



Members' News

THE OFFICIAL WCS MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009

Things that Go Bump in the Night



It takes your eyes a few seconds to adjust to the low light, but soon you see a couple of active, pig-size animals with long snouts and ears. They're aardvarks—new additions to the *Carter Giraffe Building* (see page 7).

Aardvarks are nocturnal, usually waiting until dark before they emerge from their burrows to hunt for ants, termites, and other insects, which they dig out of the ground with their powerful claws and gather up with their long, sticky tongue. An aardvark's nighttime travels average one to three miles but can range up to 18.

We share the Earth with a wide variety of wild species, and each of them has developed special adaptations for living in their natural habitats. Like aardvarks, nocturnal animals have physical features

and behaviors that help them survive in the dark. Owls, toads, and cats have special eyes that help them see well at night. Some nocturnal creatures—bats for example—use echolocation, in which the animal emits a high-pitched sound that bounces off objects. The sound is then received by the animal, giving it information about the object's shape, direction, distance, and texture. Other nocturnal animals have big ears—like aardvarks, foxes, and rabbits—to detect the movements of prey and predators.

What better way to celebrate the Halloween season than by visiting the WCS zoos and aquarium to see some of the mysterious creatures of the nighttime world. And mark your calendars for Boo at the Zoo (see page 5). Whoooooo would want to miss it?

WCS's Top 10 Nocturnal Animals

- Owls** Bronx Zoo's Birds of Prey, Carter Giraffe Building, Children's Zoo; Prospect Park Zoo's Animal Lifestyles; Queens Zoo's Woodland Trail
- Flying squirrels** Bronx Zoo's Mouse House
- Foxes** Bronx Zoo's Children's Zoo
- Toads & frogs** Bronx Zoo's World of Reptiles, Zoo Center, JungleWorld; Central Park Zoo's Tropic Zone; New York Aquarium's Conservation Hall; Prospect Park Zoo's Animals in Our Lives
- Aardvarks** Bronx Zoo's Carter Giraffe Building
- Fossas** Bronx Zoo's Madagascar!
- Two-toed sloths** Central Park Zoo's Tropic Zone
- Snow leopards** Bronx Zoo's Himalayan Highlands; Central Park Zoo's Allison Maher Stern Snow Leopard Exhibit
- Skunks** Bronx Zoo's Mouse House
- Porcupines** Bronx Zoo's Children's Zoo; Prospect Park Zoo's Barn and Garden; Queens Zoo's Aviary



Ghost Owl

By Jonathan Slaght, PhD Candidate, University of Minnesota

On March 18, my Russian colleagues and I made camp on the bank of the Amgu River, in the southern Primorye region, just a stone's throw from the Sea of Japan and within sight of the logging village Amgu. We arrived late in the day and immediately began looking for wood and digging a spot in the snow for our fire. Suddenly, the calls of two Blakiston's fish owls broke the silence. It was the Kudya pair (we name the owls after the area in which we find them).

The birds were vocalizing a few hundred yards upstream. We sat frozen, not believing our luck, as the duetting birds moved closer and closer. Soon, we had an unobstructed view of fish owl hunting behavior—not just one bird, or even two, but a whole family. It is the first time anyone has documented the species' hunting behavior in Russia.

Katya, the resident female, glided in low and perched on a white birch. Next came the silhouette of Dzhonik, the resident male, as he passed her without a glance and perched nearby. Last, Ryzhii, their son, hatched almost 12 months before, landed screeching and impatient next to Katya, eager for the hunt to start. For a few moments the family sat motionless, their forms fading into the background of snow and tree as dusk became night.

At almost the same second, both adults dropped to the icy

riverbank and walked toward the water's edge, where they searched intently for the subtle movements of passing fish. Ryzhii fluttered to his mother's side, and when she ignored his begging, he flapped downriver to his father, who offered him a small, still-wriggling salmon.

Blakiston's Fish Owl

Standing about two and a half feet tall and weighing as much as a bald eagle, Blakiston's fish owl is perhaps the world's largest owl. This endangered species lives only in remote forests of northern Japan, the Russian Far East, and northeastern China. I first became interested in this secretive bird in 2000, when I was hiking in Primorye and photographed the first fish owl recorded in Lazo County. Today, Blakiston's fish owl is the focus of my PhD work at the University of Minnesota.

