

C O M O F R I E N D S

INSIDER

Spring 2023 | Volume 25 | Number 2

Under the Sea

*Meet the amazing new inhabitants
of Como Zoo's Aquatic Animals
Building*

Photo by Susannah Baudhuin

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COMO NEWS & EVENTS

BOUQUETS REBLOOMS



Thanks to the generous sponsors, partners, donors and guests who made Como Friends' Bouquets fundraiser such a spirited event. Postponed due to weather in February, the March event gave guests the first glimpse of the Spring Flower Show now on display in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's Sunken Garden through April 30. "We were sorry the weather disrupted our original plans, but thrilled to have a sold-out crowd join us for this rescheduled event," says Caroline Mehlhop, Como Friends' Director of Institutional Partnerships and Events.

Special thanks to BrightWines, Lancer Hospitality, 21st Century Bank, the Bouquets Committee, and the amazing staff of Como Park Zoo & Conservatory whose efforts were key to throwing a successful celebration!

CONSERVATION CHAMPIONS IN ACTION

Did you know your contributions are helping curb Como's carbon footprint? This spring, in honor of Como's annual Earth Day celebration Party for the Planet, in April, sponsored by Xcel Energy, horticulturists from the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, along with volunteers from Xcel Energy, will be planting dozens of new trees and shrubs made possible by Como Friends' Conservation Champions program. This program supports high priority conservation projects in the field, and right on the grounds of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.



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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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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

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

COMO FRIENDS INSIDER

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COMO NEWS & EVENTS



THIS SPRING, SPONSOR AN ANIMAL OR GARDEN

As the crowds come to Como and the temperatures rise, spring is a great season to become an animal or garden sponsor. The perfect gift for nature lovers of all ages, Animal and Garden Sponsorships go directly to work, providing exceptional veterinary care for Como Zoo's animals, beautiful flowers and plants throughout the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, and free admission for every visitor. Click "Support" at Como Friends' website to learn more about the gift of sponsorship.

comofriends.org/support/sponsorship/animal

Thank you!



MAKE COMO FRIENDS PART OF YOUR ESTATE PLAN

Como Park Zoo & Conservatory has been a part of Minnesota family memories for more than 125 years. Keep the Como tradition going strong for the next generation of visitors by including Como Friends in your estate plan. Your planned gift can help to protect the wild and precious plants and animals that inspire us, and the free admission that makes Como accessible to all.

For more information contact **Laurel Lundberg, Director of Individual Giving**, at: laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org or 651-487-8296.

COMO NEWS & EVENTS

COMO QUEST FOR THE GROWN-UPS AN AFTER-HOURS ADVENTURE FOR THE 21+ FLOCK *May 4 from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.*



Why should kids have all the fun? This spring, sign up for our new Como Quest 21+ event, a grown-up twist on Como Friends' popular family scavenger hunt event. Geared for adults who love Como Park Zoo & Conservatory, this after-hours event includes great conservation talks from Como's talented team of educators, horticulturists and zookeepers; concessions; a cash bar; and all the plants and animals you love at Como. A great date night idea or outing for a group of friends, this interactive event is all about sparking conversation and conservation to benefit the animals, plants and people that depend on Como.

And don't forget—Como Friends members receive \$5 off the \$40 ticket price! Purchase tickets! comofriends.org/events/como-quest-21



SAVE THE DATE FOR COMO QUEST FOR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND THE YOUNGER FLOCK SATURDAY & SUNDAY, JUNE 3RD & 4TH, 2023 | 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Choose your day and dive in to a global adventure in the heart of Como Park Zoo & Conservatory and discover more to learn—and love—about the animals and plants in our care. Your Como Quest mission will send you and your team on a treasure hunt through the rainforest habitat of Tropical Encounters, the coastal landscapes of Como Harbor, the tundra of Polar Bear Odyssey and the lush gardens of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory on an unforgettable adventure exploring Minnesota's most visited conservation destination. comofriends.org/events/como-quest



Calling all conservation-minded kids!

