



como friends
THRIVE ON

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INSIDER

Empathy Education

Como's education programs are back in full force, with a growing emphasis on discoveries that foster new connections with nature.

Photo by Susannah Baudhuin

| Como Park Zoo & Conservatory is back to class with your support of Como Friends! |

CONTENTS INSIDER



Wyoming Toads | 5



Animal House Calls | 6



Empathy Education | 10



Garden Safari Gifts | 12

HOW TO REACH US

Como Friends: 651.487.8229
Membership & Donations: 651.487.8229
Garden Safari Gifts: 651.487.8222

Como Park Zoo & Conservatory Information: 651.487.8200
Visitor Services: 651.487.8201
Education Department: 651.487.8272
Volunteer Services: 651.487.8252
Rentals: 651.487.8250

COMO PARK ZOO & CONSERVATORY

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



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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**COMO PARK
ZOO & CONSERVATORY**

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 FRIENDS INSIDER

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COMO NEWS & EVENTS



NEW EXHIBIT HIGHLIGHTS \$50 MILLION IMPACT MADE POSSIBLE BY COMO FRIENDS

Created by visionaries and volunteers more than a century ago, Como Park Zoo & Conservatory has always relied on community support to keep this public treasure growing. And thanks to the generous support of people like you, Como Friends has just reached an important milestone, contributing more than \$50 million to Como Park Zoo & Conservatory since the year 2000. Contributions paired with proceeds from gift shop sales have advanced transformative change at Como. Together,

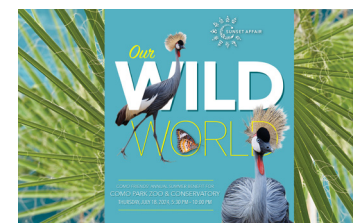
we support improvements to animal habitats and gardens, care of the historic buildings and grounds, accessible education programs for K-12 schools throughout Minnesota, and the Conservation Champions program that has an impact at Como and around the globe. All of this has happened while keeping Como admission free for every visitor! Plan a visit today or visit our website at comofriends.org and click on our **Impact & News** story.



Choose Your Own Adventure at Wild Conservation Tuesday, May 14 | 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Experience the wonders of Como Park Zoo & Conservatory without the crowds—or the kids! Wild Conservation at Como is the 21+ after-hours fundraising event and interactive scavenger hunt, with a cash bar and cool animals, plants and people.

The evening includes the option of an open-house style experience in the Polar Bear Lodge, overlooking Polar Bear Odyssey, where Como's own Conservation Champions will be on hand to talk about Como's role in species preservation projects around the world. To learn more, visit comofriends.org/events.



Sunset Affair: Our Wild World Thursday, July 18 | 5:30 pm – 10:00 pm

"Our Wild World" is the theme for Como Friends' Sunset Affair, the summer gala that supports Como's wild and precious animals and plants throughout the year. With fascinating conversations with Como's zookeepers, horticulturists, educators, and a famously fabulous silent auction, the summer's best fundraiser is sold out year after year. Watch your inbox this season for our announcement of live ticket sales, coming in May.



COMO FRIENDS MEMBERS MAKE IT HAPPEN

From new zoo babies to gorgeous native plants, your membership support for Como Friends helps to provide the extra care and funding that's made Como Park Zoo & Conservatory into Minnesota's conservation classroom. Keep your Como Friends membership up-to-date this season to support our mission-driven programs—and to take advantage of great member-only discounts for Como's summer camp offerings and great events like Wild Conservation.

For more information on membership levels and benefits, contact Kate Aksadi, Individual Giving Manager, at kate.aksadi@comofriends.org or call 651.487.8264.



LEAVE A LEGACY

A Minnesota tradition for more than 125 years, coming to Como Park Zoo & Conservatory is a memory that connects across generations. Help keep this legacy thriving by making a planned gift to support the wild and precious plants and animals that inspire us, and to safeguard the free admission visitors count on.

