

C O M O F R I E N D S

# INSIDER

Fall 2023 | Volume 25 | Number 4



## Good Breeding

*Professional collaboration  
and animal chemistry are  
the key to Como Zoo's  
species preservation projects*

Photo by Zookeeper Kristin Blake

TICKETS AVAILABLE FOR COMO QUEST: WILD CONSERVATION 21+!



# COMO FRIENDS INSIDER

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1225 Estabrook Drive | St. Paul, MN 55103 | 651.487.8229  
www.comofriends.org | comomembership@comofriends.org



Como Friends is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to inspire community generosity in support of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory so it thrives for generations to come.

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1225 Estabrook Drive | St. Paul, MN 55103  
www.comozooconservatory.org

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory's mission is to inspire our public to value the presence of living things in our lives.

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Look for the AZA logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things.



The American Public Gardens Association (APGA) serves and strengthens public gardens throughout North America by supporting and promoting their work, value and achievements in horticultural display, education, research and plant conservation.



DIRECTOR OF PARKS AND RECREATION: Andy Rodriguez

### COMO PARK ZOO & CONSERVATORY

**Winter Hours:** (October 1 – March 31) 10 am – 4 pm  
**Summer Hours:** (April 1 – September 30) 10 am – 6 pm

### COMO FRIENDS INSIDER

**Art Direction & Design:** Susannah Baudhuin  
**Editor:** Laura Billings Coleman | **Printing:** Dolan Printing

## COMO NEWS & EVENTS

### COMO QUEST FOR THE GROWN-UPS

*An after-hours adventure for the young at heart | October 5 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.*



Scavenger hunts aren't just for kids. At our next Como Quest 21+ event, grown-ups get the chance to take off across Como Park Zoo & Conservatory and compete for prizes—with a cash bar, too! A great date night idea or girls night outing, this interactive event is all about sparking conversation and conservation to benefit the animals, plants and people that depend on Como. **Visit [comofriends.org](http://comofriends.org) to reserve your tickets today, and use your Como Friends membership to receive \$5 off the \$40 ticket price!**

### A NIGHT OF STARGAZING

Nearly 400 guests made Sunset Affair: Stargazing a sparkling night with engaging animal ambassadors, enthusiastic bids on hundreds of silent auction items and a generous Fund-a-Mission contribution. A casual summer fundraiser that helps support Como Park Zoo & Conservatory throughout the year, gifts through the 2023 Sunset Affair Fund-A-Mission campaign will help to provide everything from veterinary equipment at Como Zoo to beneficial bugs at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, while protecting the free admission that more than a million visitors depend on. **MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR NEXT YEAR'S SUNSET AFFAIR, COMING THURSDAY, JULY 18, 2024.**



Photos by, Travis Johansen, Provid Films



# COMO NEWS & EVENTS

## GIVE TO THE MAX FOR COMO ON NOVEMBER 16



Como Park Zoo & Conservatory is a gateway to the wonders of the natural world, where free admission makes it possible to teach two million children and adults the values of conservation every year. From rare orchids to endangered orangutans, there's a whole world of wild and precious plants and animals to discover at Como, with family-friendly conservation programs that inspire us to appreciate and protect the planet we love.

On Give to the Max Day, your generosity will help make even more possible at Minnesota's most visited cultural destination. From breeding programs that preserve endangered animals, to earth-friendly pest control to keep Como's gardens looking gorgeous, to inclusive programs to train the next generation of zookeepers and gardeners, your support allows Como Park Zoo & Conservatory to stay true to its mission, teaching us all about the life-giving connections between animals, plants and people.

Watch your inbox for Como Friends' Give to the Max details and make your early gift beginning November 1—or wait for the big day on November 16.

## LEAVE A LEGACY

Como Park Zoo & Conservatory has been a part of Minnesota family memories for five generations. Keep the Como tradition going strong for the next generation of visitors by including Como Friends in your estate plan. Your planned gift will help to protect the wild and precious plants and animals that inspire us, and sustain the free admission that makes Como accessible to all.