Led by youth volunteers who love connecting visitors with amazing animals and plants, Como's popular Nature Walk program is making a return in 2023. While the application process has closed this year, make sure your rising 8th-12th grader who loves animals, plants and people applies to be part of this important volunteer program next year. The Nature Walk program provides youth with valuable work experience and job skills and creates a gateway for potential future opportunities at Como and other conservation institutions. Visit **Como's website** for more information, or email comovolunteers@ci.stpaul.mn.us with questions. *Thank you!*



UNDER THE SEA

*Meet the amazing new inhabitants of Como Zoo's
Aquatic Animals Building*



Though she's still only a few months old, Como Zoo's new giant Pacific octopus may well be the most fascinating animal at Como. With eight limbs, nine brains, nearly 2,000 suckers, and the uncanny ability to change colors at will, seeing the new octopus explore her new tide pool habitat in the Aquatic Animals Building is a mesmerizing experience.


"She's an incredibly complicated and complex animal," says Como Zoo aquarist Gina Julio, about the juvenile octopus who is a citrusy orange/red coloring. One of the earth's largest invertebrates, the giant Pacific octopus is both deeply intelligent and surprisingly playful, capable of recognizing human faces and even solving puzzle mazes in lab tests.

Since she arrived at Como, the giant Pacific octopus has been demonstrating the full range of octopus behaviors, often greeting Julio in the morning by rising to the surface and squirting a friendly jet of water from her siphon, as Julio squirts her back. "She actually likes to be held and lifted out of the water for short periods of time, and she also seems to like having water poured over her,"

Julio says. "I pour it over her head like a little kid in the bathtub—I suppose everybody likes a shower."

The giant Pacific octopus has also been getting to know the starfish and anemones that share the tide pool habitat with her, and learning the limits of what the neighbors will tolerate. "While all of these animals are compatible, the anemones have stinging cells called nematocysts," says Julio. "On her first day here, she accidentally touched one and got stung, so she learned immediately not to stick her arms in there."

The new tide pool, located next to the immersive submarine feature, is part of the first phase of a major facelift taking place at the Aquatic Animals Building. Supported by the donors of Como Friends and state funding through the Arts and Cultural Heritage Legacy Fund, the renovation effort has already removed the fish tanks that were once in the center of the building, replacing them with smaller microhabitats for fish and other marine life. Come see what's new on your next Como visit, and learn more about the amazing animals that live under the sea!



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SEX LIFE: How can you tell if an octopus is a girl or a boy? "It's not easy," says Julio. "Unlike most animals, which are pretty sexually dimorphic, with an octopus you have to get up close and personal and gain their trust. We can tell that she's a female because of the shape of the third arm on her right side." Males typically have a specialized arm without suckers called a hectocotylus, and die soon after breeding. As females take care of up to 100,000 eggs, they go without food, dying just as their offspring are born. It's estimated fewer than one percent of giant Pacific octopus hatchlings survive to adolescence.

HEART LIKE A WHEEL: Did you know that octopuses have three hearts? Two of the hearts pump oxygen-rich blood through the gills, and one circulates it through the rest of the body. Unlike humans, octopuses have blue blood from

hemocyanin, a copper-containing respiratory protein that binds oxygen—but not very efficiently. Scientists say low oxygen levels may account for the octopus's slow-moving, energy-saving vibe.

COMMAND CENTER: Octopuses have a unique central nervous system, with a centralized donut-shaped brain, and eight additional satellite brains that help guide each arm independently. With the largest brain-to-body ratio of any invertebrate, octopuses can use tools, recognize their human keepers and even unscrew lids from jars. While some famous octopuses have been credited with predicting the outcome of World Cup matches and other sports events, Julio says the octopus at Como has shown no signs of being a sports fan, "though we'll have to watch to see if that develops."

