

giraffes, zebras, antelopes, gazelles and other species “living together as they do in nature,” the leadership said in a public statement. They have also discussed generally larger enclosures for primates and other animals.

“A lot of the reason that two-thirds of the animals that used to be at the Sacramento Zoo aren’t there anymore has to do with decisions on animal wellness,” Jacobs says. “Space is a quality of life issue for some animals.”

‘Give me shelter’

A golden-brown grizzly bear sits waist-deep in a pond, his claws playfully thrashing the water, occasionally grazing his wet nose. His nearly 3-acre pen at the Oakland Zoo sits at the top of a hill overlooking seaside neighborhoods around the East Bay and then out to the Pacific Ocean.

The grizzly, which was saved from being euthanized as a cub after his mother was deemed a problem bear in Alaska, lives in the zoo’s recently opened California Trail—a 56-acre expansion that doubled the size of the zoo and added a secluded oak woodland dedicated entirely to North American species. Most of the animals living on the trail were brought for sanctuary by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. State and federal biologists often struggle to find long-term sanctuaries for orphaned animals that can’t go back in the wild, especially mountain lion and black bear cubs.

The Oakland Zoo has taken in three rescued mountain lion cubs—one from El Dorado County—and a black bear and her triplets. The mother bear had broken into a house in Kern County and then behaved defensively when its owner confronted her. The zoo prevented the sow and her cubs from being euthanized.

Parrot’s team also has a program for detoxing California condors that have secondary lead poisoning and getting them back in the wild.

“If they test positive, the condors are brought to our vet hospital,” Parrot explains. “We provide a drug that brings down the lead to a safe level, then they go back to Pinnacles National Park.”

The Detroit Zoo has also put a public punctuation mark on its rescue work. Kagan says it took in a lion that was guarding a crack house in Detroit, a lion that had been wandering a junkyard in Kansas, a bear held as a mascot and viciously abused, and a polar bear that a fly-by-night circus was dragging through the heated jungles of the Caribbean. Kagan’s team has made it a point to tell each animal’s story.

“Part of the education is to show those cases where people have really failed these animals,” Kagan says.

While the Sacramento Zoo has taken some rescue animals, most were bred in captivity or transferred from other zoos. It hasn’t had space

for large California wildlife needing sanctuary. In the region, that burden has been taken on by the much smaller Folsom Zoo, which continues to be a sanctuary for black bears, mountain lions, bobcats and Pacific Northwest wolves.

If a larger Sacramento Zoo is built, Citizens Lobbying for Animals in Zoos wants it to have dedicated space for North American wildlife.

“The Sacramento Zoo has an opportunity to think bigger than what they’re thinking, and bigger than business as usual,” Barker says. “It should focus on being a refuge for animals rather than a way station.”

Jacobs says that while there are a lot of unknowns until the feasibility study is done in a few months, he and his team have a lot of interest in doing sanctuary work.

“We’d love to have a habitat that focuses on the Sacramento Delta and American River wildlife,” he says. “And we’d love to be in a position to help rescue animals like grizzly bears.”

Jacobs adds that Colombia is currently looking for long-term homes for hippos that were imported by the late drug lord Pablo Escobar and aren’t doing well in its climate.

“Those are conversations we’re interested in having,” he notes.

Darkness in the forest

Indah, a smooth-haired Sumatran orangutan, rocks back and forth on a tree branch, her long arm grabbing a rope against the breeze. She eventually climbs down, waddling toward her rock enclosure inside the Sacramento Zoo.

Stacy Broyles approaches Indah’s enclosure with her 1-year-old niece, Bailey, who’s smiling and jabbering at other critters flashing by. Broyles says it’s important to teach children about wildlife at an early age.

“There’s a lot of people causing harm to animals in the world, and I think this is a good way to teach kids about what’s special when it comes to animals,” she says.

Indah and the two orangutans that live alongside her, Makan and Cheli, are a major attraction. Orangutans have been a draw for years, going back to Urban, a shaggy male who wowed visitors with his size, and Ginger, a spry female, who set the world record for the oldest orangutan in captivity. Urban died in 2009 and Ginger in 2011.

But for as much fascination as orangutans have brought to visitors, the reality is that this gentle, highly intelligent species is facing its twilight. Orangutan numbers in the wild have plummeted over the last century. The World Wildlife Fund has listed Sumatran orangutans as critically endangered, with only between 8,000 and 14,000 left in the rain forests of Southeast Asia.

“Recovering the wild”

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