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Nashville Zoo Awarded AZA Accreditation

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) announced Nashville Zoo's accreditation on March 24 during AZA's mid-year meeting in Oklahoma City. Less than 10 percent of the approximately 2,400 USDA-licensed wildlife exhibitors achieve AZA accreditation. The announcement was made public during a press conference and flag-raising ceremony held at the Zoo on May 6.

"Nashville Zoo has been granted AZA accreditation because of its high standards in every aspect of the organization," said AZA Executive Director Kristin Vehrs who attended the ceremony. "The Zoo is a valuable community asset and important economic engine; something Nashville should feel proud to have in the area."

Nashville Mayor Karl Dean offered a similar reaction to the announcement. "The accreditation received by the AZA is a testament to the quality of our local Zoo," said Mayor Dean. "This is an important accolade received by a national organization. Moreover, we need not overlook how the Zoo supports our community through recreation, animal and cultural education, and doing its part to contribute to the vitality of our local economy."

Nashville Zoo first achieved accreditation in 2004. AZA requires its members to reapply for accreditation every five years to ensure the highest standards of animal care are upheld. During the accreditation process, all aspects of an institution are evaluated, including: animal care; keeper training; animal, staff and visitor safety; educational programs; conservation efforts; veterinary programs; financial stability; risk management; and visitor services.

"Achieving and keeping accreditation is no easy task," said Nashville Zoo President Rick Schwartz. "AZA doesn't accept just average zoos as members. AZA-accredited institutions are the elite, the top 10 percent in the nation, and our staff works very hard year-round to ensure that all aspects of Nashville Zoo meet or exceed AZA's high standards."

As an AZA member, Nashville Zoo collaborates with other accredited institutions on a variety of conservation programs, like the Clouded Leopard Consortium in Thailand and Amphibian Ark, a worldwide effort to save threatened amphibians. For Nashville Zoo members, accreditation means access to over 100 zoos and aquariums participating in the AZA Reciprocal Admissions Program.

Nashville Zoo is a non-profit organization located at 3777 Nolensville Road and is open every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. The mission of the Nashville Zoo is to inspire a culture of understanding and discovery of our natural world through conservation, innovation and leadership. For more information about Nashville Zoo, call 615-833-1534 or visit www.nashvillezoo.org.

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