

# Conversations

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A **Connect** Webinar Series

## AZA Animal Care and Wellbeing Grants Fund

- Call for applications open through June 30<sup>th</sup>
- <https://www.aza.org/animal-care-and-wellbeing-grants-fund>
- Upcoming webinar on AZA Learn
  - April 22<sup>nd</sup>



# Support AZA Animal Wellbeing!

Since 2022, generous support from Disney and AZA members has raised over \$690,000 for the **AZA Animal Care and Wellbeing Grants Fund**.

\$400,000 plus in grants have been awarded to AZA institutions.

## These grants support:

- Welfare research
- Innovative animal monitoring and welfare technologies
- Evidence-based welfare assessment techniques
- Studies in animal care, health, and management
- Science-based learning opportunities and materials

**Support critical research.**

**Donate to the AZA Animal Care and Wellbeing Grants Fund!**

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# Communicating Wellbeing

## An interdepartmental initiative

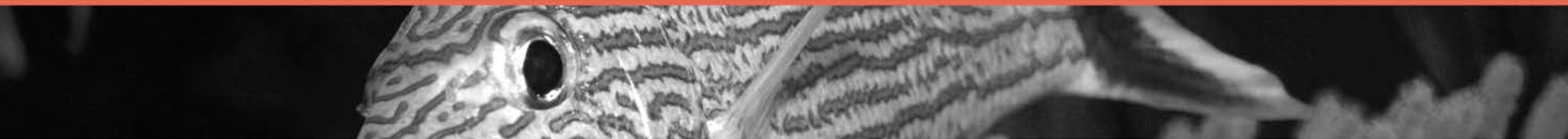
## Animal Welfare Committee

Join our free monthly Welfare webinars on AZA Learn on the second Wednesday of the Month, 11am CT

<https://www.pathlms.com/aza-learn/courses/56110/sections/119622>

Join the AWC office hours on the second Thursday of the month, 12pm CT

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82093090810?pwd=BVWrYSn29R8yCc5oal0sSSyz1DeR8o.1> Meeting ID: 820 9309 0810, Passcode: 855950



Grace Fuller



**Grace Fuller, PhD**

Senior Director of Animal  
Welfare and Research  
Detroit Zoo

Stephanie  
Norton



**Stephanie Norton**

Animal Behavior and  
Well-Being Program  
Leader  
Reid Park Zoo

Mike  
Maslanka



**Mike Maslanka**

Senior Nutritionist and  
Head of the Department of  
Nutrition Science  
Smithsonian's National Zoo  
and Conservation Biology  
Institute

Karin Gallo



**Karin Gallo**

Director, Public Relations  
and Social Media  
OdySea Aquarium



# Growing a Culture of Animal Wellbeing Within Your Community

Stephanie Norton

Animal Behavior and Well-being Program Leader

Reid Park Zoo



# Communicating wellbeing and generating buy-in

- Building relationships isn't always easy, but is essential
- Trust accounts, they aren't just for animal training!
- Wellbeing incorporation into core values and performance evaluations



**REID PARK ZOO Core Values**

**ANIMAL WELL-BEING**

- Animal well-being has the **highest priority** in everything we do.
- We believe that animals are the best ambassadors for their species when they are **happy, healthy and comfortable**.
- We believe that **everyone has a part in animal well-being** and value any concerns brought forward, responding swiftly, thoughtfully, and compassionately.

**CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY**

- Conservation and sustainability are the **guiding compass** of our work and actions.
- We **lead by example**, educating and inspiring others to be conservation ambassadors.
- We prioritize our conservation efforts within the Zoo, in the region and around the world to **help build a better future** for wildlife and our planet, communicating and celebrating successes.

**KINDNESS**

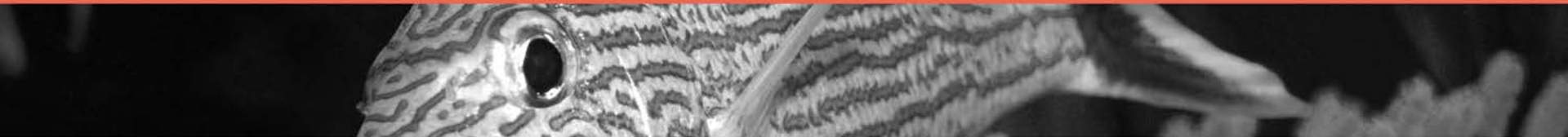
- We are welcoming and friendly, **creating an environment where everyone feels welcome**.
- We appreciate diversity, are **dedicated to inclusion** and treat everyone with empathy and respect.
- We take the time to **think before we react**.
- We **view people as people**, not as things or obstacles.

**INTEGRITY**

- We are **ethical, transparent, straightforward, and accurate**.
- We represent the Zoo publicly in a manner that is both **affirmative and true**.
- We **acknowledge our mistakes** and fix them.
- We have the courage to **uphold our values**.

