membership sold. In addition, all members will receive a Pollinator Pop Seed Stick to plant in their own backyard! Learn more at [www.zoologicalsocietyofnj.org/blooms](http://www.zoologicalsocietyofnj.org/blooms).

### MEMBER APPRECIATION MONTHS

#### April & October

If you're a member, enjoy a 15% discount at the Savanna Café all April and October long! Just show them your membership ID and mention the discount!

### MEMBER MORNINGS

#### Monday, May 13, June 10, July 8, & August 12 at 9am

Gates open at 9am - no reservations necessary. Please bring a valid photo ID and membership for entry.

### MEMBER LATE NIGHTS

#### Saturday, April 27 & Friday, September 13 from 5:30pm - 8:30pm

The zoo will stay open for members only 5:30pm to 8:30pm. No reservation necessary. Please bring a valid photo ID and membership for entry.

### MEMBERS ONLY HOLIDAY LIGHTS

#### Thursday, December 5 from 5pm - 9pm

Join us for an exclusive MEMBERS ONLY Holiday Lights evening! Enjoy the lights displayed throughout the Zoo, entertainment and more!



Scan Here to Join

## PARTNERS IN WILDLIFE PROTECTION

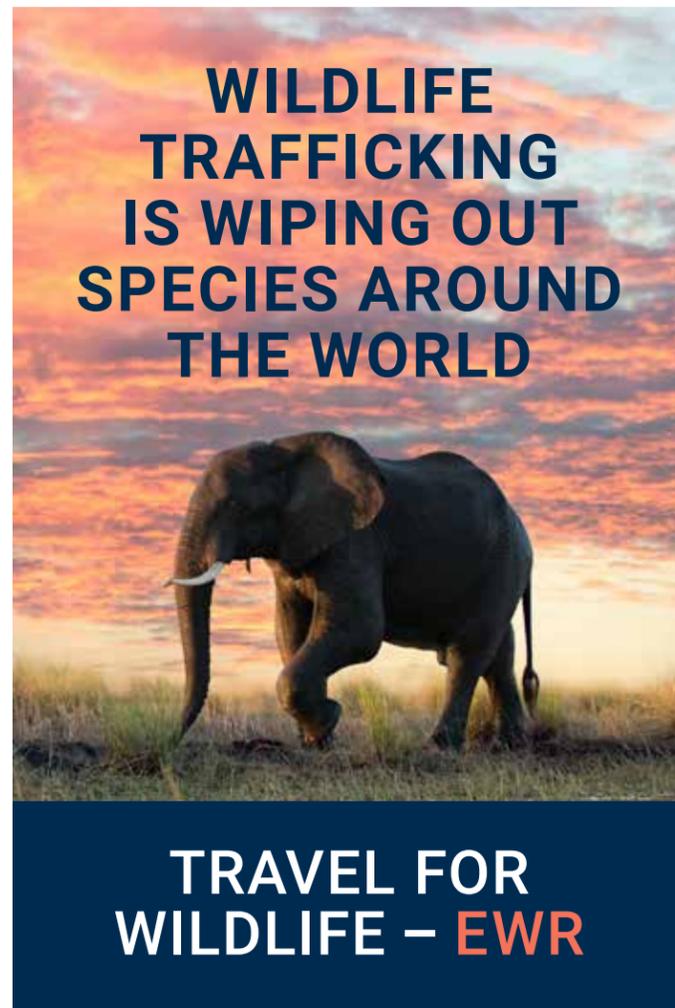


The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Wildlife Trafficking Alliance (WTA) is a coalition of over 90 companies, non-profit organizations, and AZA zoos and aquariums, including Turtle Back Zoo, that have all come together to combat the illegal trade of wildlife and wildlife products.

Thanks to our support from the Zoological Society of New Jersey, Essex County Turtle Back Zoo is proud to be a Gold Program Partner with WTA since 2022. The conservation efforts we support are central to our mission of saving the most precious species on the planet. The programs run by the WTA help us teach our guests about ways to protect wildlife and increase our ability to make an impact every day!

