



2025 Conference Program

Houston Zoo, February 26-28



Wednesday, February 26

<p>8:00 - 10:00 AM</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">OFFSITE - OPTIONAL FIELD EXPERIENCE Saving Birds at Sims Bayou <i>Facilitated by: SPLASh (Stopping Plastics and Litter Along Shorelines)</i></p>
<p>12:00 - 1:00 PM</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EVENT HALL Conference Kickoff <i>Ben Jones, Houston Zoo</i></p>
<p>1:00 - 1:30 PM</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EVENT HALL Education/Conservation Partnership to Support the Most Endangered Snake in the U.S. - the Louisiana Pine Snake <i>Charlotte Henley & Whitney Anderson, Ellen Trout Zoo</i></p>
<p>1:30 - 2:30 PM</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EVENT HALL Data Driven: Logic Models and Outcomes <i>Judi Harrington & Samantha Junker, Houston Zoo</i></p>
<p>2:30 - 3:00 PM</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EVENT HALL Cracking the Case of Interpretive Spaces <i>Brianna Sorber & Karrington Wright, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center</i></p>
<p>3:00 - 3:45 PM</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EVENT HALL Featured Speaker <i>Jaime Gonzalez, Student Conservation Association</i></p>
<p>4:00 - 5:00 PM</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WILDLIFE WORKSHOP Workshopping a New Interpretive Space <i>Bennett Dones & Ben Jones, Houston Zoo</i></p>
<p>6:00 - 9:00 PM</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EVENT HALL Dinner & Event with Local Conservation Partners <i>Featured Speaker: Dr. Cullen Geiselman Muse</i> <i>Houston Toad Recovery Program</i> <i>Attwater Prairie Chicken Team</i> <i>HZ Teen Program Snake & Bird Saving Campaigns</i> <i>Gorillas on the Line Collective</i> <i>Zero Waste Houston</i> <i>Gulf Coast Bird Observatory</i> SPLASh</p>

Thursday, February 27

8:00 - 8:30 AM	<p align="center">EVENT HALL Houston Breakfast Bites <i>Shipley Donuts</i></p>	
8:30 - 9:30 AM	<p align="center">EVENT HALL It's All Fun and Games <i>Brittany Aich & Kaci Faulks, Abilene Zoo</i></p>	<p align="center">HZHQ Director's Summit</p>
9:30 - 10:30 AM	<p align="center">EVENT HALL Empathy through Enrichment <i>Sarah Fern, Houston Zoo</i></p>	
10:30 - 11:00 AM	<p align="center">CLASSROOMS High-Impact Tours: Certified Interpretive Guide Training <i>Amber Pepper, National Association for Interpretation</i></p> <p align="center">Spotlight Species at the Cameron Park Zoo <i>Holley Day, Cameron Park Zoo</i></p>	
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM	<p align="center">CLASSROOMS Everyday Leadership <i>Aaron Burd, Houston Zoo</i></p> <p align="center">Native Birds of a Feather Rehab Together <i>Brittany Aich, Abilene Zoological Gardens</i></p>	
12:00 - 1:00 PM	<p align="center">EVENT HALL Lunch</p>	
1:00 - 2:00 PM	<p align="center">AROUND THE ZOO Special Experience Opportunities <i>Led by Houston Zoo Education & Animal Care Staff</i></p>	
2:00 - 3:00 PM	<p align="center">AROUND THE ZOO Self-Guided Interpretive Tours <i>Galápagos Islands, Birds of the World, Texas Wetlands, South America's Pantanal</i></p>	
3:00 - 3:15 PM	<p align="center">EVENT HALL Break & Sweet Treats</p>	
3:15 - 4:00 PM	<p align="center">CLASSROOMS Intentional Interpretation: Streamlining Zoo-wide Stories through Master Interpretive Planning <i>Melissa Mair, Houston Zoo</i></p>	<p align="center">EVENT HALL Interpreting Climate Science Through Art <i>Taylor Galaviz, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary</i></p>
4:15 - 5:00 PM	<p align="center">EVENT HALL DEI Reflections: What We Feel, Think, and Say <i>Stephanie Gonzalez, AZA Diversity Committee Texas Liaison</i></p>	
6:00 - 8:00 PM	<p align="center">OFFSITE - OPTIONAL Evening Social at Axelrad Beer Garden</p>	