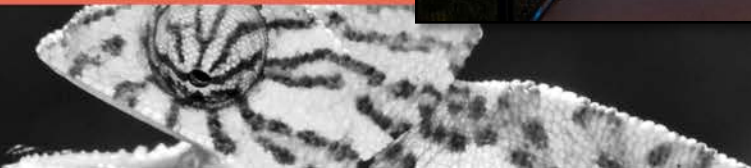
**DEPENDABILITY**

- We step in and **help when needed**.
- We are **present, timely, accountable, and ready** to make things happen.
- We are **resourceful** in solving problems and meeting people's diverse



## Internal partners

- Upper management
- Special events
- Facilities
- Guest services
- Administrative
- Education



# External partners

- Construction groups
- Vendors
- Contractors
- Governmental representatives
- Police/fire
- Donors

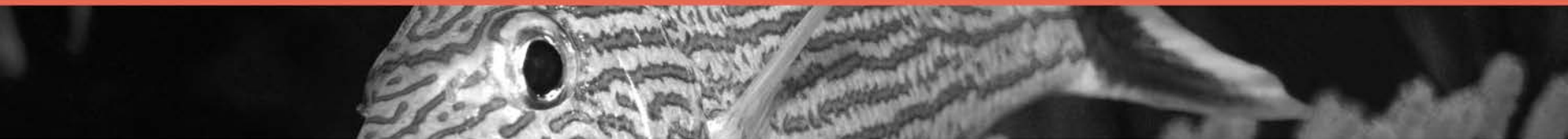


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Stephanie Norton  
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# Beyond “Beyond the Bowl” – Food for Thought

Mike Maslanka

Senior Nutritionist and Head, Department of Nutrition Science  
Smithsonian’s National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute  
Chair, AZA Nutrition Advisory Group



# Beyond the Bowl Workshop – AZA Tampa 2025

Cross-discipline effort to promote a holistic approach that emphasizes the integral role that nutrition and feeding plays in animal well-being.

## Presentations:

- Marcus Clauss “Integrative Approach to Diet and Well-Being”
- Sessions:
  - Creating animal diets
  - Diet presentation
  - Proximate assessment
  - Ultimate assessment

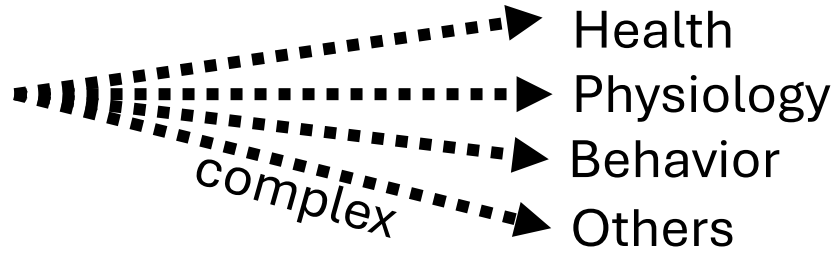


## Group discussion:

- How do zoos keep nutrition and diet as an (pro)ACTIVE component of animal well-being every day?
- What are some priorities/future focuses to improve nutrition/feeding management for animal well-being?
- What can AZA do to promote improved nutrition/feeding management for collections?
- What key principles of nutrition and feeding present the greatest challenges, and how can different areas of expertise work together to resolve, compromise, communicate, and find solutions?