The Blakiston's Fish Owl Project, with invaluable support from WCS-Russia, had a very successful 2009 capture

Above: A section of river near Amgu, Russia, where the endangered Blakiston's fish owl hunts. WCS-Russia is studying this species to help protect the remaining 1,000 birds. Opposite: Field technician Andrei Katkov holds Rada, a one-year-old female.

KIDS' CORNER QUIZ: OWL PROWL



- Owls like to eat
 - Halloween candy
 - leaves and twigs
 - live animals, from earthworms to monkeys
 - chips and pretzels
- Most owls
 - fly and hunt at night
 - swim and play at the beach
 - live under rocks and fallen trees
 - dance by the light of the moon
- Owls live on every continent except
 - Africa
 - Australia
 - Antarctica
 - South America
- Owls have
 - good eyesight and hearing
 - colorful feathers and eggs
 - large eyes and four toes
 - thin beaks and short wings
- The ears of many owl species
 - stick up like antennae on top of their head
 - are arranged on the sides of the head, one higher than the other
 - have large outer lobes, like human ears
 - can be rotated, like satellite dishes
- A group of owls is called a
 - herd
 - flock
 - parliament
 - gaggle

(answers at bottom of page)

season. Using a trap design developed by one of our Russian field technicians, we caught ten birds from February to April—twice the number in 2008—across our nearly 6,000-square-mile study area. We recaptured all three owls that we had outfitted with GPS data loggers in 2008, and we downloaded vital data from those units. Information on fish owl movements—where they go and when—will be critical as we help develop a species conservation plan, the first for this owl in Russia.

Fish Owl Behavior

We are particularly interested in Ryzhii's behavior during his family's hunt for fish. A female born to another pair, the Saiyon family, who we named Rada, is about the same age as Ryzhii. When we photographed Rada in April 2008, she was still blind and helpless. This year, she is a confident, wily, and largely independent youngster. Unlike Ryzhii, Rada seems comfortable hunting alongside her parents or off on her own. We watched her turn down a fish caught by her father because she was so busy hunting for herself. Soon, Rada will disperse to find her own territory and mate. The species conservation plan will help ensure she finds both.

For more information on WCS-Russia, go to www.wcs.org/saving-wild-places/asia, and for more on the fish owls and to download the birds' calls, go to www.fishowls.com.



Spotlight on Jim Breheny

How many people can say they are working at something they always wanted to do? Bronx Zoo Director Jim Breheny can, and does. He's been interested in animals since he was a boy. And even with his 24-7 job as Bronx Zoo Director, Jim finds time to fly to South Africa to inspect Nile crocodiles or take the reins of Clydesdale horses during special zoo events. Jim and his wife, Kathleen LaMattina, live in the Bronx with their three dogs, a Muscovy duck, fish, and a host of tropical plants.

Members' News: Is this your dream job? When you were young, did you want to be a zoo director?

Jim Breheny: I always wanted to be around animals, though I don't think I can say that as a kid I dreamed of being a zoo director. A zookeeper or curator, perhaps.

MN: You started out quite young at the Bronx Zoo; when was that?



JB: I grew up in the Bronx, not far from the zoo, and my first job was working with the camels at the age of 14. I worked part-time on weekends and during summers in high school and college. After college, I was hired as a supervisor in the *Children's Zoo*. I continued on to graduate school and entered the WCS program for curatorial interns—what we now call scientific fellows.

MN: What is the most satisfying part of your job?

JB: Being surrounded by animals in the greatest zoo in the world and working with people who share the same passion to care for wildlife. I particularly enjoy watching the human-animal connection around the park, whether it is with our keepers or our guests. It is very satisfying to know that you have a direct role in making this connection, helping people develop empathy for nature. Because of this, they'll want to help us save wild animals and wild places.

We have a collection of animals in our Education programs that we use to create unique opportunities for people to get up close and personal with wild cats, birds, and other small animals. In a similar vein, we've created a giraffe feeding station at the *Carter Giraffe Building* to bring lucky guests to eye level with these amazing creatures. It's a very rewarding part of the job.

There are other things, too. I pride myself as being able to

come out from behind my desk and work with animals from time to time. When we were developing *Madagascar!*, one of the primary displays was a pool housing a pair of huge Nile crocodiles. Bill Holmstrom, Herpetology Collections Manager at the time, and I traveled to a crocodile farm in Durban, South Africa to choose the two crocs that are now in that exhibit. The fellow who owned the farm—he could have been a stunt double for

Crocodile Dundee!—had had this magnificent pair of animals in an enclosure outside his dining room window for 26 years.