Open every day of the year, Como provides community members access to the natural world. By including Como in your estate plan, you help keep this community treasure available to all for years to come.

For more information on planned giving, contact Laurel Lundberg, Director of Individual Giving, at laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org or call 651.487.8296.

CONSERVATION CORNER: HOW TO MAKE A WYOMING TOAD

Resembling a large refrigerator, Como Zoo's hibernaculum is actually a critical tool for amphibian conservation. This spring, this biosecure chamber will become the full-time home to a host of Wyoming toads that live behind the scenes at Como—all part of an aggressive species preservation partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help rebuild a species that's been declared extinct in the wild.

Como Zoo has been involved in this nation-wide conservation effort since 2008, breeding season after season of tadpoles and toadlets that are sent every summer to the Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuge near Laramie, Wyoming. This year, keeper Allison Pizel will join a growing team from seven zoos and three federal hatcheries to release the season's new toadlets, and to track the success of previously released animals.

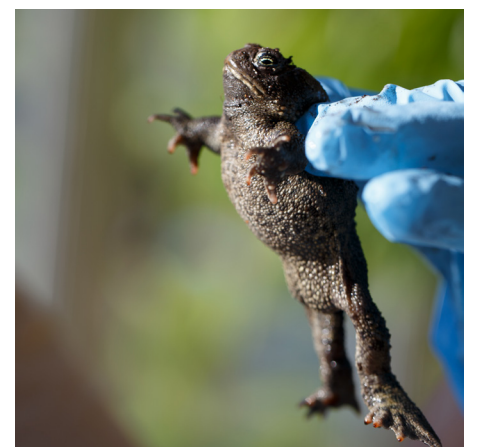
"It's a cool project, because when you catch the older toads, some will have a microchip in them indicating they've survived the winter, and maybe survived many years," says Pizel. Habitat destruction, pesticide runoff, and chytrid—an infectious fungal disease fatal to many amphibians—all contributed to the decline of the Wyoming toad, which was declared extinct in the wild since 1991. "We're still seeing that chytrid fungus can cause a crash in progress," Pizel says, "but overall, I'd say the numbers are increasing."

To breed enough Wyoming toads to release by July,

Pizel starts with six breeding pairs of toads, including a genetically valuable male specially chosen by the project's coordinator. To simulate a natural state of hibernation, Pizel will stop feeding the toads for a week in April, turning off the lights, and finally placing them in the deep cold of the hibernaculum for about six weeks. Once they're released, both males and females get a booster shot of hormones before mingling in the breeding tank. Within about two days, female toads will lay their eggs, and before the end of the week, tadpoles have arrived.

Then begins another amazing metamorphosis as the tadpoles transition into toads. "They'll start getting their back legs first, then they'll pop their front legs," Pizel says. "Once they pop that last leg, I'll take them out of the tank. They're called morphs at this point, and as they grow, they'll turn into toadlets by late June and early July."

Community support provided through Como Friends has been critical to the success of Como Zoo's Wyoming toad conservation efforts, helping to provide for the hibernaculum and biosecure room where the toads live, as well as ongoing professional training for keepers like Pizel. "Getting together with other institutions working toward the same goal is an important part of the project," she says. "We share our setbacks, how we've changed our protocols, we give each other tips, and when something goes really well, we all cheer."



ANIMAL HOUSE CALLS



With a new on-site veterinary team, Como Zoo has more resources to diagnose, prevent and respond to emerging animal health needs



On a cold early spring morning, a small veterinary team gathers in an examining room in Como Zoo's Aquatic Animals Building to prepare for the day's patient—a Hoffmann's two-toed sloth who lives in Tropical Encounters.

Known as Chloe to her legions of adoring fans, she's even better known to her keepers, who keep a close watch on the 20-year-old sloth's every mood and movement. A few weeks before, they had noticed a slight change of pigmentation

in her skin. When the problem persisted, keepers decided it was time to consult with a veterinary team.