LIMITED LIFE SPAN: As she grows to her full adult size of six feet, 160 pounds, the octopus at Como is consuming a steady diet of shrimp, scallops, clams and other seafood, just as she would in the ocean. Even though she won't breed at Como Zoo, giant Pacific octopus isn't expected to live long—typically less than two years in human care. "Definitely one of the harder parts of being an aquarist is that a lot of fish and invertebrates don't live very long compared to terrestrial animals," says Julio. "It's hard because as you get to know an animal there's an emotional bond. That's why our goal is to give her the best life she can have while she's with us."



SUNSET AFFAIR: STARGAZING

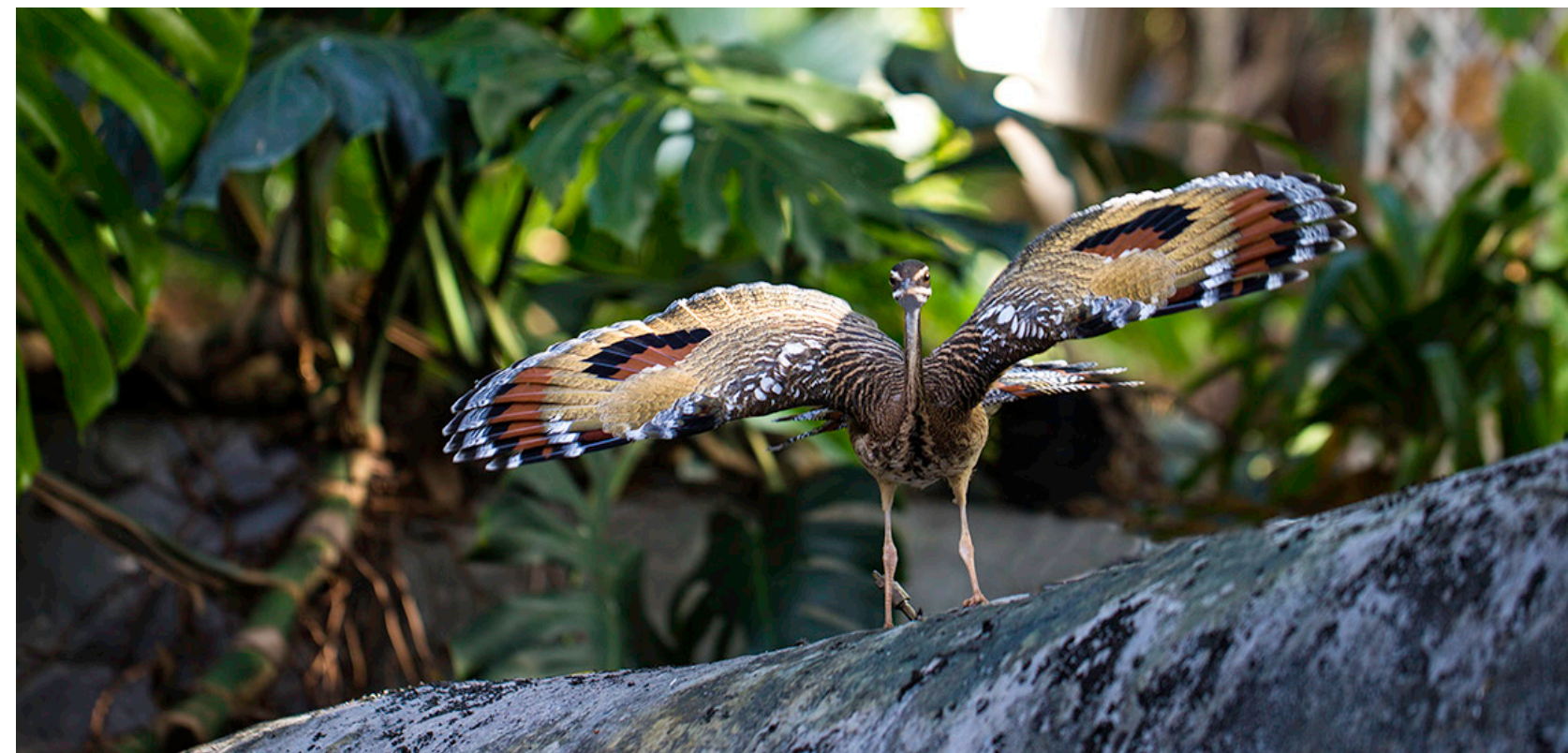
The giant Pacific octopus isn't the only aquatic animal enjoying the spotlight this season. In July, Como Friends will be celebrating some of her neighbors during the annual summer gala, **"Sunset Affair: Star Gazing"**, featuring penguins, puffins and polar bears."