When we saw the crocodiles, I said to Bill that I didn't think the male was quite 13 feet. The guy invited us to go in and measure the animals. With a pole lined up at the male's snout, Bill and I warily stretched a string down the length of the animal's spine and saw that he was 13.5 feet long. Satisfied by our demonstrated ability around the animals, their owner accepted us as "mates," and he was happy to see the crocs come to the Bronx Zoo.

MN: What's on the horizon for the Bronx Zoo?

JB: We have a Master Plan with five-, seven-, and ten-year goals. It includes a new complex for our Education animals, bringing Indian rhinos back to *Zoo Center*, creating a climate change exhibit featuring amphibians and corals, and a safari adventure for kids in the southeast corner of the park. After we create the safari, we will be able to rework the current *Children's Zoo* into perhaps a year-round, 60- to 90-minute experience for kids with a Latin American theme. I'd like to see a spectacular exhibit for bats, which are such incredibly marvelous and misunderstood creatures. Whatever we do, you can be assured that our animals and dynamic, cutting-edge exhibits will continue to delight and educate visitors about the conservation work WCS is doing at home and abroad.

calendar of events

BRONX ZOO

General Information: 718-367-1010
www.bronxzoo.com



BIRDS OF PREY FLYING SHOW September 12-13, 19-20, and 26-27

Bring the family for a fascinating experience with eagles, hawks, falcons, and vultures. Watch these raptors of the wild soar and dive overhead and visit with them up close after the show.

Presented by Pepsi

BOO AT THE ZOO October 10-12, 17-18, 24-25, and October 31-November 1

A great Halloween tradition in family fun, Boo at the Zoo is filled with activities such as magic shows, spooky stories, live music, costume parades, pumpkin-carving demonstrations, hayrides, and keeper chats.

Presented by Pepsi and supported by FedEx

TODDLER TUESDAYS through October

Tour the zoo each Tuesday using our Toddler Time map. Enjoy the Wildlife Theater Players' entertainment at the *Children's Zoo*.

Presented by Fisher-Price®

CITY ZOOS

Central Park Zoo: 212-439-6500
www.centralparkzoo.com

Prospect Park Zoo: 718-399-7339
www.prospectparkzoo.com

Queens Zoo: 718-271-1500
www.queenszoo.com

Please note: Events are subject to change or cancellation.

ALL THREE CITY ZOOS HOST BOO AT THE ZOO October 31 & November 1

At **Central Park Zoo**, it's all treats and no tricks as our polar bears and other animals wolf down their yummy Halloween goodies at this spooktacular event. Visitors aren't only spectators; they get into the spirit with crafts and games. **Prospect Park Zoo**-goers plan to have a frightening good time at this extreme Halloween party! Watch the animals devour their Halloween treats, tour the haunted barn, and make some fun, festive crafts as you experience the thrills and chills of the zoo during this scary season. At the **Queens Zoo**, get ready for spine-tingling surprises as our animals get their delicious Halloween treats. Take part in fun festivities that include face painting and craft making. And visit the extinct species graveyard to learn about the animals of eras gone by.

Presented by Pepsi and supported by FedEx

Sea Lion Experience

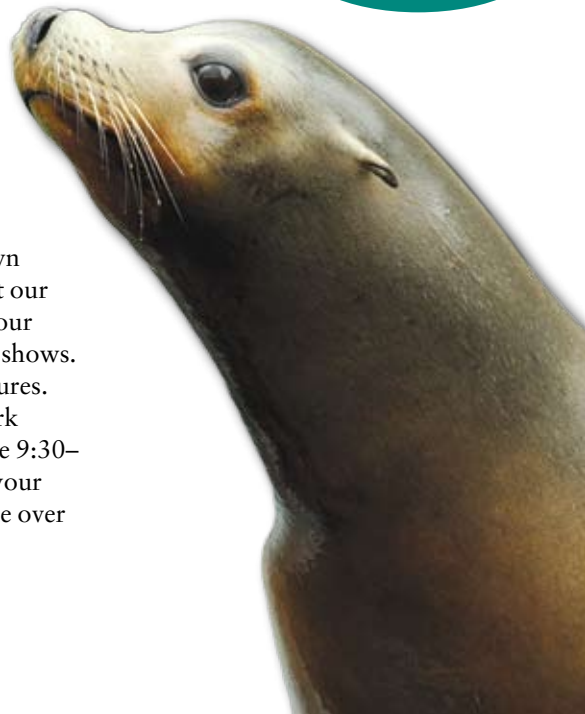
The **New York Aquarium** has launched a new wet and wild adventure. The new Sea Lion Experience begins with a 20-minute introduction into the natural history and behavior of sea lions and the threats they face in the wild. Aquarium specialists will tell you all about our diverse collection of aquatic animals.