Below are some programs that the WTA is currently focused on:

- The **Not a Pet** campaign highlights the illegal trade of live wildlife as pets and the risk of diseases carried by wild animals. To spread the word about this harmful trade, Amazing Asia was opened in Turtle Back Zoo in 2022, with a focus on the One Health approach. One Health emphasizes the close connections among human, animal, and ecosystem health. Amazing Asia



I Travel for Wildlife Poster



THREATENED | Tortoises and turtles



THREATENED | American Alligator



features Vietnamese pond turtles, one of the most critically-endangered turtles on the planet due to the live pet trade. In addition, we also recently added Rote Island snake-necked turtles, another critically-endangered freshwater turtle, to the conservation tank in our reptile house. To learn more about the Not a Pet program and for ways to be an ally, go to <https://www.notapet.net/>.

- The **I Travel for Wildlife** campaign educates travelers on how their actions can contribute to illegal wildlife and wildlife product trade. In 2023, Turtle Back Zoo worked with local partners to create a new airport display that has recently been installed at Newark Liberty International Airport. The program's unique and impactful signs will be seen by millions of people a year.

The goal is to teach international travelers about the best ways to interact with wildlife and how to

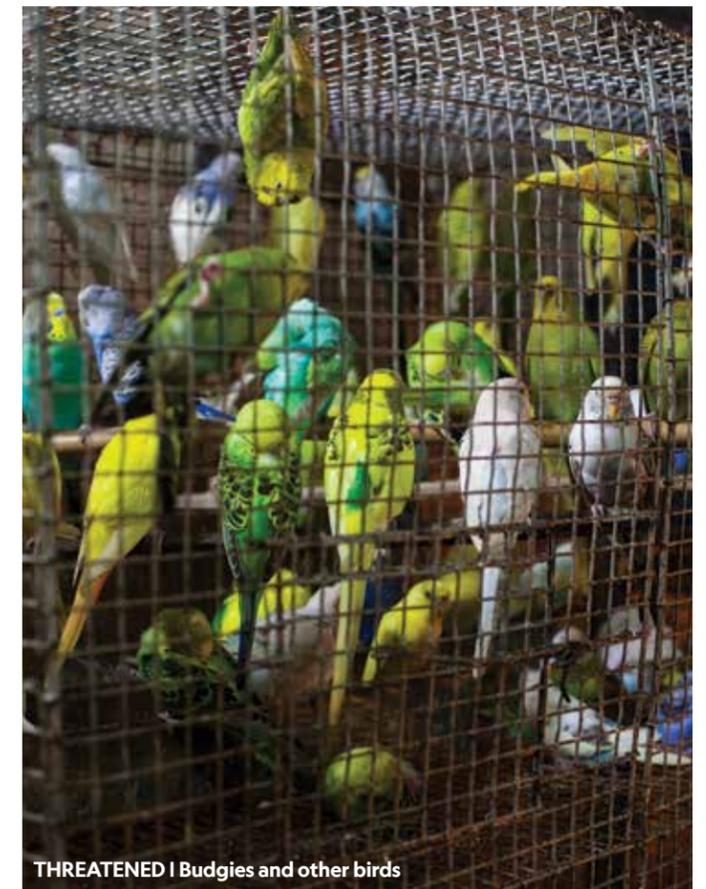


recognize, and avoid, purchases that harm wild animals. So the next time you take a trip through Newark Liberty International Airport, look for our signs! For more information and tips on how to buy wildlife products responsibly, go to <https://www.itravelforwildlife.org/>.

- The **Wildlife Confiscations Network** is currently being developed to provide care for animals confiscated from illegal trade. The program depends on cooperation between the AZA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Not many people are aware of how closely zoos and aquariums work with local, state, and federal law enforcement, as well as with Fish and Wildlife Services, to provide both short- and long-term housing and care for wildlife rescued from illegal trade. As a result of these partnerships, Turtle Back Zoo received and housed several of these animals just this year. In fact, some of our permanent residents, such as Pineapple the alligator, was once someone's pet who came to Turtle Back Zoo when his owners realized they could not care for him properly! Visit <https://www.aza.org/wta-confiscations-network> to find out more about this initiative. ♦

To learn more about the Wildlife Trafficking Alliance and what you can do to support our combined efforts, follow <https://www.aza.org/wildlife-trafficking-alliance>.