For more information on planned giving, contact **Laurel Lundberg, Director of Individual Giving** at [laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org](mailto:laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org) | 651-487-8296.



# COMO NEWS & EVENTS

## CONSERVATION CORNER



### BEHIND-THE-SCENES PROJECTS AT COMO PARK ZOO & CONSERVATORY

Growing on rocky ledges, steep cliffs, and lava fields, the Hawaiian plant known as *Brighamia insignis* has always been hard to spot. Now that its only pollinator, the hawk moth, is extinct, this rare plant now depends on humans for its continued survival.

Some years ago, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory was one of more than 50 botanical gardens to receive cuttings of the plant as part of a strategy to keep *Brighamia insignis*—also known as the vulcan palm or cabbage on a stick—around for the public to see. The Conservatory has gone on to share cuttings from its own collection with other gardens across the midwest. “As horticulturists, we don’t want to be the only institution that has a rare plant,” explains Dr. Lisa Philander, the Conservatory’s horticultural curator. “Unlike a piece of rare art, you want to share it with as many good greenhouses as you can to ensure that it continues to grow.”

*The Conservatory’s eight Brighamia insignis specimens are kept in the growing range, making occasional appearances at special events and interpretive stations throughout the year.*



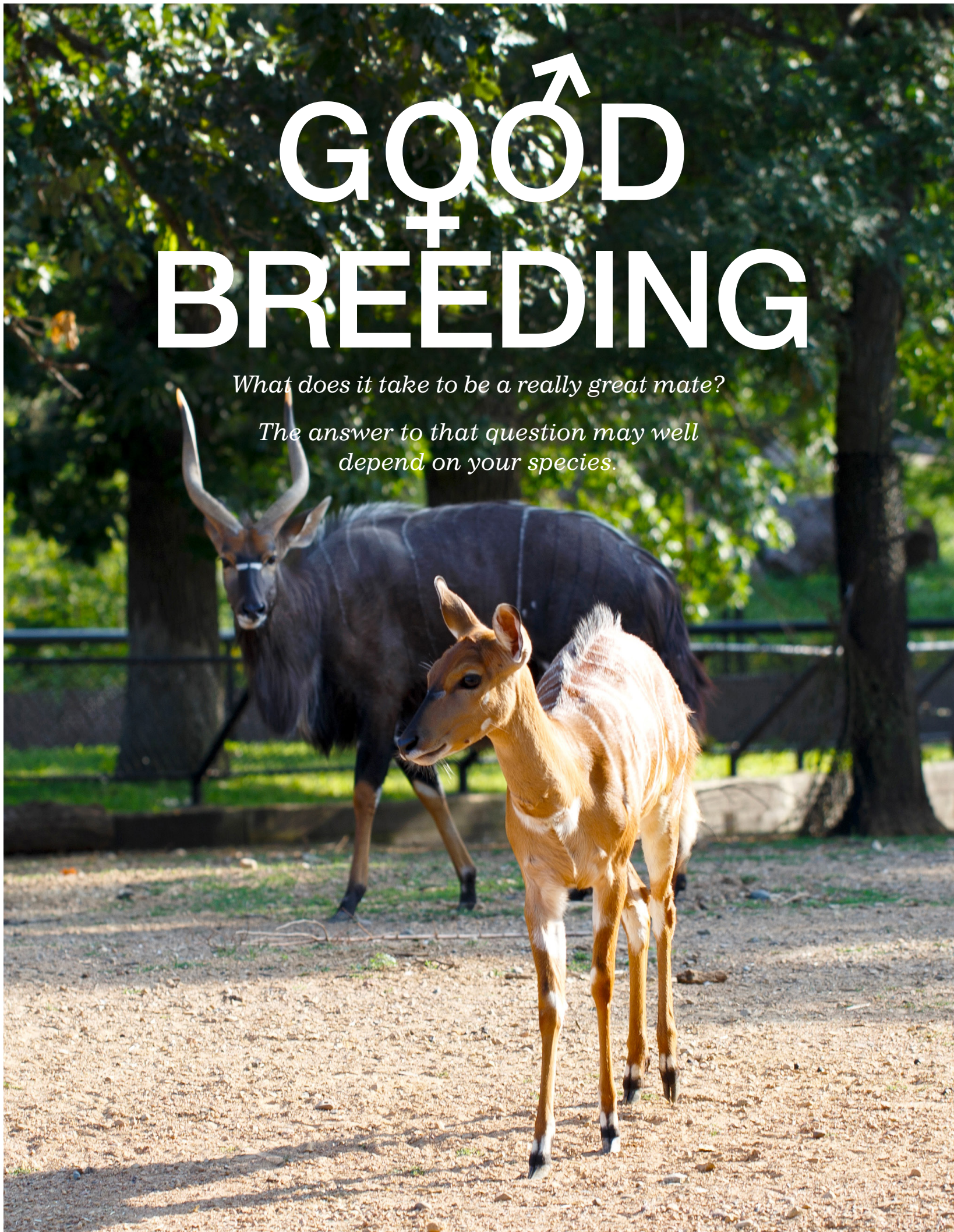
While the plant is available to home gardeners, getting it to flower can be a challenge, even for professional horticulturists. “To hand pollinate, we’ll take a small brush to get the pollen off one of the flowers, to the stamens of another,” Philander says, noting that botanists in Hawaii have done the same to prop up native populations of *Brighamia*.