Once you've become a "trainer-for-a-day," you are ready for a complete husbandry session with our professional animal trainers. You'll learn about the nutritional needs of our animals and help as we thaw, cut, and prepare the fish for our sea lions' daily feed.

Our keepers will share their professional training techniques, called operant conditioning, and you'll come away with skills you can use at home with your own animals—or maybe even with someone you know! Hear fascinating stories about our beloved sea lions from the people who know them best. Next—the highlight of your adventure—is a 20-minute visit with one of the stars of our Sea Lion Celebration shows. Under the guidance of a training partner, you will work with these amazing creatures.

Photographs and videos of your unique experience, as well as official New York Aquarium mementos of the day, will be available. Sea Lion Experiences take place 9:30–11:00 a.m. daily. Only one session is offered per day, and space is limited. Make your reservation today. The cost is \$200 per person, and the program is open to anyone over the age of 7. Please visit www.nyaquarium.com for more details.

NEW!



EXCLUSIVE INVITATION

for Conservation Supporter/Fellow/Partner Members

On the 400th anniversary of New York City's discovery, WCS looks back—and into the future—of Manhattan's natural heritage. Henry Hudson sailed into New York Harbor on September 12, 1609 and found a long island of wooded hills locally called "Mannahatta." Four hundred years later, to the day, hear WCS ecologist Dr. Eric W. Sanderson describe that place full of wildlife—the kind of landscape WCS seeks to conserve here and around the world. Dr. Sanderson, who wrote the award-winning *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City* (Abrams, 2009), is the guest curator of "Mannahatta/Manhattan" at the Museum of the City of New York, through October 12, 2009.

MANNAHATTA LECTURE WITH ERIC W. SANDERSON
SATURDAY, SEPT. 12, 2009 AT 11:00 A.M.
CENTRAL PARK ZOO, ZOO GALLERY

This event is free for Conservation Supporter/Partner/Fellow Members, but seating is limited and pre-registration is required. Please call Emily Sahl at 718-741-1825 or email esahl@wcs.org to reserve your seat. Maximum 2 tickets per person.



ADVENTURES IN EDUCATION at the Bronx Zoo

Bring your family to the Bronx Zoo for some WILD fun with these programs offered by the Education Division.

Daddy and Me – October 3, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Dads, bring your 4- to 7-year-olds and learn about wild fathers who carry their young on their backs or keep their eggs warm until they hatch.

Tales about Tails – October 3, 2:00-3:00 p.m.

You and your 3- to 4-year-old toddler will discover the amazing ways animals use their tails—for balance, warmth, communication, and more.

Zoo School Musical – October 4, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Calling all 8- to 12-year-olds for a wild cast audition.

Fuzzy, Furry Friends – October 4, 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Introduce your 3- to 4-year-old to the ABCs of mammals.

Wild Wheels Animal Safari – October 11, 10:30-11:30 a.m.

An amphibian and reptile adventure for 2- to 3-year-olds.

Sign up today; spaces are limited.

And don't forget, WCS Members receive a discount! Please visit www.bronxzoo.com and follow the links to Programs and Tours.

From the Zoo Archives

ANTELOPE (GIRAFFE) HOUSE

In the *Popular Official Guide to the New York Zoological Park*, published in the early 1900s, then-Bronx Zoo Director and General Curator William T. Hornaday wrote that, “The Antelope House occupies a commanding situation of a high, tree-covered knoll at the south end of the Zoological Park. The situation seems as if specially formed by Nature to be occupied by this building, and its outside enclosures. . . [It] has been designed to meet the wants of giraffes and large African antelopes of all kinds . . .”

The world’s tallest animals—the giraffes—are still the highlight of the exhibit, inside and out.

For 73 years, the zoo’s Antelope House was home to a variety of African hoofed mammals—from springbok and gemsbok, to eland and waterbuck, to okapi and various subspecies of giraffe. Zebras and giraffes bred in the Antelope House, but during the 1970s, zoo officials decided that these animals should have a more modern facility and habitat in which they could roam as a vital part of the *African Plains* exhibit. In 1977, Mr. and Mrs. James Walter Carter, who were ardent supporters of African wildlife and WCS, offered to donate funds to redesign and support the Antelope House and surrounding outdoor yards. The new *Carter Giraffe Building* opened in June 1982. Spanning about five acres, the complex initially housed Baringo giraffes, Grevy’s zebras, cheetahs, and South African ostriches.