Getting a sloth to go to her doctor's appointment has never been easy. But thanks to Como Zoo's new on-site veterinary team, getting a diagnosis is a much faster and less invasive process than it might have been. Instead of climbing into her tree, Chloe starts her day by climbing into a ventilated plastic barrel—a simple travel crate her keepers carry the short distance from the Visitor Center to the Aquatic Animals Building. Showing

no signs of stress, the sloth is anesthetized, enabling her care team to collect two skin biopsies to be sent off for microscopic examination. While she's under, the team also takes blood and urine samples, taking advantage of the opportunity to gather as much data as possible.

"Sometimes when you see pigmentation show up on the skin, you want to rule out the bad things—melanoma, endocrine troubles, allergies, Cushing's disease, which would be over-active adrenal glands," says veterinarian Carl Larson. "You always have to weigh the risks and

benefits of getting more information from a closer exam, but when we saw the problem wasn't going away on its own, we decided to pursue this."

As Chloe wakes up, her team is already evaluating the test results. "What we've determined is that the pigment change was likely due to an overgrowth of yeast, some normal microflora that she doesn't seem bothered by and that we can help her manage," Larson says. "Now we're cued into some possible treatments, and we've got a lot of peace of mind knowing that there's nothing worse happening."



With more than 1,200 animals of all shapes, sizes and species, veterinary care is a constant at Como. While a long-standing partnership with the University of Minnesota's Veterinary School of Medicine allows Como's keepers to consult with their experts on a variety of cases, over the last year, Como has also assembled a small on-site team that includes Larson, veterinary technician Andrea Persson, and veterinarian Jim Rasmussen, to provide more daily care. The arrangement has made it possible to provide timely and coordinated care to a host of animals, from providing post-surgical care to Willow, a blind snow leopard, to post-partum care for Stevie, the nyala who became a first-time mother in January.

On a recent day, Snowflake the Dall's sheep was the morning's patient, presenting with an overgrown coat. "She doesn't lose her coat like she should, which we think could be a sign of a hormonal imbalance," says senior keeper Jill Erzar. To find out, a team of 10 took full advantage of her time under anesthesia, performing a complete physical examination, collecting blood samples for further tests, and trimming excess hoof material. The team also sheared her abnormally thick fleece, and placed a hormonal implant which they hope will support future shedding. "Anytime you do a procedure like this, you lose part of your relationship with the animal. It doesn't matter if things go well or if they don't, any intervention will come at a cost. It's a fine line we have to walk between the animal's well-being

and choosing all available care, which is one reason we work hard to get as much information as we can anytime we do pursue a procedure."

Making sure that young animals don't panic during procedures is particularly important, because it can help set the tone for positive interactions with veterinary staff for years to come. On a recent winter morning, more than a dozen Como Zoo keepers and vet staff gathered backstage in Como Zoo's African Hoofstock Building for a pre-travel wellness check for Autumn, a one-and-a-half-year-old zebra who is about to join her sister Aurora at the Idaho Falls Zoo. It's standard practice for zoos to share a full health work-up before an animal relocates, and while Autumn is

in great health, keepers are cautious about how she'll recover from anesthesia.

"Zebras are burst runners," Erzar explains. "When that fight or flight response kicks in they just run blind, which can be very dangerous."

To reduce the potential for an explosive recovery, Rasmussen used an anesthetic combination designed to keep her calmer as she recovered from the procedure. As she got to her feet, everyone let out a collective sigh of relief.

"That's just how you want things to go," Erzar says. "When it comes to veterinary experiences, kind of boring is good."

Previous pages: Veterinarians Jim Rasmussen and Carl Larson, Vet Tech Andrea Persson, and Senior Keeper Allison Jungheim

*Shown left: Veterinarians Jim Rasmussen and Carl Larson, Zookeepers Adam Nigon, Aaron Nelson, Jill Erzar and Tami Murphy
Shown right: Veterinarians Jim Rasmussen and Carl Larson, Vet Tech Andrea Persson, and Senior Keeper Jill Erzar*

EMPATHY EDUCATION

Como's education programs are back in full force, with a growing emphasis on discoveries that foster new connections with nature.



