BIAZA BROWSE magazine

April 2026

The Bill, Please

Meet Exmoor Zoo's beloved resident

Fresh starts for Southern Zoos

The next steps for Paignton and Newquay

'Zoo & A'

With SEND changemaker Natasha Kyle

PLUS:

Restoring a Scottish river, mantis welfare, What's to come Q2 2026.

BIAZA
BRITISH & IRISH ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS & AQUARIUMS

Welcome!

Welcome back to BIAZA Browse, *the* magazine for British and Irish zoos and aquariums, and those that love them.

Before I get onto the exciting contents of this Spring edition, I wanted to reflect on how far the sector has come. Having joined BIAZA just over five years ago, I've seen the community come together around the coronavirus pandemic, the UK's new zoo standards and the impacts of Brexit. During that period we have also launched BIAZA's Accreditation scheme, which means we have a much better understanding of the goings on across our members, enabling us to support real positive change in the lives of animals.

This springtime Browse is full of hope. Libéma, the new owners of Paignton and Newquay Zoo, set out their exciting plans, we hear from Woburn Safari about their new SEND facilities, and St Andrews Aquarium tells us about their river restoration work. Proving there's so much more to BIAZA zoos and aquariums than meets the eye.

With so much going on, I am feeling hopeful, and, after reading this edition I hope you do too.

Dr Jo Judge
BIAZA CEO

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About the cover: Abou the Shoebill, Exmoor Zoo, Devon, Read more on page 11

The Headlines

DNA world first

In a scientific milestone, researchers from Liverpool John Moores University, Institute Scientifique de Rabat and the Atlas Golden Wolf Project have successfully sequenced the entire genome of the Endangered Barbary macaque. This breakthrough is thanks to a resident of Trentham Monkey Forest in Staffordshire, named Crinkle.

Crinkle's DNA will support studies to allow law enforcement to pinpoint the origin of macaques seized from the illegal wildlife trade.

Crinkle the Barbary Macaque assists groundbreaking research

Top prize for reintroduction project

The reintroduction of thousands of water voles over 20 years by the Wildwood Trust has been awarded top prize in the 2026 BIAZA Great British Wildlife Restoration. This award was granted to the Kent-based charity after receiving the most votes from MPs and Members of the House of Lords. This competition shone a light on twenty-six conservation projects based in the UK for politicians, including glutinous snail preservation and nature reserve management.

Partnerships, beavering away!

Flamingo Land in Yorkshire has taken another significant step in its commitment to native species conservation with the creation of a new dedicated holding facility for Eurasian beavers. The facility will support reintroduction projects across Britain and strengthen ongoing partnerships with organisations such as Forestry England and Beaver Trust.

Eurasian beavers that have passed through Flamingo Land have gone on to play a role in reintroduction projects across the country, with animals now living in locations including London, Cornwall and Scotland. This was expanded in January this year, when a brand new holding facility for beavers was constructed.

Designed to be fully biosecure, this facility provides a safe and controlled environment for health checks and where animals can rest during journeys between release sites.

The Yorkshire Beaver Facility, Flamingo Land, is one of only a few specialised facilities for beavers in the UK (Photo: Elliot McCandless)

Aquarium breeding breakthrough

Scotland's Deep Sea World is celebrating the birth of a Critically Endangered common eagle ray. This serene species of stingray is sadly disappearing from our oceans, due to the impact of unsustainable fishing industries. BIAZA Aquariums serve a common goal of highlighting the serious issues the global fishing industry present.