Written by Jilian Fazio



THREATENED | Budgies and other birds

OH  
BABY!



Young Amur leopard, Nadya. (March 2020)

OH BABY!



Clouded Leopard baby Chai with Keeper Kim at our Amazing Asia Demo Wall (April 2024)



Two-toed Sloth baby Juneberry (June 2021)

### How do you know when spring has sprung at Turtle Back Zoo? Look for the babies!

During this exciting time of year, take a look around the zoo for all the baby animals. At Prairie Dog Hill, you'll see prairie dog pups popping up from their dens. In the Australian exhibit, you might spot wallaby babies (called joeys) poking their noses out from their mum's pouch. And it's only a matter of time before our budgie chicks and stingray babies emerge!

### SPECIES SURVIVAL PLANS

While springtime and babies go hand in hand, it's also important to make sure zoo populations are healthy and balanced. As part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Turtle Back Zoo uses Species Survival Plans (SSPs) to manage and match zoo species. These plans monitor zoo populations based on different genes and things like age and gender. From Komodo dragons to red pandas, zoo staff keep detailed records on the family history and health of each individual in the population. They add this data to a shared document called a Studbook. The Studbook helps us analyze the genetics of the population as a whole. Then, participating zoos can make better decisions about which animals should be paired for breeding to keep a species healthy and successful in the long term. About 240 zoos and aquariums within the AZA community match mates both locally and globally to manage

sustainable populations and support conservation. In fact, some of our newest additions at Turtle Back Zoo come from carefully coordinated planning between AZA facilities.

### SSPS IN ACTION

Friday, March 13, 2020, was a day of mixed emotions at Turtle Back Zoo. As the zoo prepared to close due to COVID-19, it also experienced a very hopeful event! Our SSP-matched pair of Amur leopards, mom Annika and dad Valeri, welcomed their first cub—a baby girl named Nadya. Nadya's birth was very important since her species is classified as critically endangered. There are only an estimated 84 Amur leopards left in their native habitat. Four years later, we are overjoyed to report that Nadya is now getting matched to her own male partner, helping to keep the species growing!

More recently, another cat baby arrived at Turtle Back Zoo. Chai, a 6-month-old clouded leopard cub born at the Nashville Zoo, came to us as a recommendation from the SSP. Turtle Back Zoo manages the SSP for clouded leopards and maintains the International Studbook for the species. Chai can be seen in our Amazing Asia habitat during training sessions with animal care staff and as part of the Behind the Scenes tours in the month of April. Once Chai is old enough, she will be introduced to the outdoor habitat so guests will be able to see her more regularly. We are optimistic that

## OH BABY!



Prehensile-tailed porcupine baby (June 2022)



Spring Prairie dog babies

a good genetic male match will be born this year who can be paired with Chai through the SSP program in the future. With only about 350 clouded leopards in zoos around the world, and less than 10,000 estimated to live in the wild, every birth is important for this species. Our ultimate goal is to return clouded leopards back to the wild in areas they used to live, like Taiwan, where they have not been seen in over 60 years!

### TLC AT TBZ

We are dedicated to supporting the success and health of all of our amazing species at Turtle Back Zoo. Sometimes, our new additions need extra tender loving care. For these babies, the new Animal Wellness Center is set to open in the fall of 2024. The center will have a dedicated nursery space and equipment for baby animals that need medical care and support. Our guests will be able to view the nursery area and be part of the babies' journeys as we help them thrive from day one! A good example is Tribbiani, a joey that needed extra care when born here. Now he is at another zoo as a breeding male for their mob! We are also keeping our fingers crossed for new SSP babies to arrive this year. Successful matches help sustain these important species and ensure the biodiversity of our planet for future generations to come! ♦



# TREETOP ADVENTURE

**OPEN SPRING WEEKENDS**

**10am - 4pm**

**Daily starting June 15th**

**Reservations Recommended**

[turtlebackzoo.com/discover/treetop-adventure-course/](https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/treetop-adventure-course/)

For group bookings call 973-731-5800 EXT 279

*Please note Treetop Adventure is not part of Zoo Admission.*



# INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ZOOKEEPERS

Have you ever wondered what it takes to be a zookeeper? Now, animal science students from Essex County West Caldwell School of Technology can do more than just wonder, they can take action. Through a unique partnership, Essex County Turtle Back Zoo offers these high school students an opportunity to develop real-world knowledge and skills they can't get in a classroom alone. By participating in daily operations, student interns get a behind-the-scenes look at animal care, jobs at the zoo, and how to connect with the community. The program not only supports the students' futures by giving them a competitive

edge in the workforce, but also supports the future of conservation for us all.

