



### **Little Zoos Can Too!**

#### **Our Beginning**

Blank Park Zoo's conservation story began in 1997, when a small group of staff and volunteers banded together to form the Blank Park Zoo Conservation Committee.

We picked a few projects that were important to us and raised funds through small fundraisers and special events. We sold animal shaped lollipops, stickers, temporary tattoos and Zoo calendars. We installed wishing wells and painted hundreds (probably thousands) of children's faces. We also sold margaritas at our adult only summer event Zoo Brew. Like many zoos, our conservation work was done mostly on personal time, in the evenings and on the weekends.

After years of hard work, the funds and notoriety really started to build. We were proving ourselves to the community and Zoo management. Then, conservation becomes a line-item on our Zoo's operating budget! We also started carving out "zoo time" for conservation work. But, like many Zoo conservation devotees, I continue to juggle my duties as Conservation Coordinator and Zoo Keeper.



## Picking up Steam

In 2009, we launched our Conservation Speaker Series and currently have three speakers per year talking about in-situ conservation. This event has garnered a dedicated following and has become an important and engaging educational opportunity for our community.

In addition to financially supporting in-situ projects, we've also found another impactful way to support projects by supplying much needed field-work gear and equipment.

Over the past few years, we have donated supplies and uniforms to four Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA) Sanctuaries. This has included the Conservation Ambassadors of the Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservation Trust (CSWCT) in Uganda who have received new uniforms, GPS units, digital cameras, data collection supplies and educational supplies for the surrounding communities.

In 2010, we launched our Coins for Conservation program. Now, I'm happy to report that 25 cents per admission and \$1 per membership sold goes to in-situ conservation.

So, now we've gone from a few hundred dollars for conservation per year, to tens of thousands of dollars!

Conservation commerce at your zoo is another great way for small zoos to support conservation! Many of you have probably seen the beaded necklaces made from recycled paper in parts of Africa. We've purchased bulk beads from CSWCT and now have a necklace-making station in our new African exhibit at the Zoo where families can thread their own jewelry, while learning about conservation and sustainable livelihoods.



## Lessons we've learned

At Blank Park Zoo, our conservation commitment is strengthening and we are all learning important lessons about the value of giving tailored and specialized support to fit the individual needs of a particular project; how targeting your resources properly, *no matter how many resources you have*, can lead to a much greater impact; and about how it takes a holistic view to conservation to be successful over the long-run: taking in consideration the health of the environment, the health and well-being of the local people as well as the health and well-being of the animal populations.

But the most important lesson we have learned over the years is that-- little zoos can too!

Last November, Beth Armstrong of Conservation Initiatives and Anne Warner of Conservation Strategies spent a week with us at Blank Park Zoo, meeting with all of our stakeholders and conducting discussions and workshops to pinpoint our individualized conservation philosophy and make a plan on how we can move forward. This "Conservation Consultation" is helping us move forward by making conservation part of everyone's job at Blank Park Zoo!

## Keep it up!

So, for all the 'small zoos' out there: don't give up! Know that with some hard work, creativity and dedication you CAN make an impact in wildlife conservation. Each zoo has unique and special talents they can offer to the cause. Target your resources where you feel you can make the greatest impact and be proud of your work. And, don't forget that you have a support system in ZACC to help you along the way!

