

Introducing Dr. Lee Ehmke ... recently confirmed President of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, WAZA

WAZA President's Message

I am excited and honored to have been elected President of WAZA, and look forward to working with the Executive Director Gerald Dick and his staff, WAZA Council and our 334+ members to forge progress toward WAZA's ultimate vision: that the full conservation potential of the world's zoos and aquariums is realized. WAZA's Corporate Strategy, developed in 2009, sets out six strategic directions that will continue to inform and shape the priorities and activities of WAZA Council over the next two years. Under the leadership of our outgoing President Dr. Jörg Junhold, significant progress has been made on all six of these priorities. However, much work remains to be accomplished, in a world where wildlife and wild places are under assault, and the role of zoos and aquariums in combating this assault still not as widely understood and accepted as it needs to be.

At the top of the priority list is completing two major initiatives launched during the past year: Development of a new Global Zoo/Aquarium Strategy for Animal Welfare, and a significant update and re-imagining of a document that has—perhaps to greater effect than any other—defined the philosophical framework for 21st century zoological institutions: the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (WZACS). Under the guidance of WAZA Council members Susan Hunt and Rick Barongi, respectively, the Animal Welfare Strategy and a streamlined WZACS will provide continued evidence of the zoo community's leadership role in the humane care of animals and of the conservation impact derived from the operation and growth of zoo-based education, research, fundraising and animal management practices.

Another significant initiative that will be publicly launched in the upcoming months is the Decade on Biodiversity project, funded by the largest grant ever received by WAZA, generously provided by the MAVA Foundation. An attractive and highly customizable suite of materials (analog and digital) has been developed to allow all WAZA members—institutions, associations and individuals—to make use of them in order to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity. We will release these materials in conjunction with the 8th International Zoo and Aquarium Marketing Conference, to be hosted by the Bristol Zoo from 12-14 May, 2014.

As I assume the responsibility of representing the WAZA community as President, I look forward to utilizing my professional background, first as an environmental lawyer and later as an environmental planner specializing in zoological exhibition design, and my 25 years of experience at the Bronx Zoo/Wildlife Conservation Society and the Minnesota Zoo, to inform my service to the Association during my term of office. The complex net of international,



Dr. Lee Ehmke, WAZA President
Photo: Anon

regional and national laws and regulations, including some that have been self-imposed by zoo associations, must be navigated and if possible streamlined and simplified if we are to succeed in addressing the collection sustainability crisis that threatens the viability not just of our conservation breeding efforts but of our core business of exhibiting animals. Linked to this is the imperative that zoos and aquariums continue to improve the level of care provided to our animals, while providing more meaningful and intentional experiences—with tangible conservation outcomes—for our millions of visitors. I'm excited to work with WAZA Council and staff to revisit our Corporate Strategy to be sure that these two areas—collection sustainability and measurable conservation impact—are given the attention and investment they require.

As I write this, we are completing a fantastic 68th Annual Conference, hosted with professionalism and panache by Dr. Jackie Ogden, her team and colleagues at Disney's Animal Kingdom in Orlando, Florida. A record number of attendees have benefited from the hospitality of our hosts, and we have all been inspired by Disney's remarkable facilities, staff and programs. The Conference theme: "One World, One Plan, One Hope" was powerfully articulated by a wide range of presentations, workshops and conversations. Once again, WAZA's greatest strength—the unity of purpose and friendship that transcends political, geographic and cultural boundaries—was highlighted by this important gathering.

Lee Ehmke