## THE LIVING CLASSROOM

Turtle Back Zoo works alongside the animal science program at the Essex County Schools of Technology to enhance education outside of the school setting. While classroom learning provides a strong foundation, the zoo helps students to apply that knowledge in real-world situations, with Turtle Back Zoo acting as a living classroom. By engaging with experienced zoo experts, students get a deeper understanding of the concepts



Africa Keeper Erica with Votech students in the Giraffe Barn

they study in class and learn how to handle real-life challenges in the zoo setting. This unique combination of knowledge and experience helps ensure graduates of the program are well prepared for their chosen career and poised to make a real difference.

## WELL PREPARED FOR A BRIGHT FUTURE

During each year of the animal science program, West Caldwell students take important steps toward becoming the next generation of zookeepers. They hear from zoo professionals, study animal behavior, and tour and observe the many animal departments of the zoo. Students learn how to handle and care for different species, research animal behavior, and help with conservation efforts. They also gain essential skills in communication, teamwork, and problem solving. Finally, these students create lasting relationships with the onsite staff and learn how their jobs contribute to the community through zoo-related recreation, education, and conservation. All of these skills help prepare students for a bright future in animal science.

## BE A PART OF THE ACTION

Although students must be enrolled in the animal science studies program to participate, there are a



**At Essex County West Caldwell School of Technology, students can enroll in Career and Technical Education (CTE) for Animal Science.**

This program focuses on animal science and related sciences that allow learners to personalize their education based on career interests and unique learning needs, as well as a chance to earn industry-valued credentials, college credit, and workplace experience. To learn more about the animal science program and other offerings, visit [www.essextech.org](http://www.essextech.org).

number of other opportunities for high school students at Turtle Back Zoo. Volunteer programs are offered through the zoo's education department. Students that participate in volunteering are then offered the chance to continue in the Zoo Volunteer Assistant (ZoVA) program. Turtle Back Zoo also offers students and adults the chance to participate in citizen-based science through the Nature Guardians program, a part of the Family Nature Club. This spring season, the program will focus on a brand-new salamander research project at the zoo. And of course, once graduates of our internship and volunteer programs are ready for employment, these students are highly considered for positions here at the zoo. As we inspire the next generation of conservationists through these partnerships, Turtle Back Zoo is building a solid foundation for future animal conservation, supporting our mission to preserve our planet's most precious species and the ecosystems on which they rely. ♦



## CONGRATULATIONS!

In February, the Essex County Turtle Back Zoo's Animal Science Vo-Tech Partnership Program won the Daniel M. Gasalberti Recreation Programming Award from the New Jersey Recreation & Park Association.



Educator Katie showing a ball python to one of our homeschool groups

## HOMESCHOOLING AT THE ZOO!

The Zoo has been interested in working with the homeschool community for a while - one of our educators Jarred had started writing a homeschool program in January 2020, but the arrival of Covid-19 put those plans on hold for a couple of years. Last summer, we decided it was time to try again and were delighted to see how well-received they have been within the homeschool community. Jarred, who now runs the programs that were once just a thought, thinks the main reason is similar to many of our other programs: they give kids the opportunity to supplement their lessons in a way that is dynamic and fun. One family who has been involved from the beginning is that of Devorah Levitin, who says:

“As a home educated family, we are always looking for outside sources to help bring our learning to life. When Turtle Back Zoo shared that they will be opening classes available to homeschoolers once a month, we immediately were excited to sign up. Sophie (age 10) and Emma (age 9) have been enjoying their zoo classes every month.” Sophie says, “I like that we have a lot of animals we can interact with in our classroom.” Emma says, “I like meeting new animals each month and that we are taken into the zoo to see the exhibits as well.”