# GOOD BREEDING

*What does it take to be a really great mate?*

*The answer to that question may well depend on your species.*



If you're a western lowland gorilla like Dara, you might look for a strong silent type like Schroeder—a silverback male who can beat his chest for show, but who's always gentle and patient with the kids.

If you're a snow leopard like Alya, you might prefer a cool cat like Moutig, who can quickly sniff out the signal she sends when she wants some me-time, and retreat to his own lair.

And if you're a long-time single penguin like Amalhe, who has never had a mate, you might fall hard for Casey, who now likes to stand by her side, shoulder to shoulder, looking out on the world.

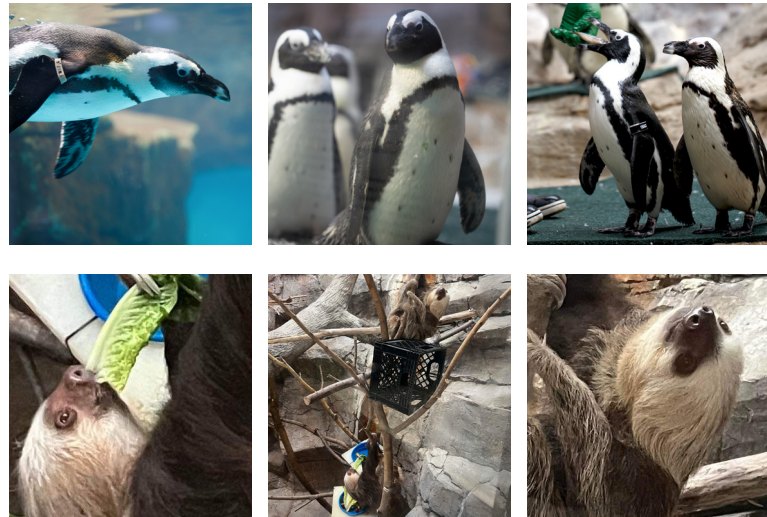
While zookeepers try not to anthropomorphize the animals in their care, Como Zoo senior keeper Jill Erzar says it can be hard not to project human feelings onto animal behaviors—especially when it comes to companionship. “We want to give our animals the best lives they can have in our care, and part of that

equation is about making sure they're paired up with the right partners,” she says.