Friday, February 28

8:00 – 8:30 AM	EVENT HALL Houston Breakfast Bites <i>Kolache Factory</i>
8:30-9:30 AM	EVENT HALL Design Thinking & Co-Designing Programs <i>Lillie Stockseth, Houston Zoo</i>
9:30 - 10:30 AM	EVENT HALL Embracing Diversity: Using Welcome Mats as a Tool to Build Stronger Teams <i>Stephanie Casalini, Dallas Zoo</i>
10:30 - 11:30 AM	CLASSROOMS Zoo Tots Creative Crafts <i>Whitney Anderson & Amanda Lyons, Ellen Trout Zoo</i> Updates & Opportunities from AZA Conservation Education Committee (CEC) <i>Lillie Stockseth, AZA CEC Texas Community Builder</i>
11:30 AM – 12:00 PM	EVENT HALL Conference Conclusions



Wednesday, February 26

Saving Birds at Sims Bayou

SPLASh (Stopping Plastics and Litter Along Shorelines)

Join us on Wednesday morning to help save Houston-area shorebirds. We will be working alongside local conservation partners at SPLASh (Stopping Plastics and Litter Along Shorelines) who focus on creating a cleaner environment for people, birds, and other wildlife in the greater Houston-Galveston region through community science, education, and outreach. During this field experience attendees will gain hands-on experience in the removal and monitoring of plastic debris along bayous and how that data is reported state-wide to help Texas leaders make decisions on how to protect humans and wildlife from plastic pollution

Conference Kickoff

Ben Jones, Vice President of Conservation and Education, Houston Zoo

Welcome to TAZE 2025! Let's kick off this week by celebrating our collective impact across our state. How are we saving wildlife together and how can we continue to broaden and deepen our impact as conservation educators?

Education/Conservation Partnership to Save the Most Endangered Snake in the U.S. – The Louisiana Pine Snake

Charlotte Henley, Zoologist/Registrar, Ellen Trout Zoo

Whitney Anderson, Education Director, Ellen Trout Zoo

The repatriation of the Louisiana Pine Snake is one of the first consolidations of an SSP program with documented success and provides a "real in our backyard" example for various audiences how in-situ and ex-situ conservation works.

Data Driven: Logic Models and Outcomes

Judi Harrington, Volunteer Programs Supervisor, Houston Zoo

Samantha Junker, Director of Guest Engagement and Volunteers, Houston Zoo

Logic models are an effective framework for program development, detailing everything from what you need to run your program to desired impacts/outcomes. In this workshop, you'll get a brief overview of logic models and be able to practice developing one for your programs in real-time.

Cracking the Case of Interpretive Spaces

Brianna Sorber, Senior Environmental Engagement Specialist, Fossil Rim Wildlife Park

Karrington Wright, Environmental Engagement Specialist, Fossil Rim Wildlife Park

Conservation Investigations is Fossil Rim's new interactive, educational space that invites visitors of all ages to explore conservation issues and solutions in their roles as Conservation Investigators. Staff will discuss the joy and challenges of creating this immersive yet low cost guest interpretation space built to adapt and grow.

Workshopping a New Interpretive Space

Bennett Dones, Interpretive Programs Manager, Houston Zoo

Ben Jones, Vice President of Conservation & Education, Houston Zoo

TAZE Hivemind, help! We have more questions than answers. Join us to consider, conceptualize, and even challenge aspects of a new program currently in development - Houston Zoo's Wildlife Workshop. We'll describe the concept and explore some of the real questions we are wrestling with toward (what we hope will be) an innovation in campus-based wildlife-saving.