"What do you think this plant would taste like?" a second grader from St. Paul's Capitol Hill Magnet School wonders aloud.

"Yucky," says her classmate, as she contemplates a table full of mint, cacao and other plant specimens from the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory.

"But maybe not," says a third student, leaning in for a sniff. "This one kind of smells nice..."

Shown above center: Bekah Hanes Shown top right, Como's Education and Public Engagement team: Erin Dimond, Anne Ahiers, Kelsey Raffel, Brigid Murphy, Ashley Verdeck, and Tim Buer

Using all five senses to explore the world of plants is the power of Plant Detectives, a popular school partnership that brings elementary students from the St. Paul public schools to Como with free tuition provided by Como Friends. In a classroom in Como's Visitor Center, small teams of students work their way from station to station, smelling, touching and observing all they can about plants, and comparing their notes in a high-energy setting guided by Como's education specialists.

During the pandemic, when school programs like this were put on pause, virtual programs like Como Connections helped classrooms around the state learn about conservation through fun and interactive videos. But as education coordinator Tim Buer says, there's nothing like being back in person again for getting kids fired up about learning. "It's been great to re-establish the connection that we've had with schools for so many years," he says. "We don't even have any space left in this program, it's been so popular with teachers."

Como field trips are a familiar tradition for many schools, but this year, the conservation curriculum is taking a new shape thanks to a new education strategic plan supported by Como Friends. "As our school partners were coming out of COVID, we took the opportunity to think really intentionally about all of our education programs, making sure that they're all aligned with our conservation mission," says Bekah Hanes, Como's education and conservation curator. Through Como's growing partnership with Advancing Conservation Through Empathy (ACE) for Wildlife, a nationwide learning network, Como's education programs have also been updated to reflect the growing body of research that shows that fostering empathy with animals and plants is a powerful tool in building life-long conservation behaviors.

Como visitors will notice the new conservation-focused vibe all across campus, from the full roster of summer camp programs relaunching this season, to the new field trip enrichment stations you'll see near the Visitor Center during the busy spring months. "It's wonderful to hear the noise and energy of kids being in classroom spaces that we haven't used for awhile," says Hanes. "Seeing those school buses come back, and knowing the next field trip is on its way here brings us all a lot of joy."



BACK TO CLASS WITH COMO FRIENDS

Your support for Como Friends has been critical to the resurgence of Como's education programs this year, with new scholarship offerings for schools and families. *Here's a look:*

HITCHING A RIDE: With rates for school bus rentals on the rise, Como Friends is helping provide bus scholarships to schools in need to ensure that finances are never a barrier to school field trips.

SUMMER CAMP SURGE: After a successful pilot run last season, Como's popular summer camps are making a full return with 12 weeks of great programs about animals and plants for preschoolers through sixth graders. Como Friends provided scholarship funding for families to enroll in Camp Como this season. Your Como Friends' membership can also help save 10 percent off your registration costs.

ST. PAUL PARTNERS: With field trips back in full swing, Como has resumed its popular second grade field trip program with the St. Paul public schools, a program paid for by Como Friends.

CURRICULUM UPDATES: With a new focus on fostering empathy with animals and plants, Como's education department hired a dedicated curriculum writer to update all of Como's programs with best practice strategies for inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards.





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From local artists in Minnesota on your favorite sticker, to hand-thrown mugs from Deneen Pottery, to flowery earrings to adorn your ears, Garden Safari Gifts is full of thoughtfully curated gifts from the land of loons and lady slippers. Every purchase at Como Friends' gift shop helps to support the animals and plants you love, from wolves to wildflowers. **Como Friends members enjoy 15 percent off every purchase.**