Part of that mission is accomplished through Como Zoo's active participation in the Species Survival Plan (SSP) Program, a cooperative management strategy for protecting the health, wellbeing and genetic diversity of nearly 300 animal species cared for by accredited members of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Working with colleagues in 46 states and 13 countries, Como Zoo cooperates with so-called Taxon Advisory Groups (TAG) for dozens of species, working to make informed decisions about animal care, breeding and transfers. The goal is to create groups of animals that can live well together, as companions or as potential mates.

Here's a look at how those recommendations have come into play lately at Como Zoo and how keepers help to foster the relationship chemistry that helps animals thrive.



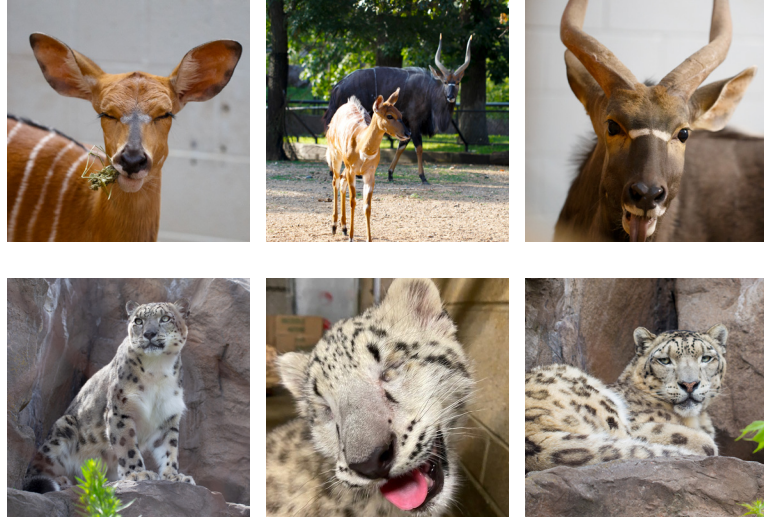


#### AMAHLE & CASEY

Penguins are social animals, and the partnerships they forge with their mates can last a lifetime. But with a nine-member colony in Como Zoo's Aquatic Animals Building, 4-year-old Amahle (pronounced a-Ma-she) had long been the odd bird out. That changed earlier this year with the arrival of two young males, Joshua and Casey. While keepers hoped the penguins might form a trio, Amahle showed a strong preference for Casey, who now shares a rock and a sleeping nest with the young female. Though the pair will not breed—the genetics of Como Zoo's colony is already well-represented in zoo populations—they share a strong bond that could last for decades.

#### ZIGGY & SAGO

These two young Hoffmann's two-toed sloths arrived at Como Zoo this season as part of a new breeding recommendation. But as you might expect, the courtship process between sloths can be very, very, very slow. "Sloths are very private about things, so any breeding that takes place is usually going to happen overnight," explains primate keeper Mike Marazzi. "When they do have a baby, it could be a bit of a surprise to us since female sloths don't always show their pregnancies with a visible weight gain."

