

Reflecting on 2023

This issue of *Connect* is always the most anticipated, a traditional celebration of the magnificence and beauty of wildlife. Not only does the Annual Photo Contest showcase the amazing talent in our community, it is a testament of animal wellbeing and how they thrive in Association of Zoos and Aquariums-accredited aquariums and zoos.

Congratulations to this year's winner, Bertrand Duhamel, for his stunning photograph of Kiboko the hippopotamus. Bertrand enjoys spending time in his retirement at Zoo de Granby to capture special moments like this one. Thank you to Bertrand, and all the talented team members and volunteers, who contribute to this beloved issue. It is a perfect and fitting tribute for an end-of-the-year reflection.

As we close on 2023, there is so much hard work and achievement to recognize in this community. This has truly been a productive, record-setting year for AZA. Here are just a few of our collective accomplishments:

Our SAFE programs saw dramatic growth, now numbering 39. We solidified our policies and positions with the release of The Guiding Principles of AZA Animal Wellbeing Culture, our Animal Ambassador Position Statement, and our Statement on Applications of Biotechnology. The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium hosted a record-setting Annual Conference with 2,812 attendees and our Pathway Toward Membership program had an all-time high of 36 facilities involved. We hit operational milestones getting a new AZA Strategic Planning Process underway, made substantial updates and revisions to AZA bylaws, and had a record response to the Call to Service.

Additionally, the AZA played a leading role in shaping and driving the IUCN Position Statement on the Conservation Roles of Botanic Gardens, Zoos, and Aquariums published in October.

As we reflect on 2023, I encourage you all to think back on the Japanese concept of ikigai, or what gives us purpose. As a community, we work hard to accomplish all of these goals to support the well-being of our staff, animals, and guests with the purpose of saving wildlife and wild places.



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