Longleat Lioness' Pawprints add grip to NASA's Mars Rover

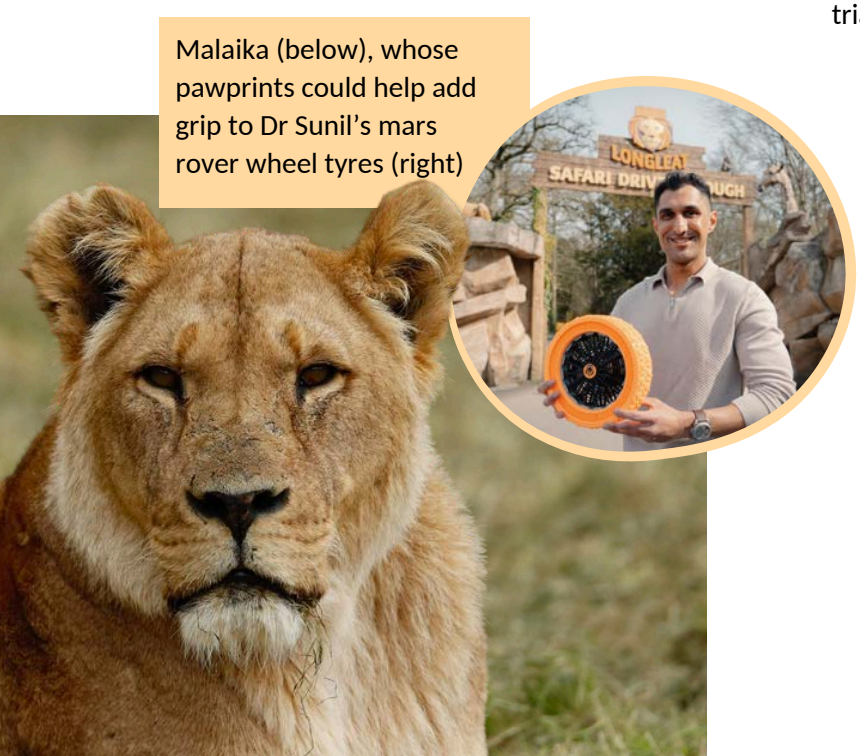
A former queen of the pride at Longleat is being immortalised by University of Warwick inventor Sunil Dhillon who has re-created her paws in tyre form to improve the grip on terrain for Tractors and Mars Rover vehicles.

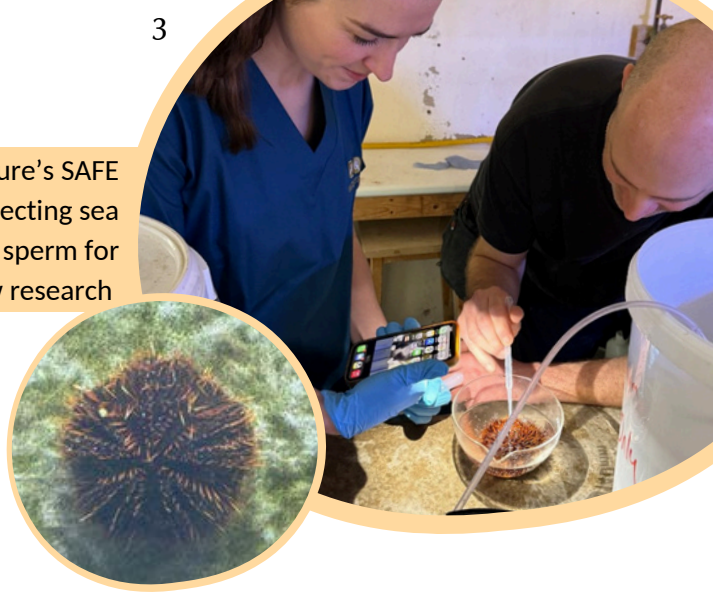
And already he has interest in his creation from NASA to support exploratory missions on Mars following the study at the Wiltshire estate.

Lioness Malaika died last year just weeks before her 20th birthday but not before she and others in her pride were studied by Sunil to replicate the movement of body and limbs to improve the suspension system.

Dr Tom Lewis, Conservation and Research Manager at Longleat, said: "We're excited to see where Sunil's vehicles end up. It would be incredible to see a Malaika in space!"

Malaika (below), whose pawprints could help add grip to Dr Sunil's mars rover wheel tyres (right)





Nature's SAFE collecting sea urchin sperm for new research

Urchin sperm research success

Cryobiologists from Nature's SAFE - a biobank which freezes genetic material - recently visited marine biologists at the University of Southampton to help them preserve sea urchin sperm. By doing so, Nature's SAFE's scientists have accelerated the University's research output.

Sea urchins are used at the university as a model species to study processes such as skeletal development.

