

# ASSINIBOINE PARK CONSERVANCY **CONSERVATION STRATEGY 2024-2029**



**CONNECT. INSPIRE. CONSERVE.**

  
Assiniboine Park  
Conservancy

  
Assiniboine Park  
MANITOBA, CANADA

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*A conservation scientist holds up a specimen in a jar from a trawling survey conducted in Hudson Bay.*

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Assiniboine Park and fieldwork locations for the Conservation and Research Department are located on Treaty 1 and Treaty 5 territory within the Province of Manitoba, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota Peoples, the national homeland of the Red River Métis, and lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We recognize that land acknowledgements are not enough to rectify the violence, forcible displacement, and treaty violations on Indigenous peoples. However, we hope our acknowledgement will offer respect, create public awareness about the history of this area, promote decolonization of conservation biology, and serve as a call for more reconciliation action in our profession and our community.



*An APC conservation scientist surveys a prairie site in Manitoba.*

# WELCOME

As a proud member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), we stand alongside 237 other accredited facilities worldwide and one of seven in Canada, affirming our commitment to the highest standards of animal care, scientific research, and conservation efforts.

At the heart of our collective mission lies a vision shared by AZA member institutions globally: to foster a world where every individual respects, values, and actively conserves wildlife and their habitats. We firmly believe that the contemporary practices of animal management, husbandry and veterinary care should be grounded in robust scientific principles. This commitment to scientific research, both fundamental and applied, distinguishes modern zoological parks and aquariums, driving innovation and progress in the field of wildlife conservation.

As stewards of biodiversity, AZA-accredited institutions like ours embrace the invaluable opportunity—and responsibility—to conduct and facilitate research in both in situ (natural habitat) and ex-situ (controlled environment) settings. Through our dedicated Conservation and Research Team, we advance scientific knowledge, contribute to the conservation of endangered species, and inspire and educate our visitors and wider conservation communities.

In celebrating our achievements, we recognize the tireless efforts of our Conservation and Research Team, Animal Care Professionals, and Volunteers whose dedication has made a significant impact in safeguarding our natural heritage. From humble beginnings, we have embarked on a transformative journey, guided by our new conservation strategy (2024-2029) and ten-year Zoo Master Plan (2024-2034) going forward. While we take pride in our accomplishments, we acknowledge that our work is far from complete. The challenges of wildlife conservation demands continued innovation, collaboration, and perseverance.

As a modern zoo, we recognize the vital role of public engagement in fostering a deeper understanding of the intricate link between the animals in our care and the



*COO Bruce Keats feeds an endangered red panda.*

broader conservation imperative. Through immersive experiences, educational programs, and community outreach initiatives, we strive to empower individuals to become active participants in wildlife conservation.

Looking ahead, we remain steadfast in our commitment to excellence, driven by the belief that together, we can create a future where wildlife thrives and wild places endure for generations to come. Join us on this extraordinary journey as we continue to make a difference—one paw print, one scientific breakthrough and one conservation success story at a time.

With regards,  
*Bruce Keats, Chief Operating Officer  
Assiniboine Park Conservancy*

# SUCCESSES SO FAR

## CONSERVATION SCIENCE:

MORE THAN

**30**

scientific publications and technical reports based on our conservation science

OVER

**\$1.4M**

received in grant funding for research and conservation

**600M**

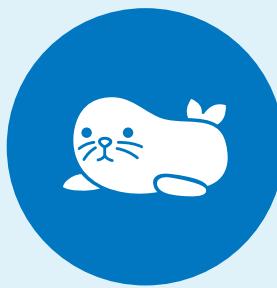
base pair genome sequenced and aligned from 46 Poweshiek skipperlings

**475**

invertebrate specimens DNA-barcoded during collaboration with Hudson Bay ecosystem trawl surveys



Genetically-sexed  
**93** burrowing owls



Equipped **12** wild harbour seals with satellite telemetry devices to understand movement and river use in northern Manitoba and Western Hudson Bay



**25,000+** participants in the Beluga Bits project that monitors Western Hudson Bay beluga whales



Identified source populations of **9** wild cougars

## SCIENCE COMMUNICATION EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT:

HIRED AND TRAINED

**23**

conservation assistants, eight conservation interns, nine conservation technicians, and supported dozens of student research projects



Awarded the Eleanore Oakes Award for Education Program Design from Canada's Accredited Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA) for our Beluga Bits in the Classroom program

OVER

**500**

presentations of our conservation and research, reaching an estimated audience of more than 55,000 people

# SUCCESSES SO FAR

## CONSERVATION ACTION:

**OVER  
500**

Critically Endangered Poweshiek skipperling butterflies released to the wild



Steering Committee member of AZA's Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) North American Bison

