



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 5, 2004

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**ST. LOUIS ZOO ESTABLISHES NEW WILDCARE INSTITUTE
Zoo Makes Major Commitment to Conservation Centers Around the Globe**

A leader in worldwide efforts to save endangered species and habitats, the St. Louis Zoo will take its wildlife conservation work to a new level with the establishment of the St. Louis Zoo's WildCare Institute. The Institute will be an umbrella organization for 12 major conservation centers around the globe, from Niger to Nicaragua, from Madagascar to Missouri, plus other Zoo conservation initiatives.

The WildCare Institute will be privately funded by a \$19,000,000 commitment from the St. Louis Zoo Friends Association for both a restricted gift to the Saint Louis Zoo Endowment Trust that is newly created and for general expenses of the Institute. The Zoo anticipates this fund will grow significantly through the years by means of outright or deferred gifts to support the Zoo's conservation work. Additional funds will be generated from ridership on the Zoo's new Mary Ann Lee Conservation Carousel.

"Launching the WildCare Institute is one of the most momentous steps the St. Louis Zoo has ever taken," says Dr. Jeffrey P. Bonner, president of the Zoo. "Zoos used to think their conservation role was to reproduce endangered species. Now we realize that's not going to be enough. Today we know there probably will not be many habitats around in the future to support animals in the wild."

"Our WildCare Institute is not just a means to help some of the endangered species about which we care," he emphasizes. "It's a relatively new way of working through many partnerships to help animals, ecosystems and people all at the same time."

Dr. R. Eric Miller has been named Director of the new WildCare Institute. For the

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past 10 years Miller has been Director of Animal Health and Conservation at the St. Louis Zoo. He has been a veterinarian at the Zoo since 1981.

“We’ve developed the WildCare Institute so that we can take a more holistic approach to conservation,” says Miller. “We’ll be working on wildlife recovery and management, breeding for possible future reintroductions to the wild wherever possible, and studies of nutrition, reproduction, health and behavior.

“We’ll also be working on the human element in these ecosystems,” he adds. “We’ll work on community development, conservation education, ecotourism and cultural anthropology. We can’t make a change for the species if we don’t consider the environment and the people.”

Some of the St. Louis Zoo’s efforts will include:

Avian Health in the Galapagos Islands: Studying the health of the endemic birds of the Galapagos to prevent their extinction from diseases; training Ecuadorian scientists and rangers to recognize and test for disease in conjunction with University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Bosawas Biosphere Reserve in Nicaragua: Helping the indigenous people develop a Wildlife Management Plan and gain legal title to their homeland; training native biologists to manage existing wildlife so people can hunt sustainably.

Equids in the Horn of Africa: Studying the numbers and behaviors of the endangered Grevy’s zebra and the African wild ass; helping teach African communities how to share their grazing land with these wild equids.

Lemurs in Madagascar: Studying the health and genetics of endangered lemurs, and teaching local students and rangers how to manage and protect the remaining lemur populations.

Mountain Vipers in the Near East: Studying the little-known habits of rare mountain vipers; teaching local communities the value of these snakes, as well as how to farm in more habitat-friendly ways.

Wildlife Recovery in the Sahelo-Saharan Region of Africa: Helping survey the numbers of critically endangered addax; working to establish a reserve for these and other near-extinct desert antelope.

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Hellbenders: Sponsoring water quality studies of the hellbender's habitat; starting a captive breeding program to supplement wild populations of this declining amphibian.

American Burying Beetles: Conducting surveys to see if critically endangered American burying beetles still live here; developing a captive breeding program if there is a need to re-introduce captive-bred beetles into the wild.

Humboldt Penguins in Punta San Juan, Peru: Establishing a breeding reserve for the Humboldt penguins; supporting improvements in the Peruvian fisheries industry; raising awareness of marine conservation issues.

Horned Guans in Mexico: Studying the habits of the horned guan to develop a recovery plan for this endangered bird; teaching local communities how to farm in more habitat-friendly ways.

Conservation in Papua New Guinea: Sponsoring field studies on rare long-beaked echidnas; educating clans with a goal of establishing a refuge for endangered wildlife.

Cheetahs in Africa: Helping survey the health and numbers of wild cheetahs; working to reduce conflicts with livestock by teaching ranchers how to co-exist with cheetahs and other predators.

"Partnerships with universities, conservation organizations, government agencies and field researchers will be key to the success of the WildCare Institute," says Miller. "We'll be adding partners as we go. We want to make it possible for other zoos and conservation organizations to be able to take on specific projects, or smaller parts of big projects, to help the cause."

In the future, the WildCare Institute plans to incorporate a Conservation Training Consortium to train park wardens and other natural resource managers for the future.

Twenty-four distinguished scientists and conservationists have agreed to serve as Conservation Fellows to advise and assist the Zoo on its conservation centers.

About the St. Louis Zoo

One of the few free zoos in the United States, the St. Louis Zoo is widely recognized as a leader in worldwide conservation efforts. The Zoo is renowned for its natural exhibits, diverse collection of animals and dedication to conserve endangered species and their habitats. Open every day but Christmas and New Year's Day, the Zoo attracts 3 million visitors a year.

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