Once the urchins have been induced to spawn, their sperm is collected and Nature's SAFE does what they do best and freezes it. After confirming that the samples are viable for fertilisation, and then team transfers them into liquid nitrogen storage to keep them frozen at -196°C for the long-term.

Preserved samples can be used by the university researchers to fertilise freshly spawned eggs with ease. The next step for Nature's SAFE will be to trial urchin egg preservation techniques.

Bristol Zoo Project's African Forest opens

Visitors to Bristol Zoo Project this Easter have been enjoying the much-anticipated African Forest area, featuring the troop of gorillas after they were moved from the Clifton site in a huge operation involving forty specialists and members of staff.

Chief Executive Justin Morris said; "One of the most exciting features of African Forest is the opportunity to witness the unique interactions between species that share the same habitats in the wild. It is their world on your doorstep."

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A new chapter for Paignton and Newquay

Paignton Zoo and Newquay Zoo have become part of Libéma, a Dutch leisure company with a strong track record of revitalising zoological parks.

Both Paignton and Newquay Zoos had previously been owned by Wild Planet Trust, which had faced increasing financial pressures in recent years. Recognising the scale of investment required to secure the zoos' long term future, the Trust made the difficult but responsible decision to sell.

With investment in habitats, infrastructure, and digital systems, the aim of Libéma CEO Dirk Lips is not simply to stabilise the zoos, but to create the conditions for them to thrive.

Early signs of that investment are already visible:

Dutch leisure company Libéma have secured the long-term future of the two zoos

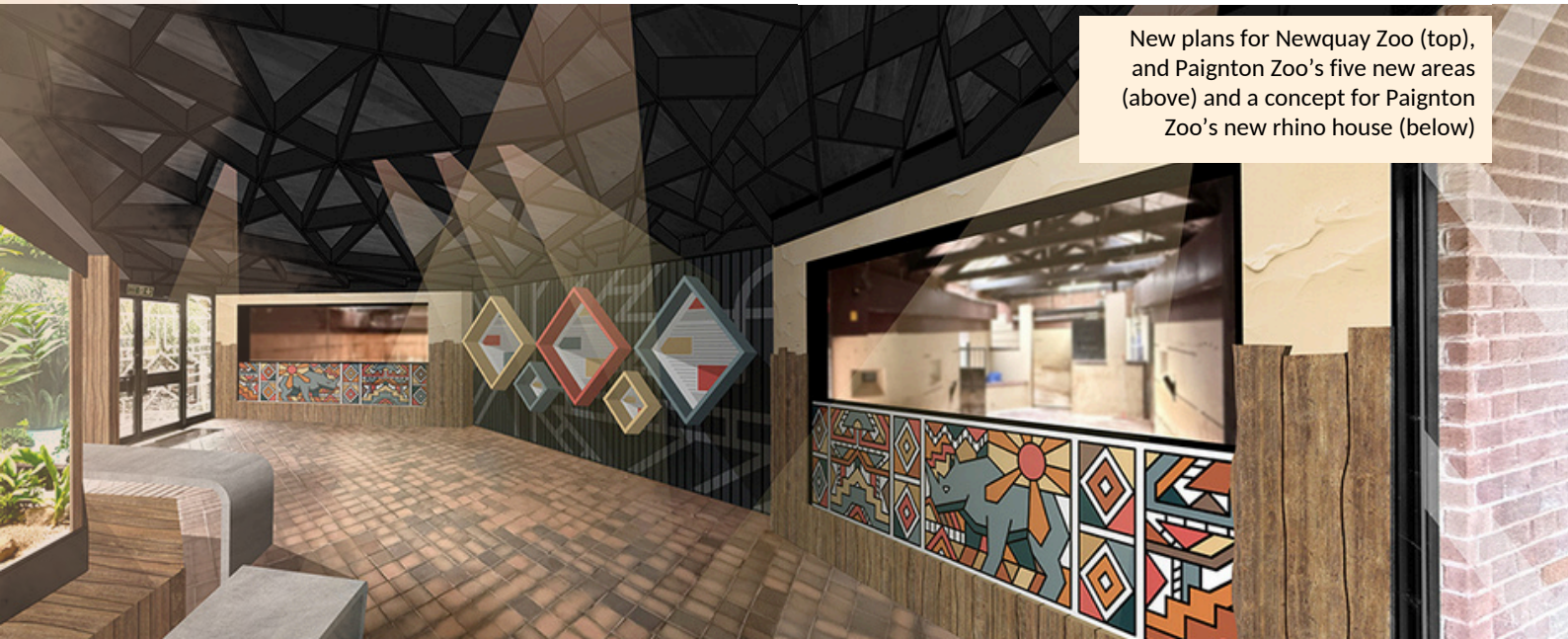
Diana Monkey, Paignton Zoo (credit Farah Adaci)