**6 YRS**

threatened chimney swifts have nested in the experimental chimney behind the McFeetors' Heavy Horse Centre (the first recorded use of an artificial chimney by swifts in Manitoba)



Serve as members of nine provincial, national and international conservation committees

**OVER  
50K**

donated to external wildlife charities including Snow Leopard Trust and Red Panda Network



Installed bird-window collision mitigation on many windows and established a comprehensive system to identify windows in need of mitigation

**6 YRS**

of successfully fledged new generations of tree swallows from our artificial nest boxes



Program partners in five AZA SAFE programs: North American Songbirds, North American Monarch, North American Bison, Red Panda, and Snow Leopard

*The Zoo is home to several endangered and vulnerable species like snow leopards.*

# CONSERVATION STRATEGY: 2024-2029

In 2011, the leadership of the Assiniboine Park Conservancy (APC) recognized that modern zoos must be leaders in wildlife conservation and brought Assiniboine Park Zoo into a new era with the formation of the Conservation and Research department. Since then, the department has grown, and along with it the incredible conservation impacts from their efforts.

Wildlife and humanity are facing increasing environmental challenges from climate change, biodiversity loss, and habitat loss. We have an opportunity to not only advance conservation science and help species on the brink of extinction with our in-house expertise, but to also engage with the millions of visitors and followers of the Park and Zoo and encourage them to make changes that save species.

To guide our work and address our generation's most pressing conservation issues, we developed an initial conservation strategy in 2019. This first strategy focused on several key projects and the development of APC as a conservation leader in the province. As the time came to refresh the strategy in 2023, we looked for a new vision for APC conservation that supported our ongoing projects and supported the expansion of our work to other pressing conservation issues.

This refreshed conservation strategy introduces four conservation themes that will excite our community and inspire them to join our efforts. The themes are aligned with national and global strategies such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Sustainable Development Goals, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Working at the local level with actions that contribute to larger goals will ensure that the impact we have leaves a better world for generations to come.

The Assiniboine Park Conservancy Conservation Strategy has four strategic areas (themes) that encompass ongoing conservation projects and focus our efforts and expertise on emerging conservation priorities.



Understanding  
the Changing  
Arctic



Preventing  
Species  
Extinction



Protecting  
Urban  
Biodiversity



Cultivating  
Conservation  
Connections



# UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGING ARCTIC

Climate change is affecting the Arctic at a rate two to three times that of the rest of the globe, with new challenges arising each year. We will build on our strong record of Arctic and subarctic conservation science over the past 10 years and continue to advance our understanding of Arctic animals, ecosystems, and changing climate. We work with the Arctic species in our care to assist the conservation of their wild counterparts and to create connections between these incredible animals, our visitors, and the actions they can take.

## SIGNATURE PROJECT POLAR BEARS

Polar bears are an iconic species important to Manitobans and people around the world. Due in large part to the long history of research on polar bears in Manitoba, they have become the symbol of climate change impacts on wild species.

- Polar bears in our care participate in research projects that work to help us better understand their wild counterparts, facilitate conservation, and improve existing research approaches.
- We lead research on polar bear denning in Canada, and identify the risks that these important places face with the changing climate.
- We provide a home for orphaned or at-risk polar bears from Manitoba that would otherwise perish in the wild. These bears contribute to the education of visitors and participate in science that helps bears in the wild.

*Photo: Polar bear walking on ice near Churchill, Manitoba.*

## GOALS MOVING US FORWARD:

- Collect data that contributes to species' assessments and recovery as well as to support the creation and monitoring of northern protected areas.
- Monitor the changing ecosystems along Manitoba's Arctic coast.
- Create open data and resources that agencies, jurisdictions, and communities can use to make decisions that benefit wildlife and habitats.
- Participate in conservation committees and citizen science projects.
- Support and facilitate external collaborators in achieving their conservation goals that align with our values.





# PREVENTING SPECIES EXTINCTION

Rapid environmental change has caused undue stress on the natural world and the species that depend upon it. We will prevent species from reaching extinction by leading zoo breeding and release programs for Manitoba's threatened wildlife, expanding on our strong record with Endangered Manitoban butterflies. We will also reduce the risk of species extinction outside our provincial borders by supporting partners around the globe in their work to save species on the brink.

## GOALS MOVING US FORWARD:

- Collect data to support species status assessments and recovery.
- Create open data and resources that agencies, jurisdictions, communities can use to make decisions that benefit wildlife and habitats.
- Support selected international conservation programs for endangered species that we hold in our care at Assiniboine Park Zoo.
- Lead or participate in ex-situ breeding and release programs for endangered Manitoban wildlife.
- Participate in and, when possible, lead AZA SAFE programs to maximize our conservation impacts through collaboration.