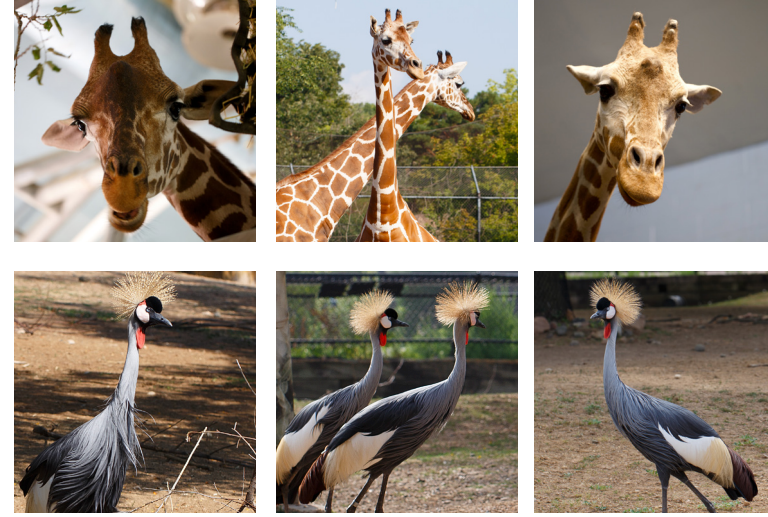


#### STEVIE & STANLEY

These two young nyala are new to the African habitat this year, charming keepers with their calm temperaments and engaging nature. Both are young animals, but as they reach sexual maturity, the hope is that they might produce new offspring. "We haven't seen any behavior like that so far," says Erzar, noting that nyala males have a unique breeding display. "The mane along their spine stands completely upright when they're trying to attract a mate, so that's something we'll be looking out for in Stanley."

#### ALYA & MOUTIG

Alya the snow leopard has proved herself to be a caring and capable mother to cub, Willow. Born blind, the cub's genetic condition may mean the break-up of the breeding match between Moutig and Alya, two European-born snow leopards brought to Como Zoo several years ago as part of a global breeding strategy for these endangered cats. "Alya and Moutig have been terrific together, but their offspring have had substantial health problems," says Erzar. "When that happens, we have to have hard conversations as a management team and share what we've learned with the Taxon Advisory Group to figure out a new strategy."



#### ZINNIA & CLOVER

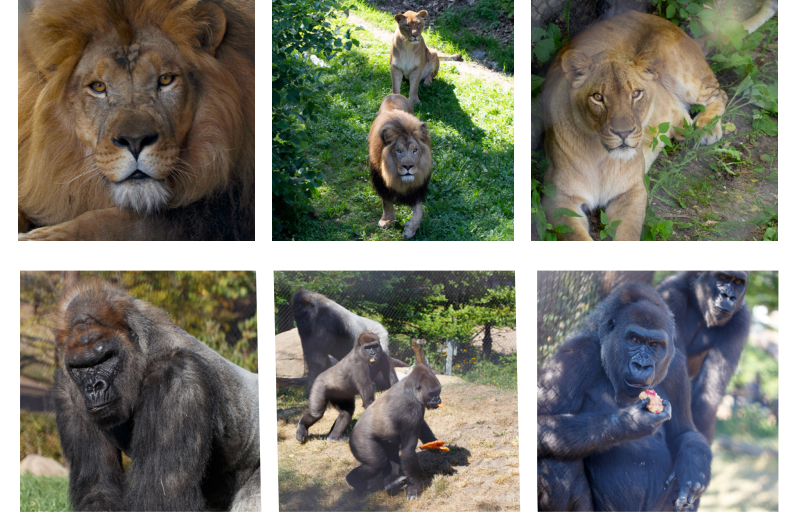
Animal pairing isn't always about mating. Sometimes it's about providing companionship to older animals and creating groups of animals that can thrive together. That's the plan playing out right now in Como Zoo's giraffe habitat which recently welcomed Zinnia, a 7-year-old female giraffe, as a partner to Clover, whose longtime companion Daisy died earlier this year. With Como's giraffe genetics already well-represented in zoos across the country, Zinnia and Skeeter, Como's resident male giraffe, will not breed together. "That's a good thing because Skeeter seems to be terrified of her," Erzar says. "We have no idea what that's about."

#### HOUDINI & MUTAMBI

Houdini, 13, and Mutambi, 5, are part of a species survival plan breeding recommendation for the grey crowned crane, the national bird of Uganda. But so far, Houdini is only doing his courtship dance for his keepers. "Houdini hasn't quite figured out that his girlfriend is awesome," Erzar says.