At Newquay Zoo, development plans are progressing well. A new walkthrough lemur habitat is in planning, while work has begun on the savannah field with the long term ambition of introducing giraffes to the site. If realised, this would mark the first time giraffes have been housed in Cornwall.

Over at Paignton Zoo, the site masterplan has been reimagined around a series of themed zones: Grasslands, Forests, Wetlands, and Islands, all connected through a central plaza. Work has begun in the Grasslands zone, where the existing giraffe paddock is being expanded into a mixed species savannah habitat. Nearby habitats will represent the South American pampa, featuring rheas and vicuñas, and the Central Asian steppe, home to species such as yak and Bactrian camel. The Rhino House is also being upgraded in preparation for welcoming white rhinos, marking another step in the development of the zoo's large herbivore collection.

Alongside these developments, Libéma has reaffirmed its commitment to conservation. Both zoos have long contributed to European breeding programmes, and their EEP portfolios will continue to deliver the greatest possible conservation impact. A new charity, the Libéma Wildlife Foundation, is also being established to support conservation projects both locally and internationally.

While the transition is still in its early stages, the direction and ambition are clear. With renewed investment and a long-term vision, Paignton and Newquay Zoos have a promising future ahead.



New plans for Newquay Zoo (top), and Paignton Zoo's five new areas (above) and a concept for Paignton Zoo's new rhino house (below)

Restoring Eden

How St Andrews Aquarium joined forces with local partners to preserve the River Eden in Fife, a vital artery for local wildlife and agriculture.

Led by volunteers, the River Eden Sustainability Partnership (RESP) is a blueprint for thriving, collaborative conservation.

The 30 mile long River Eden derives its name from the Celtic word ituna, meaning water. It provides vital habitats for species such as salmon, and its estuary forms a local nature reserve.

The RESP partnership found a key ally in St Andrews Aquarium, since aquariums are well-versed in precise water chemistry testing for their own species. The aquarium team lent their professional skills for large-scale water quality testing of the river, vital for measuring pollution. From this came the Citizen Science Water Quality Testing programme.

The project has now been running for six months. Tayanne Corbani (St Andrews Aquarium) and Nicola Allison (University of St Andrews) trained volunteers to measure nutrients in river water, assess data quality, and interpret water quality metrics.

Tayanne noted that "the training is enabling the volunteers to gather comprehensive information on the river's condition which can guide future projects to restore the river catchment and lead to significant and lasting ecological change."

Nicola added; "This citizen science program is producing replicable measurements which highlight seasonal changes in water quality in the catchment and the volunteers are producing a valuable dataset which will inform future restoration of the river. The project demonstrates the power of local volunteers in science and community action."

This monitoring effort is also part of a much wider "source-to-sea" strategy which gathers comprehensive information on the river's condition and feeds directly into future restoration projects.

This network of initiatives is bound by a community-led effort to protect the catchment, engaging locals through "Salmon in the Classroom" school visits, or the annual River Eden Day celebrations.

Michael Farrell RESP Chair said; “RESP aims to achieve a restored river corridor, rich in biodiversity, free from invasive non-native species, resilient to climate change and connected to the community for well-being and economic benefit.”

“Our collaboration with the enthusiastic team at St Andrews Aquarium has really turbo-charged our programme of citizen science, bringing on board new volunteers and providing us with excellent training and a framework of support. This has given us the skills and confidence to carry out regular water quality testing to support our habitat restoration ambitions.”

