Rocky Mountain chapter of the American Association of Zoo Keepers

What is AAZK?

AAZK is the American Association of Zoo Keepers

Mission: “to advance excellence in the animal keeping profession, foster effective communication beneficial to animal care, support deserving conservation projects, and promote the preservation of our natural resources and animal life.”

AAZK was started in 1967 by seven keepers in San Diego. It has since grown into a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with approximately 114 chapters affiliated with over 250 animal care facilities and has over 2300 individual members spanning the United States, Canada, and 24 foreign countries.

For additional information, please visit www.aazk.org

About Rocky Mountain AAZK

Rocky Mountain AAZK (RMAAZK) is your local chapter of the American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK). Rocky Mountain AAZK was chartered on March 4, 1984 and was one of the first twenty-five chartered chapters of the association.

Rocky Mountain AAZK is a multi-institutional chapter with a membership of 40 plus individuals, representing three AZA accredited facilities around the Denver area. Those facilities are Denver Zoo, Landry’s Downtown Aquarium Denver and The Butterfly Pavilion.

For additional information, please visit www.rmaazk.org

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RMAAZK Affiliated Facilities

Denver Zoo
Affiliated with RMAAZK since 1984
“inspiring communities to save wildlife for future generations”

Landry’s Downtown Aquarium Denver
Affiliated with RMAAZK since 2017
“committed to supporting the conservation of our environment and educating our visitors on the importance of being respectful of the world around us”

Butterfly Pavilion
Affiliated with RMAAZK since 2019
“to foster an appreciation of invertebrates by educating the public about the need to protect and care for threatened habitats globally, while conducting research for solutions in invertebrate conservation”
Letter from the President

I would like to extend sincere thanks to each of you for supporting Rocky Mountain AAZK last year! We all faced a lot of challenges in 2020, and zookeepers and animal care staff were in a unique position. Many of our members were laid off, furloughed, or had their hours reduced, while others changed their schedules, continued to work when most things closed down, and managed to give excellent animal care despite budget cuts and staffing shortages. Our facilities closed to the public, and when things re-opened we had to adapt to changes with guests, animal demonstrations, and more. Although 2020 was not what any of us had hoped, I am extremely proud of our Rocky Mountain AAZK members and all that we were able to accomplish together.

In the beginning of 2020, our chapter shifted to virtual meetings to be more inclusive and allow for members of all three local facilities to attend. This increased our members’ ability to participate, collaborate, and achieve our mission of "empowering zoo professionals to protect the natural world." When March hit and forced quarantines and isolations, our group was prepared to continue meeting online, but we were also motivated to find new ways to connect our members. RMAAZK started virtual presentations for members on a variety of topics including conservation and conferences, we hosted virtual happy hours, and we played trivia, animal-themed of course, on Zoom. Our members were facing change that was unique to our field and our industry, and we all found value in connecting with others in similar situations.

As we gained confidence in our ability to still make an impact despite a pandemic, we hosted our first virtual fundraiser. Our annual Bowling for Rhinos event became Running (or walking) for Rhinos and was one of our most successful years ever! We were so excited to see the overwhelming support we had from our community. Seeing that our members and supporters alike enjoyed finding new ways to support our chapter and conservation, we decided to move forward with our 20th annual Comedy Night for Conservation online. We hired local comedians through ScienceRiots, hosted an online silent auction, and had musical performances by 'Pint and a Half'. Bringing this event online allowed us to include everyone's favorite parts of Comedy Night while also expanding it to include people outside of Denver! We innovated and adapted, and the event was a huge success.

I am so proud of our chapter and all that we accomplished last year. As I look back on 2020, I am very proud to be a part of a community that really supports and lifts each other up. Our officers and our members were continually looking for ways to support our members as each month brought new challenges to the animal care field.

Despite all the chaos, hardship and unprecedented concerns of 2020, our chapter remained motivated to innovate and learn. Last year, Rocky Mountain AAZK accomplished our mission, found new and successful strategies, and made an impact on conservation! We could not have done it without all of you, so we sincerely and gratefully thank you for your continued support!

~ Kelsey

Kelsey Eggers
President 2020/2021
Rocky Mountain AAZK
RMAAZK 2020 Officers

President 2020/2021  
Kelsey Eggers  
Predators Keeper  
Denver Zoo

Secretary 2020/2021  
Heather Shields  
Trainer III  
Downtown Aquarium Denver

Facility Liaison 2021/2022  
An Nguyen  
Predators Keeper  
Butterfly Pavilion

Vice President 2021/2022  
Thea Etchells  
Tropical Discovery Keeper  
Denver Zoo

Communications 2021/2022  
Anton Morrison  
Bird Keeper  
Denver Zoo

Facility Liaison 2021/2022  
Jessica Miller  
Assistant Curator of Fishes, Inverts, and Herps  
Downtown Aquarium Denver

Treasurer 2020/2021  
Disa Skaff  
Night Keeper  
Denver Zoo

Facility Liaison 2020/2021  
Sara Stevens  
Aquatics Manager  
Butterfly Pavilion

Officer positions are on an alternate schedule so officers will overlap from year to year. In November of 2020, the positions that were open from nominations were: Vice President, Communications, DZ Liaison and DAD Liaison. There were no oppositions for these and officers were confirmed in December 2020. Congratulations and thank you for your continued service to the chapter and AAZK.