Some past and upcoming homeschool topics include Endangered Species and Extinction, The Purpose and History of Zoos, and Conservation - What You Can Do. Follow us on Facebook or Instagram for more topics and program dates. ♦

## EASTERN BONGO

The next time you visit African Adventure in the Zoo, you may notice two new faces in with our ground **hornbill**, whistling **ducks**, **ostrich** and Masai **giraffe**! **Zito & Rosie**, our Eastern Bongo (*Tragelaphus eurycerus*) have a glossy, chestnut-colored coat patterned with vertical white **stripes** that help the Bongo to remain camouflaged in the dense forest and undergrowth. Their distinctive spiraled **horns** usually have either one or one-and-half twists.

In **Africa**, this large forest **antelope** is **threatened** through both hunting and habitat loss listing them as critically endangered. There are believed to be less than 200 left in the wild. ♦

Find the bolded words from the Creature Feature in the puzzle. Words can go in any direction. Words can share letters as they cross over each other: Giraffe, Rosie, Bongo, Africa, Hornbill, Antelope, Ducks, Threatened, Ostrich, Stripes, Zito, Horns.

C L U J B Q R O S E  
 O N L O C S O V T P  
 G S N I K L S U R O  
 G G T C B N I R I L  
 O I U R S N E Z P E  
 V D R B I N R O E T  
 L Z Z A V C R O S N  
 A C I R F A H O H A  
 O T I Z R F J X H Z  
 T H R E A T E N E D



ROSIE



ZITO



Ice cream at Savanna Café

## ENJOY SWEET TREATS AROUND THE ZOO

Interested in parties and catering? Go to [turtlebackzoo.com/birthday-parties/](http://turtlebackzoo.com/birthday-parties/) to learn more about rental spaces and view our catering menus.



BEER AND WINE AT ZANZIBAR



TACO TRUCK AT GIBBON GROVE

KONA ICE BY THE TRAIN



Sara Perotti  
Reptile Department

## QUESTIONS FOR THE KEEPER

**Q:** How long have you been a zookeeper?

**A:** 8 years total, 4 years at Turtle Back Zoo

**Q:** What are your day-to-day responsibilities?

**A:** Taking care of all the animals in the Reptile House and at Island Giants. Responsibilities include basic caretaking of the animals, maintaining the animals' habitats, providing enrichment, record keeping, and having keeper chats with guests.

**Q:** Which animal that you care for is your favorite (don't worry, we won't tell the others)?

**A:** Shu the Komodo Dragon. Komodos have always been a dream species for me to work with. Shu has a great personality and is always eager to train with his keepers.

**Q:** What's the weirdest thing you do as part of your job?

**A:** Most of the things I do to take care of my animals don't usually involve the animals themselves. Herpetology keepers are constantly checking things like light and heat sources, temperatures, water quality, the condition of live plants, and making sure their food (i.e., bugs) are eating nutritious food. If the animal's

environment is ideal, then the animal can live its life in comfort and without stress.

**Q:** What achievement are you most proud about in your job?

**A:** There are lots of achievements over the years that bring a sense of pride, but a recent one was being selected to attend Amphibian Management School earlier this year. Experts in amphibian care from around the country taught classroom lectures on updated amphibian-centric topics. They also guided us through hands-on learning experiences. It's exciting to learn about new findings in amphibian research and being able to apply that knowledge to the frogs and salamanders at Turtle Back Zoo.

**Q:** What impact do you think zoos have?

**A:** Zoos encourage people to never stop learning. There are so many amazing species out there, and seeing a glimpse of what they look like in the wild can have a major impact on a guest. If even one guest is inspired to take action to help threatened species and their ecosystems, then the world will be a better place for all.