Recently shortlisted for a BIAZA Great British Wildlife Restoration award, RESP proves that conservation is for anyone with the goodwill and passion to get started. Collaboration and community engagement remain the pillars for protecting our natural world.

RESP is also a collaboration with Sustainable Cupar, the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust, the Eden Angling Association, and the University of St Andrews. More information can be found on the RESP website.

Plans, partnerships, and passion are creating change for the River Eden. (Images courtesy of RESP)

Millets Wildside: 20 inspiring years

James Channon, Owner and Director of Millets Wildside, Oxfordshire, on the driving force behind his organisation:

People often say I have the best job in the world. They're right - I do.

But what many don't see is the hard work behind the scenes. Running any business is demanding, and running a zoo brings its own unique responsibility, pressure and stress. It isn't always fun, and it certainly isn't easy.

Growing up, I never imagined I'd end up where I am today. I consider myself incredibly fortunate to do a job I love, and I've always seen it as a privilege to share my life with some of the world's most extraordinary creatures. Every day brings challenges, but it also brings moments of awe and wonder - the kind that remind me exactly why I do this.

Running Millets Wildside has taught me that a zoo is far more than the sum of its parts. It's a living, breathing ecosystem of people, animals and ideas. What began as a modest home for birds of prey in the grounds of a hotel has grown into a major wildlife and education hub in Oxfordshire. I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved and the direction we're taking it.

For me, the magic of any zoo lies in the way it connects people to nature through meaningful experiences. We don't rely on gimmicks. Instead, we focus on authenticity: letting visitors feel the rush of a vulture's wings overhead during our flying demonstrations, watch an otter's mischievous curiosity up close, or discover the hidden engineering of a bug hotel. These moments spark something real; curiosity, empathy, and a sense of responsibility. That spark is what first ignited my own passion for the natural world.

It guides every decision we make.

Education sits at the core of our mission. Each year, thousands of people walk through our doors, and we take that responsibility seriously. My team and I work hard to design encounter sessions, demonstrations and keeper talks that are genuinely inspiring. We want visitors to leave with smiles on their faces, bright eyes and a deeper understanding of nature. When a child tells me they want to help hedgehogs at home or become a zookeeper one day, I know we're doing something right.

Behind the scenes, my staff and volunteers are the heartbeat of the centre. Their expertise, creativity and dedication shape everything from animal care to public messaging. Together, we've built a culture that values welfare, storytelling and continuous improvement - a culture that allows us to innovate without compromising our values.

Millets Wildside is evolving, but our purpose remains constant: to inspire, to educate and to champion conservation. As we continue to grow, I'm excited to show how a small zoo can have a big impact - not through size, but through creativity, authenticity and the connections we create.

Millets Wildside is home to an impressive collection of birds of prey and many more amazing animals from around the world.

Millets Wildside
Falconry & Wildlife Centre

An eye on Mantis Welfare

Luke Durston (Askham Bryan Wildlife and Conservation Park) on his research to elevate zoo mantis care.

I am often surprised and encouraged by the reactions of students and visitors when they first encounter the invertebrate teaching facility at Askham Bryan Wildlife and Conservation Park. What usually begins as a mix of curiosity and apprehension quickly shifts to genuine interest.

My own fascination with invertebrates started in a similar way.

As a work placement student, I agreed to help with something no one else seemed keen to do: assisting veterinarian Dr Benjamin Kennedy as he investigated several cases of “black eye” in praying mantises. The plan was to place the affected mantises under general anaesthetic - something I hadn’t realised was even possible for invertebrates - and examine their eyes under a microscope while recording anaesthetic doses.

I was in my first year of a foundation degree in Animal Management, but even then it was clear that we were documenting something rarely captured for insects. That experience turned into a long-term passion for invertebrate welfare.

When the time came to choose a topic for my Master’s thesis, I returned to the question that first sparked my interest: what causes black eye in mantises?

The subjects were giant Asian mantis, Hierodula membranacea, a species commonly kept both in zoos and as pets. Despite their popularity, there is very little scientific research into their welfare.