RMAAZK Membership Updates

2020 was a crazy year for so many reasons and we are so proud of our membership for persevering and continuously supporting each other. Even in the craziness, our chapter gained 18 new members raising the total to 53 members! There are 7 members from the Butterfly Pavilion, 10 from the Aquarium, 2 unaffiliated and 34 from Denver Zoo.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there wasn’t much we could do this year in person but again, our membership is strong. Meetings, presentations and happy hours were all held on ZOOM. That didn’t stop chapter officers from providing little treats to membership though, following all proper PPE protocols of course.

RMAAZK Membership Support

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Fundraisers & Social Events

March 3rd          Painting for Polar Bears
May 22nd-24th     Rhino Crash 2020 (Bowling for Rhinos event)
August 6th        20th Annual Comedy Night (Virtual)
December 13th     Virtual Trivia & Chapter Holiday ZOOM

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, there was a lot of thinking outside the box. RMAAZK hosted our first ever virtual event with Rhino Crash. Funds raised from this event were in support of AAZK’s national fundraiser “Bowling for Rhinos”. We plan on continuing with this form of the event and hope to add in-person options in years to come.

Our annual Comedy Night for Conservation celebrated its 20th year and what a year it was! This event was held virtually for the first time in its history. Live comedy was done via ZOOM and the silent auction managed through an online site. Thank you to all that helped make this event such a huge success!

Income Generated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAZK Bowling for Rhinos</td>
<td>$4,079.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAZK Trees for You and Me Grant—Painting for Polar Bears</td>
<td>$180.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy Night for Conservation</td>
<td>$20,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amazon Smile</td>
<td>$23.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eco-Cell</td>
<td>$55.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$24,337.39</strong></td>
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Financial Contributions Made

Fundraisers support conservation efforts and professional development grants. All donations are made in accordance with AAZK bylaws to 501(c)3 non-profit organizations or the international equivalent. The organizations that RMAAZK chooses to donate to are voted upon by the membership and/or have members in direct participation with the project/organization.

<table>
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<td>$180.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMAAZK Professional Development Grants</td>
<td>$2,920.83</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL dispersed in 2020</strong></td>
<td><strong>$7,180.22</strong></td>
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Since 2006, Rocky Mountain AAZK has raised and donated over $250,000 to more than 65 different conservation organizations and projects around the globe.
Professional Development Grants

Originally, $9,900 in Professional Development Grants was to be distributed to 12 members for 2020 Professional Development Grants. These funds were awarded to members to attend multiple different national conferences and to participate in global conservation efforts. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, many of these opportunities were rescheduled for future dates or canceled completely. We are thankful that we were still able to support 4 people for attending two different conservation trips and one conference at the beginning of the year.

Conservation in Nepal
An Nguyen

Conservation in Nepal
Arielle Schepmoes

Conservation with Keas in New Zealand
Jessica Meehan

ZAA Mid-Year Conference
Bri Cooper

Presentations: Local Level

One of the requirements for receiving a Professional Development Grant from the chapter is to give a presentation to the membership. The presentations can be about the experience of a trip, practice for a presentation/workshop, or summary of materials learned. Thank you to this year’s presenters!

The last in-person presentations were conducted in Mach with the remaining presentations done via ZOOM.

Review of Marine Mammal Course at National AAZK 2019 Conference
Abby Lucas

Florida Reef Track Rescue Project
Sara Stevens

Nepal Conservation Trip Experience
An and Arielle Nguyen

Butterfly Conservation during COVID
Kathryn Hokamp

Tenrec Breeding at Denver Zoo
Katie Krantz

Kea Conservation in New Zealand
Jessica Meehan

Karen Pryor Training Class in Review
Stephanie Turner

SANCCOB
Stephanie Hollister

Rocky Mountain
AAZK prides itself on being able to support members for Professional Development opportunities.
2020 was a strange year but despite all of the challenges, Rocky Mountain AAZK was still able to accomplish so much with your continued support. Here is to a bright future and many more adventures to come!

Thank You from all of us in Rocky Mountain AAZK!

Stay connected with Rocky Mountain AAZK and follow us on