## ZOO HAPPENINGS

### MAY

- **Behind The Scenes Tours: Animal Wellness Center** | Every Saturday in May
- **Wonders of the Wild: Under the Sea** | Saturday, May 4
- **Family Nature Club: Birding 101** | Sunday, May 12
- **Homeschool Days: Conservation - What You Can Do** | Wednesday, May 15
- **Casino Night\*** | Saturday, May 18
- **Animal Encounters: Sloth Social** | Saturday, May 25
- **Family Nature Club: Searching for Salamanders** | Sunday, May 26
- **Sophisticated Science Seminars: Zoo Conservation & Stewardship** | Sunday, May 26

### JUNE

- **Family Nature Club: Searching for Salamanders** | Sunday, June 9
- **Night Moves** | Friday, June 14
- **Sophisticated Science** | Sunday, June 16
- **Early Childhood: Hatchlings & Tots** | Sunday, June 16
- **Night Moves** | Saturday, June 22
- **Animal Encounters: Sloth Social** | Saturday, June 22
- **Wonders of the Wild** | Saturday, June 22
- **Family Nature Club: Pollinator Parade** | Sunday, June 23
- **Early Childhood: Explorers** | Sunday, June 23
- **Brew at the Zoo\*** | Saturday, June 29



See zoo website for more details.

All ticketed events can be purchased at:  
[essexweb.usedirect.com/EssexWeb/Default.aspx](http://essexweb.usedirect.com/EssexWeb/Default.aspx)

### JULY

- **Family Fun Nights** | Every Wednesday and Thursday in July and August
- **Night Moves** | Thursday, July 11
- **Sea Turtle Recovery Breakfast at the Zoo** | Saturday, July 13
- **Animal Encounters: Sloth Social** | Saturday, July 13
- **Sea Turtle Sunrise\*\*** | Saturday, July 13
- **Wonders of the Wild** | Saturday, July 13
- **Early Childhood: Hatchlings & Tots** | Sunday, July 14
- **Sophisticated Science** | Sunday, July 14
- **Fundraiser TBD\* - Save the Date!** | Saturday, July 19
- **Early Childhood: Explorers** | Sunday, July 21
- **Night Moves** | Friday, July 26

### AUGUST

- **Family Fun Nights** | Every Wednesday and Thursday in July and August
- **Early Childhood: Hatchlings & Tots** | Sunday, August 4
- **Wonders of the Wild** | Saturday, August 10
- **Animal Encounters: Sloth Social** | Saturday, August 10
- **Night Moves** | Saturday, August 10
- **Allie Colleen Concert\*\*** | Sunday, August 11
- **Sophisticated Science** | Sunday, August 11
- **Early Childhood: Explorers** | Sunday, August 18
- **Night Moves** | Thursday, August 22

### SAVE THE DATE!

- **Holiday Lights** | Begins Friday, November 22
- **Safe Howl-O-Ween** | Thursday, October 31



\* Zoological Society Fundraising Event

\*\*Sea Turtle Recovery Fundraising Event

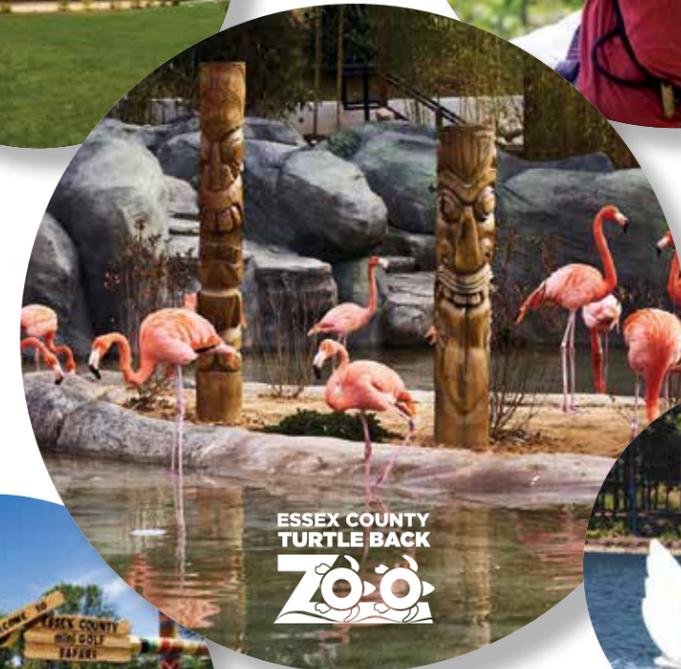
# Visit the Essex County South Mountain Recreation Complex for fun and adventure!