# Feeding and Nutrition

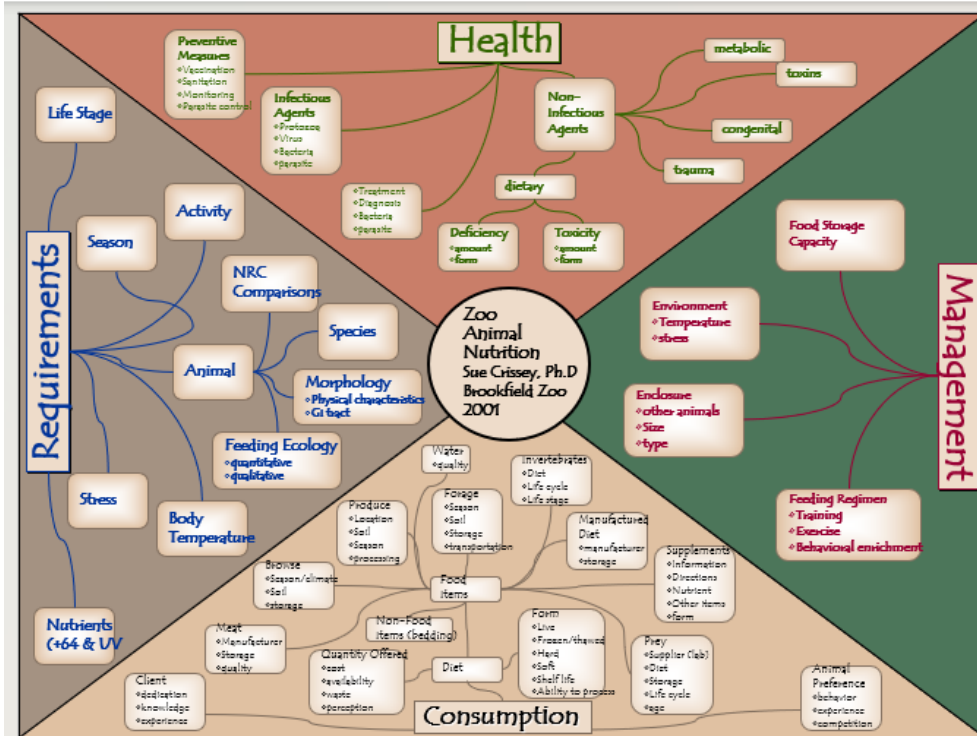


- Nutritionist / Nutrition professionals
- Animal Care staff
- Veterinarians
- Research staff
- Behaviorists
- Ecologists
- Trainers
- Horticulture
- Operations staff
- OPA / Public Affairs
- Development / Advancement
- Guest Services / Interpreters

- Natural history
- Foraging strategy
- GI tract morphology
- Model species
- Spp specific needs
- Management needs
- Individual animal needs



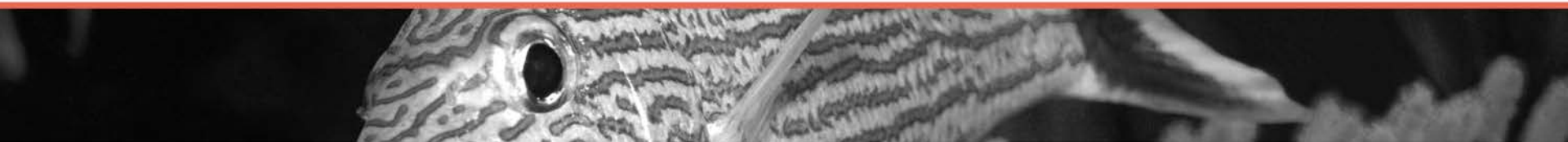
# Before “Beyond the Bowl”



Crissey, 2001

Zoo Animal Nutrition Matrix

Integrating nutrition into appropriate animal care and well-being



# Before “Beyond the Bowl”

AZA Annual 2024 Calgary

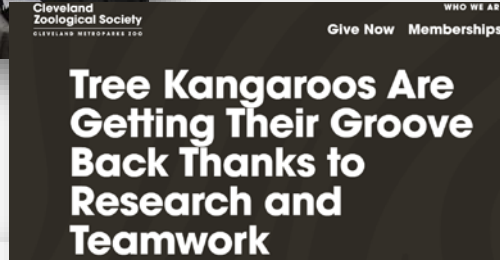
“Sustainable Nutrition and Welfare”

Nutritionists, animal managers, researchers collaborating to share stories of collaborative resource and animal management.

- Hydroponics for zoo food
- Willow as year-round browse
- Lichen sourcing for caribou feeding
- Temperate weather browse options
- Diet and nutrition improving animal population sustainability.



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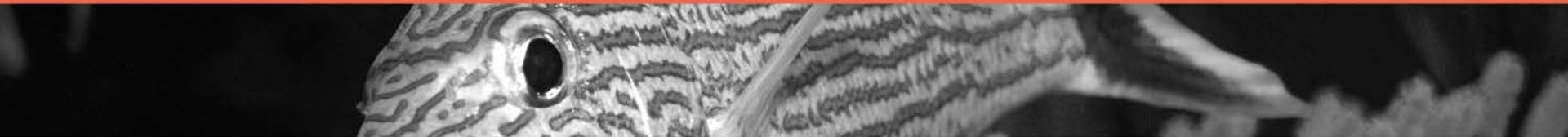
< [ZOOLOGICAL SCIENCE](#)

Variation in zoo diets, offerings of leafy browse, and body condition scores in Matschie's tree kangaroos (*Dendrolagus matschiei*) and their associations with gut microbiome composition

[Research Article](#) [Microbiology](#) [Zoology](#)

[Diana C. Koester](#)<sup>1,2</sup>, [Maura R. Plocek](#)<sup>1,2</sup>, [Ellen S. Dierenfeld](#)<sup>3</sup>, [Katherine R. Amato](#)<sup>4</sup>,  
[Noah T. Dunham](#)<sup>1,2</sup>

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# *How We Strategically Communicate Animal Wellbeing to Media — and why it works!*