#### MUMFORD & MAJI

Lions don't have a specific mating season, so keepers at Como Zoo are paying close attention to the behavior that may signal that Mumford and Maji are ready to partner up. "We have seen some lovey-dovey behavior between the two of them," Erzar says, including a distinctive chin rubbing gesture that Maji initiates, a behavior that lion experts say

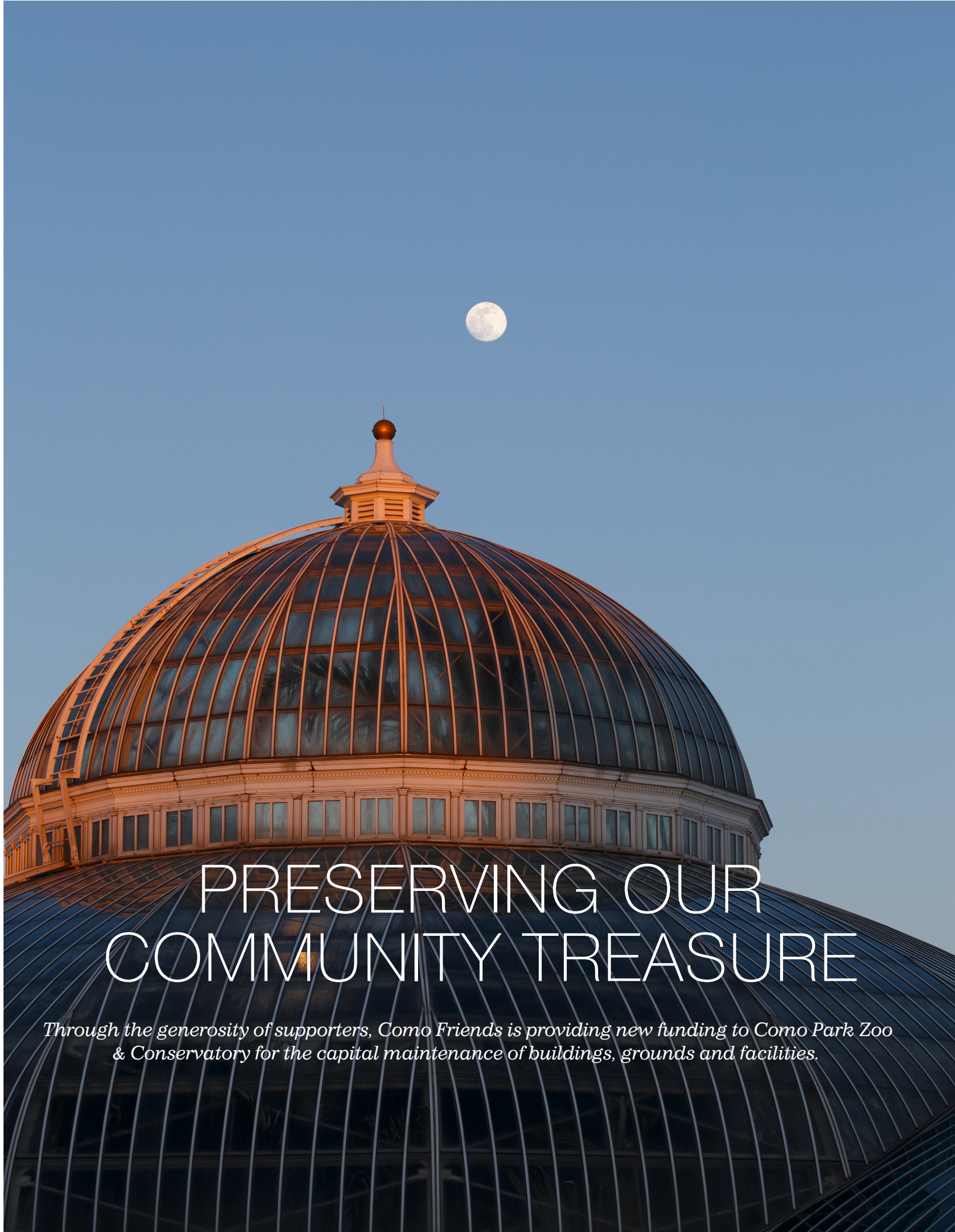


strengthens the bond between potential mates. In lions, mating behavior triggers what is called "induced ovulation," a mechanism that increases the likelihood of successful reproduction.