CODEY ARENA



TREETOP ADVENTURE COURSE



ESSEX COUNTY TURTLE BACK ZOO



THE WATERFRONT  
 • CHILDREN'S REGATTA PLAYGROUND  
 • PADDLE BOATS  
 • WALKING PATH  
 • CLIPPER PAVILION PICNIC AREA



MINIGOLF SAFARI

TURTLE BACK ZOO



## THE BARRY H. OSTROWSKY ANIMAL WELLNESS CENTER

On October 20, 2023, Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. announced plans to construct a brand new, 10,000-square-foot state-of-the-art Barry H. Ostrowsky Animal Wellness Center at Essex County Turtle Back Zoo.

Over the last 5 months tremendous progress has been made on this exciting project! As of this update, block walls and roof trusses are being erected on the site. The veterinary staff are busy preparing for their move later this year. By the time the summer months arrive, you will be able to see much more than just the skeleton of a building! Be sure to follow the zoo and county social media pages for frequent updates on construction progress and thanks in advance for your patience as we continue putting animal health first at Turtle Back Zoo. ♦



## WAY BACK WHEN...

### TURTLES OF THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Did you ever wonder how Turtle Back Zoo got its name? Take a walk around the zoo and you'll see everything from 600-pound Aldabra tortoises to endangered pond turtles. Despite our diverse collection of these amazing animals, you might be surprised to learn the real origin of our name. Just a short distance from the zoo is South Mountain Reservation and a trail that will take you our namesake, Turtle Back Rock. The pattern on the rocks was created by large basaltic crystals (made when lava cools) and makes it feel like you are standing on the back of an enormous turtle!

Turtles, tortoises, and Turtle Back Zoo go way back. Some visitors may remember taking a ride on the back of our large Aldabra tortoises in the 1960s. Though not the fastest ride, it certainly was memorable, and we still get visitors mentioning it today. We no longer offer rides, but a Behind the Scenes tour of the Island Giants habitat gives you a closer look at our three Aldabra tortoises, Andy, Delilah, and Patches, as well as Shu, our Komodo dragon. These special encounters will create treasured memories for years to come!

With a name like Turtle Back, it's only natural that our zoo takes special interest in these shelled wonders. In 1971, the tortoisery was built at Turtle Back Zoo. This building was dedicated to the housing, display, and breeding of turtles from around the world. Many endangered species were successfully bred here. The babies, and knowledge gained from our research, were then shared with other zoos and conservation organizations. Today, with nearly half of the world's freshwater turtles and tortoises at risk of extinction, zoo workers across the country and globe continue to work together to conserve these important species.

In 2021, the Zoological Society of New Jersey, based at Turtle Back Zoo, donated funds to the Asian Turtle Program's Mauremys Annamensis Project. This program researches and protects the Vietnamese pond turtle, a critically endangered species found only in parts of Vietnam. Visitors can see these striped-faced creatures and learn more about their conservation at our Amazing Asia habitat.

Not only does Turtle Back Zoo have a rich, turtle-related past, we are also looking forward to a turtle-filled future. To preserve these species for generations to come, it's important to focus on conservation efforts now. With that goal in mind, Turtle Back Zoo Animal Curator Courtney Torregrosa has recently been selected as the Association of Zoos & Aquariums Studbook keeper for Vietnamese pond turtles. A Studbook is a shared document that tracks the health and family history of each species member living in a zoo or aquarium. This information helps us analyze the genetics of the population as a whole. The global zoo and aquarium community relies on Studbook records to make good decisions when mating animals for future success. Often, these zoo-bred populations are the ones we turn to when reintroducing a species back into the wild. Our careful research and decisions now will someday help Vietnamese pond turtles, and all our shelled friends, thrive once again in their natural habitats.

Have a favorite turtle at Turtle Back Zoo? Interested in learning more about another animal? Visit us on Facebook @turtlebackzoo or Instagram @officialturtlebackzoo and let us know! ♦

**ESSEX COUNTY  
TURTLE BACK**



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# YOUR MEMBERSHIP SAVES A LOT MORE THAN MONEY

Want to support Turtle Back Zoo? One of the most effective ways is by joining or renewing your membership in the Zoological Society of New Jersey.

Membership plans include unlimited free zoo admission, special tours, discounts, and more. Plus, your membership helps us care for the animals both local and abroad, making it a truly worthy cause.

For more information <https://zoologicalsocietyofnj.org/membership/>