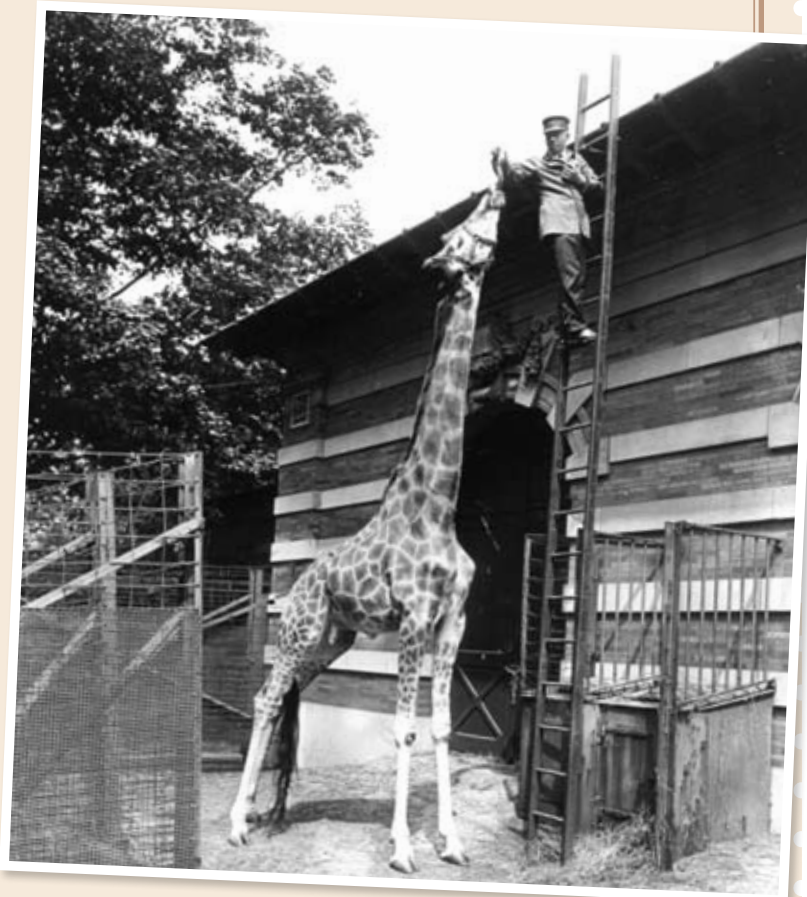
Inside the building today, murals still feature naturalistic backdrops of East African savanna landscapes. The world’s tallest animals—the giraffes—are still the highlight of the exhibit, indoors and out. Since 1982, ten male and six female giraffes have been born. The giraffes still share their outdoor yard with the ostriches.

Right: Taken in 1926 at the former Bronx Zoo Antelope House, this photo demonstrates how zookeepers at the time measured a giraffe’s height. The rungs on the ladder were roughly a foot apart.

Nearby, a pack of African wild dogs engage in elaborate “greeting ceremonies” with leaping, face licking, tail wagging, and squealing. As you walk past the wild dogs toward the building entrance, you’ll see the newest addition to the zoo—a couple of spotted hyenas. Hyenas are famous for scavenging prey that other animals have killed, but they are also skillful hunters. Though they look similar to dogs, hyenas are more closely related to cats.

Inside the building, a habitat of termite mounds and scrubland provides den sites and lookout posts for the zoo’s colony of curious, ever-vigilant dwarf mongooses. Opposite the mongooses is the new nocturnal exhibit for Dora and Arthur, our two-year-old aardvarks, and a pair of white-faced scops owls.

Thanks to the generosity of the Carters and a whole host of supporters during our 114 years, WCS continues to contribute to the survival of these fascinating animals and the many other wild species and places that are threatened by human activities.





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what's inside

- 1 Things That Go Bump in the Night, WCS's Top Ten Nocturnal Animals
- 2 Notes from the Field: Ghost Owl
- 3 Kids' Corner Quiz: Owl Prowl
- 4 Science on Site and Off: Spotlight on Jim Breheny, Bronx Zoo Director
- 5 Calendar of Events
- 6 Adventures in Education, Special Events and Programs
- 7 From the Zoo Archives



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