- Does doing lead to caring? How realistic is it that the visitor will take meaningful action to save wildlife during a visit? Can mass zoo visitation be harnessed to save wildlife beyond fund generation...can conservation be crowd-sourced?
- What mental image does "Wildlife Workshop" conjure up? Can "making" augment visitor satisfaction? How can a zoo or aquarium add value to regional wildlife habitat restoration efforts beyond a boutique-level contribution?
- Is facilitated behavior an effective reinforcement of conservation identity and/or a cultivator of stewardship ethic? Does anyone know if it is more effective than other tactical approaches that are more standard in educational programming?
- Can the zoo facilitate, support, or sponsor a community of conservation where saving wildlife is the organizing principle? Like a faith community, or club like 4-H, scouts, birding groups, etc.? How realistic? How can social elements be amplified?

We hope you'll join in for the Houston Zoo's Wildlife Workshop exploration and help us think it through.

Dinner & Evening Social with Local Conservation Partners

Featured Speaker: Dr. Cullen Geiselman Muse

Houston Toad Recovery Program

Attwater Prairie Chicken Team

Brazos Water Snake Team

Houston Zoo Teen-Led Bird and Snake Saving Campaign Committees

Gorillas on the Line Collective

Zero Waste Houston

Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

SPLASH

Join local conservation leaders as we celebrate and learn how our communities are engaging in local and state-wide efforts. Featuring animal care professionals, program leaders, and in-field experts, join us to learn about ways we can all contribute to saving Texas wildlife.

Featured Speaker:

Cullen K. Geiselman, PhD is a conservationist, philanthropist, and bat researcher. She lives and works in Houston where she chairs the board and is the acting director of the Cullen Trust for Health Care, a support organization funding healthcare initiatives in the greater Houston area. She also serves on the Board of Directors of the Houston Zoo, the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, the Houston Parks Board, the Houston Advanced Research Center, the Turtle Conservancy, and the Lone Star Coastal Alliance. She is the immediate past chair of the Board of Directors of Bat Conservation International. After working for Bat Conservation International and completing her dissertation on nectar-feeding bats in French Guiana, Ms. Geiselman continues her work with bats by collaborating with students in Africa and Latin America, curating the online Bat Eco-Interactions database (www.batbase.org), and presenting lectures about bats to technical audiences and the general public. She is dedicated to conserving species and the habitats they need to thrive and to preserving and expanding green space for the benefit of people and nature.

Thursday, February 27

Director's Summit

Opportunity to bring together leaders of education teams and invited guests to engage in strategic conversations including issues facing our field, best practices in environmental education and explore emerging trends within zoos and aquariums.

It's All Fun and Games

Kaci Faulks, Zoo Educator, Abilene Zoological Gardens

Brittany Aich, Zoo Educator, Abilene Zoological Gardens

Are you looking for more engaging activities and games that allow your students to not only have fun, but learn while doing it? This 100% hands on workshop will help you breathe new life into your curriculum and is sure to increase engagement and meaningful learning.

Empathy Through Enrichment

Sarah Fern, Interpretive Programs Specialist, Houston Zoo

As educators, we regularly apply empathy techniques to engage our guests and connect them with wildlife. In this workshop, participants will learn the importance of being intentional with empathy and how it applies to a program we currently offer at the Houston Zoo. After exploring empathy techniques, participants will experience a current program offering, Empathy Through Enrichment. This program offers guests cost-free, spontaneous opportunities to become honorary zookeepers and gain insight into animal care by creating enrichment for several featured animals, including our mob of meerkats.

High-Impact Tours: Certified Interpretive Guide Training

Amber Pepper, Certified Interpretive Trainer, National Association for Interpretation

Do you want to make your tours more engaging? More meaningful? More enjoyable? Your tours will have a greater impact on visitors when you become a Certified Interpretive Guide! Lead with confidence, and leave your audience inspired.

Spotlight Species at the Cameron Park Zoo

Holley Day, Education Coordinator, Cameron Park Zoo

Do you want to make your tours more engaging? More meaningful? More enjoyable? Your tours will have a greater impact on visitors when you become a Certified Interpretive Guide! Lead with confidence, and leave your audience inspired.

Everyday Leadership

Aaron Burd, Camp Supervisor, Houston Zoo

Philosophical yet real stories of leadership in a camp person's life. Increase your awareness of leadership characteristics we all possess no matter our title, responsibility, or background.