Dive in and join us for an unforgettable night of festive food and drink, fascinating keeper talks, and a fabulous silent auction, all to benefit the plants and animals you love at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory. Tickets to Sunset Affair go on sale soon. Watch **ComoFriends.org** and your inbox for updates about the summer's hottest ticket.

“When we try to pick out anything by itself,” the famous naturalist John Muir once wrote, “we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”

TENDING TROPICAL ENCOUNTERS

The biodiversity of Como’s rainforest habitat requires complex care



The profound interdependence of plants, animals and people is one of the lessons Como Park Zoo & Conservatory strives to convey to more than a million visitors every year, and nowhere is that lesson more evident than in Tropical Encounters. Opened in 2005, the immersive rainforest habitat features an extensive array of tropical plants and trees, and an equally diverse range of animals, from high-flying tanagers, to a slithering anaconda, to Chloe, Como’s beloved free-ranging sloth.

With so many living things under one roof, Como Zoo keepers and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory horticulturists collaborate closely within Tropical Encounters to ensure that making a change in one corner of the habitat doesn’t have negative impacts

for other residents of the rainforest. “The biggest concern is always pruning,” says Como Zoo keeper Jennifer Gleason (shown right), who takes care of the nearly 40 birds that occupy the highest reaches of the habitat. “Anytime you remove parts of the canopy, that puts pressure on the birds and can increase aggression, so I always ask gardeners to cut back less of the trees than they really want to.”

Pest control is also more complicated in Tropical Encounters. “In the past, we’ve brought in lacewing insects to help control the scale insects or mealybugs, but we don’t ever want to use traditional pesticides that might be harmful to the animals,” says horticulturist Diane Rafats (shown left). That’s also why “volunteer” mice seen scampering through the habitat are



hard to eradicate. “Mice are smart, and they love the warm temperatures,” says Gleason. “They seem to know we can’t use more traditional pest control.”

In recent years, contributions to Como Friends have helped to provide for new tropical trees, pruning equipment and other resources that keep Tropical Encounters thriving. This year, Como Friends’ support will allow Como Zoo to rebuild Tropical Encounters’ leaf cutter ant colony, or repurpose the space with a new collection item.

Como Friends will also be supporting a major soil replacement project that will take place in stages throughout the habitat. The effort is a little bit like repotting a giant terrarium, says Rafats, noting that

horticulturists must take special care with the root systems of these tropical trees to ensure they remain healthy through the process. “We do take special care in this habitat,” says Rafats, “Everything we do here can affect everything that lives here.”

TROPICAL ENCOUNTER’S NEWEST RESIDENT

With its black and orange plumage, visitors might mistake Tropical Encounters’ newest bird for a Baltimore oriole. But if you take a closer look at Como’s new troupial, you’ll see this larger tropical bird has even more striking plumage, including a distinctive blue tear-drop of color encircling each eye. Besides Tropical Encounters, the national bird of Venezuela can also be seen on the country’s 500 bolívaes banknote.





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Bee the Change

With spring in the air, it's time to celebrate the tiny but mighty pollinators that make it all bloom. From sustainable beeswax food wrappers, to cute Como honey pots, to organic cotton baby onesies, Garden Safari Gifts has something sweet for everyone in your hive. **Remember, Como Friends' members enjoy 15 percent off every purchase!**