#### SCHROEDER & DARA

A rope-swinging bachelor for most of his life, Schroeder the gorilla quickly adapted to family life in 2013 when he was matched up with a group of females with the opening of Gorilla Forest. Now the father of Arlene, born in 2015, and Nyati, born in 2017, Schroeder has valuable genetics that the Gorilla SSP Program hopes he will continue to pass through another breeding recommendation with female Dara. Over the last decade, Schroeder has proven himself to be a surprisingly laid back dad, a silverback who doesn't seem to mind being pestered by his offspring. "He's been a wonderful, protective and patient dad from the start, but with Nyati, he's even more precious," says primate keeper Michelle Warren. Infected by a rare but serious raccoon-borne parasite that's caused permanent neurological damage, Nyati sometimes needs a little boost to reach her climbing ropes, or extra time to move from location to location. "Schroeder is always there to give her a little help or to keep an eye out when the gorillas are shifting. His patience and calm demeanor play a big part in Nyati's welfare and why she's thriving."





# PRESERVING OUR COMMUNITY TREASURE

*Through the generosity of supporters, Como Friends is providing new funding to Como Park Zoo & Conservatory for the capital maintenance of buildings, grounds and facilities.*

Founded in 1897, Como Park Zoo & Conservatory has been part of Minnesota family life for more than five generations. Running an institution with roots that go back to the 19th century can sometimes be a challenge, says Como Friends President Jackie Sticha.

"It's a bit like living in a historic house," she explains. "Repairs and renovations can be especially expensive because we're also working hard to preserve and protect all the tradition and memory that lives here. We want to be good stewards of the resources past generations have provided, while also ensuring that Como is ready to welcome and serve the next generation."

That's the thinking behind new funding from Como Friends to provide annual support to Como Park Zoo & Conservatory to extend the life use of buildings, animal habitats, gardens and grounds; address urgent and emerging maintenance needs; and provide a sustained high quality experience for all of Como's two million annual visitors.

"Part of our goal is making sure that Como's systems and infrastructure work as well as they can for our visitors, Como staff, the animals and gardens," says Sticha "Here's a look at just a few of the recent projects and improvements made possible by your support for Como Friends."



**Upgrades and Repairs for Visitor Access:** Funding will replace doors on the Zoo grounds with push-button opens to make them accessible for all visitors. The pavers on The Ordway Gardens Huss Terrace will be replaced with a colored/stamped concrete surface to address shifts that have created uneven surfaces that could be a tripping hazard.

**Updates to Animal Habitats:** The giraffes will get a new year-round structure that will provide shade and a new spot to hang their favorite food, tree browse. Cracked glass in the orangutan and spider monkey habitats will be replaced to provide a safe and secure environment for animals and visitors alike.

**Maximizing Growing Environments for Plants:** New cooling pads will be installed in the behind-the-scenes greenhouses to help control temperatures, creating just the right conditions for growing the plants, bulbs and blooms seen in the Sunken Garden.

**Extending the Life Use of the Visitor Center:** Opened in 2005, Como's Visitor Center has welcomed nearly two million guests every year, and the floors are starting to show wear and tear from all of those feet. Como Friends funding will help repair and upgrade the appearance of the floors. The floors will be patched and buffed, then stained to add color and depth.





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### *Forage for Fall Colors at Garden Safari Gifts*

From flower-power patterned totes, to whimsical toadstool caps & ornaments, Garden Safari Gifts is geared up for garden lovers of all stripes. As sweater weather returns, stock up on cute wool hats and cozy sweatshirts perfect for leaf-peeping, with **15 percent off all purchases for Como Friends Members.**