Native Birds of a Feather Rehab Together

Brittany Aich, Zoo Educator, Abilene Zoological Gardens

Abilene Zoological Gardens boasts the only permitted bird rehab facility in the area. We will take a closer look into the inner workings of the rehab, what happens when birds aren't able to be released, what this facility means for our Texas ecosystems.

Special Experience Opportunities

Led by Houston Zoo Education & Animal Care Staff

A series of opportunities will be available for signup on Thursday morning. Join us on one of these fun animal experiences!

Self-Guided Interpretive Tours

Led by Houston Zoo Education Staff & Adult Volunteers

Explore some of the Zoo's newest exhibits, where staff and volunteers will be ready to deep dive into the design, interpretation, and conservation stories of the exhibit's residents. You may visit as many or as few as you would like of the following: Texas Wetlands, Birds of the World, South America's Pantanal, Galapagos Islands.

Intentional Interpretation: Streamlining Zoo-wide Stories through Master Interpretive Planning

Melissa Mair, Interpretive Planning Manager, Houston Zoo

Zoos are filled with mission-based stories, but which ones are most important to communicate? In this session, we will discuss using interpretive plans to articulate and prioritize guest-facing messages. After a presentation on the Houston Zoo's work to create a Zoo-wide Interpretive Plan, attendees will workshop their own plans.

Interpreting Climate Data through Art

Taylor Galaviz, Constituent Engagement Specialist, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Climate science shows that average global temperatures are rising, but what does that look like on a local scale? Help students visualize and interpret local data by turning it into an art project so that you can have meaningful conversations about actions needed to reduce carbon emissions.

DEI Reflections: What We Feel, Think, and Say

Stephanie Gonzalez, School Partnerships Supervisor & IDEA (DEIA) Committee Chair,
Houston Zoo; AZA Diversity Committee Texas Liaison

This exercise is designed with the intention of recognizing that if we cannot openly communicate our true thoughts and feelings about DEI, we will struggle to create lasting and meaningful change in this field, where intentional work is crucial. It's an opportunity for communication, active listening, and team engagement. By fostering an open discussion here, we can equip ourselves with the tools to engage in impactful conversations outside this space, ultimately driving positive change in DEI efforts.

Evening Social at Axelrad Beer Garden

Join us at Axelrad Beer Garden to continue the fun from the day and enjoy a longtime-favorite Houston spot!

Friday, February 28

Design Thinking & Co-Designing Programs

Lillie Stockseth, Education Programs Coordinator

Making programs inclusive, effective, and sustainable is something a lot of our teams are working toward, but where does the design process start? What kinds of programs still fit our organizations' needs and expectations? How do you continue to refine a long-standing program? Let's dissect one program, then we will workshop a framework to create or refine a program in your role.

Embracing Diversity: Using Welcome Mats as a Tool to Build Stronger Teams

Stephanie Casalini, Education Resource Manager, Dallas Zoo

In this session, participants will learn about "Welcome Mats," a visual tool that encourages teams to highlight and appreciate diversity among themselves. Participants will engage in interactive activities to learn more about themselves and have an opportunity to create their very own "Welcome Mat."

Zoo Tots Creative Crafts

Whitney Anderson, Education Director, Ellen Trout Zoo

Amanda Lyons, Zoo Educator, Ellen Trout Zoo

Participate in our favorite crafts/activities from our Zoo Tots preschool program — make your own snakes shed and a mammal teeth craft covering the dentition of herbivores, omnivores, and carnivores.

Updates from AZA Conservation Education Committee (CEC)

Lillie Stockseth, Education Programs Coordinator, Houston Zoo; AZA CEC Texas Community Builder; Radiated Tortoise SAFE Steering Committee Member

Hear the latest projects and news from the AZA Conservation Education Committee as well as updates from our state-exclusive working group, the Region 7 Community of Practice (RCP). Learn more ways to leverage our collective genius around the state and explore opportunities for educators to be more involved in AZA programs.

Conference Conclusion

As our time together ends, let's reflect on what we've learned, shared and experienced during the conference. We will also look ahead and consider how we can stay connected and collaborate to save wildlife. Afterwards, you are invited to explore any areas of the Zoo you might have missed this week.