**Karin Gallo**

**Director of Public Relations and Social Media**



AZA | Learn



# WHAT WE'RE REALLY COMMUNICATING: Turning Animal Wellbeing into TRUST

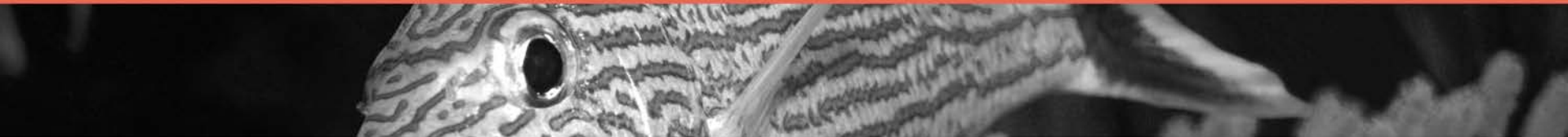
## TRUST: SHOW, DON'T TELL

- Wellbeing must be made visible to be understood
- Media coverage depends on what can be shown
- Show the care, don't just describe it
- Transparency builds public trust



## PEEL BACK THE CURTAIN:

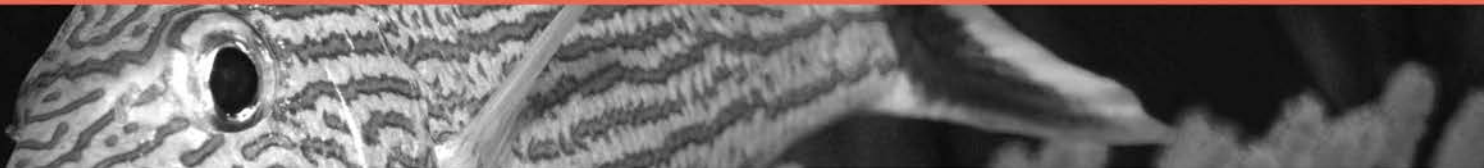
- Rehab tools (devices, treatments)
- Enrichment
- Training sessions
- Behind the scenes



# CONNECTING THROUGH EMOTION (without losing science!)

**People connect through emotion — but we must stay grounded in expertise.**

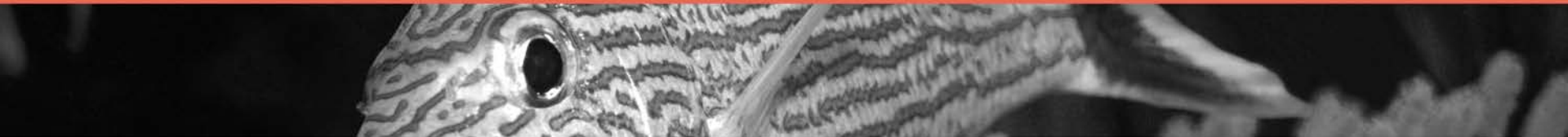
- Emotion creates connection
- Relatable ≠ anthropomorphic
- Translate what your teams are doing into something people can recognize — like care, consistency, attention, and progress — without assigning human emotions.
- Lean into the *impact* of expert care in a way that people can relate to and understand.



# BEYOND “HERO ANIMALS”

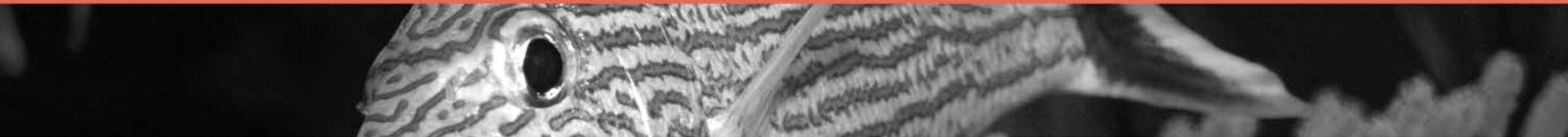


- "Hero animals" open the door
- Wellbeing happens across all colonies, herds, schools, packs & prides (etc.) in our care
- Every interaction is a storytelling opportunity
- Our goal is to shift the narrative from exception to expectation — showing that this level of care *isn't rare, it's routine*



## MAKING IT CONSISTENT (TRAINING + MEDIA STRATEGY)

- Train teams to speak to wellbeing
- Weave messaging into every media moment
- Consistency builds credibility & TRUST
- *Keep in mind: Trust is built over time*
  - Every interaction counts.
  - Say it. Show it. Repeat it.



## AZA Professional Development Opportunities

- Upcoming webinars on AZA Learn
  - Sniffing out Solutions – 4.15, 1pm ET
  - Beyond the Drill – 4.16, 1:30pm ET
  - Bear TAG: Andean Bears – 4.21 3pm ET
- Fall 2026 course registration open, [www.aza.org/courses](http://www.aza.org/courses)
  - Animal Welfare: Evidence Based Management  
September 8-13, 2026  
Brookfield Zoo Chicago, IL