## SIGNATURE PROJECT POWESHIEK SKIPPERLING

Poweshiek skipperling are a small prairie butterfly that are one of the most Endangered species in the world. The last place you can find them in Canada is the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve in southern Manitoba. They are emblems of this incredibly rare habitat and part of Manitoba's natural heritage. Since 2017, we have reared them at the Zoo for release into the wild with the goal of preventing extinction.

- We accomplished world firsts in Zoo-reared Poweshiek skipperling releases, breeding in human care, and reintroductions to formerly occupied sites.
- Cutting-edge genomics research is informing this project, as we built a reference genome for Poweshiek skipperling and are co-leading international genomics science to inform the next steps in saving this Critically Endangered species from extinction.

*Photo: A Poweshiek skipperling butterfly feeds from the nectar of a yellow flower.*





# PROTECTING URBAN BIODIVERSITY

We are stewards of an incredible urban greenspace that serves as a refuge to plants, animals, and other wildlife. We will learn about the amazing biodiversity in Assiniboine Park and the Assiniboine River and work to protect it. We will create a framework to assess new Park projects on their impacts on biodiversity and roll out new initiatives to make the Park and Zoo more friendly to our local wildlife.

## GOALS MOVING US FORWARD:

- Participate in local conservation committees and community science projects.
- Improve habitat for wildlife in Assiniboine Park.
- Continue as local leaders in bird-window collision prevention.
- Understand, monitor, and protect the rich biodiversity of Assiniboine Park.

## SIGNATURE PROJECT REDUCING BIRD-WINDOW COLLISIONS

Collisions with glass kill an estimated one billion birds in North America every year and are a leading cause of bird declines. We have become local leaders in monitoring, preventing, and educating the public on this widespread conservation issue. Through extensive monitoring, we have identified the highest risk windows across Assiniboine Park.

- We have reduced collisions on high-risk windows by up to 84%.
- Permanent window mitigation measures have been installed on 12 buildings since 2018, saving hundreds of birds from fatal collisions.

*Photo: A man stands on a ladder to install bird-window mitigation dots on the outside of polar bear habitat while a polar bear watches from inside the habitat.*





# CULTIVATING CONSERVATION CONNECTIONS

People are a crucial part of conservation successes, and we can help foster a community that cares for wildlife and habitats. We will focus on developing projects that facilitate the incorporation and amplification of Indigenous Knowledge into all our conservation activities and that help us support Indigenous communities and organizations in their conservation goals. We will also continue to support the training of the next generation of conservation scientists through employment or academic research with APC. This includes support for conservation assistants, interns, technicians, and students.

*Connect. Inspire. Conserve.* has become our mantra and our many departments that interact with visitors and clients daily look for opportunities to put this into action.

## **GOALS MOVING US FORWARD:**

- Create opportunities to build capacity in Indigenous communities in Manitoba.
- Participate in conservation committees and citizen science projects.
- Assist other organizations in their conservation goals by facilitating conservation planning.
- Train and mentor the next generation of conservation scientists.



*South gate Zoo exit with bird-window collision mitigation to reduce bird-window collisions, with white text that reads "Connect. Inspire. Conserve."*

**Connect. Inspire. Conserve.**

Exit / Sortie

# CONSERVATION FUNDING AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FUND

From its inception, the Assiniboine Park Conservancy has invested in wildlife conservation. The Leatherdale International Polar Bear Conservation Centre is the epicentre for those efforts and is home to four full-time conservation scientists and a team of six to eight-term and seasonal staff. The core budget and stable funding has allowed the team to attract over a million dollars in research and conservation grant funding, while individual donors and companies have supported the Wildlife Conservation Fund with over \$100,000 in donations.



*A conservation scientist photographs a Poweshiek skipperling larva to monitor its growth rate.*

# JOIN US

You also can join us in supporting the Wildlife Conservation Fund and Assiniboine Park Conservancy in several important ways.

- Get inspired by spending time in nature at Assiniboine Park and Zoo.
- Lend your time and skills as a community scientist to help monitor or protect wildlife and green spaces.
- Use your power – purchasing or voting – to send a signal to companies and elected officials that the environment is important to the wellbeing of all Canadians.
- Support organizations like Assiniboine Park Zoo that are committed to wildlife conservation and habitat protection.

**To donate phone: 204 927 8080 or email: [donations@assiniboinepark.ca](mailto:donations@assiniboinepark.ca)**

## CONTACT

Interested in learning more about our conservation efforts or partnering with our research team?

Contact our conservation scientists at **[conservationresearch@assiniboinepark.ca](mailto:conservationresearch@assiniboinepark.ca)** with your project ideas or questions!

**Assiniboine Park Conservancy**  
**55 Pavilion Crescent**  
**Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N6**

APC conservation scientists stand in front of Zoo vehicle, labeled "Zoo Cruiser" holding butterfly nets, pictured before they head out to conduct butterfly surveys.