We focused on two environmental factors that might influence the development of black eye: enclosure design and ultraviolet (UV) exposure.

Sixty juveniles, all hatched and raised at the park, were housed individually and monitored over an eight week period. Half were kept with visual barriers between neighbouring enclosures, preventing them from seeing each other, while the other half remained in open enclosures with full visibility of nearby mantises. Two levels of UV exposure were also tested.

The results showed that mantises housed in full view of their neighbours were significantly more likely to develop black eye than those kept with visual barriers. This supports a long-standing theory among keepers that visual exposure may trigger interaction with enclosure walls, leading to damage to the eye.

UV lighting did not seem to effect black eye, but mantises exposed to higher UV levels tended to grow larger, suggesting UV may influence physiology.

Since completing the research, visual barriers are now used more widely in the mantis room, and keepers have noticed a reduction in black eye cases. Even before a formal study, the findings can have practical value supporting invertebrate welfare across the BIAZA community.

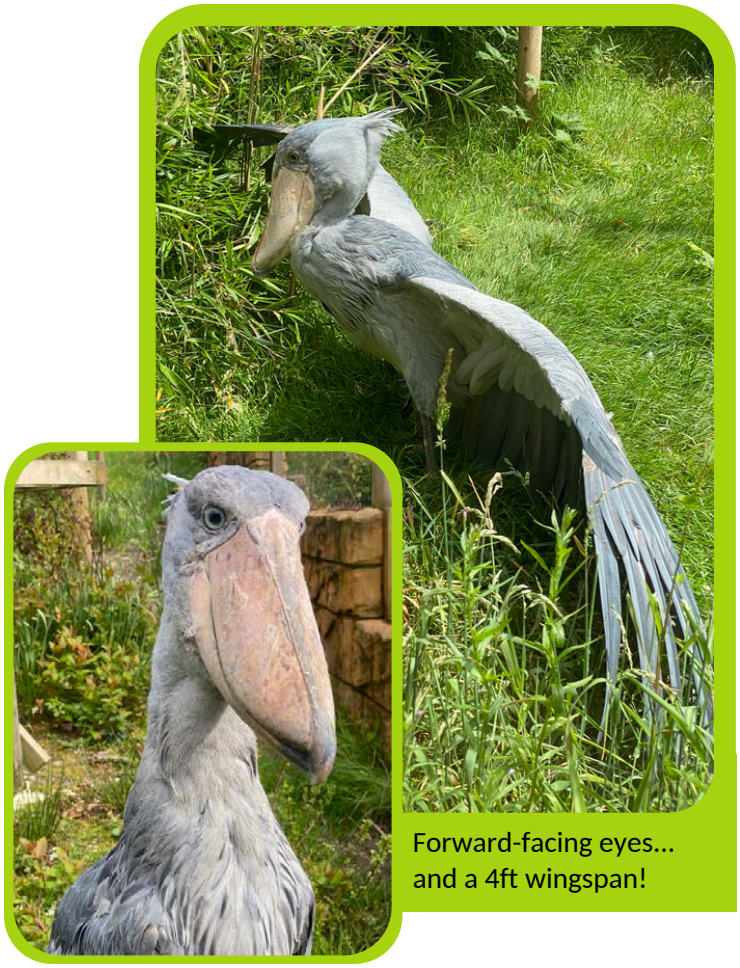
Exmoor's Living Dinosaur

Some Visitors to Exmoor Zoo may think that Abou comes straight from fantasy - but her keepers detail the very real experience of caring for the UK's only zoo shoebill:

With a billed shaped like a clog she really is a unique looking bird, even her scientific name *Balaeniceps rex* means whale-headed king. But do not mistake Exmoor Zoo's 18-year-old for anything but a true queen.

Standing like a statue (to conserve energy) this mighty-looking bird's closest relatives are pelicans and hamerkop - but couldn't look more different. Lacking webbed feet and standing at 5ft in height, shoebills live in swamps and flood plains.

These solitary birds do everything with purpose. Hours can be spent waiting for fish to swim by before a sudden striking of the beak descending into the water followed by their body to catch and gulp down their dinner. It's here you start to see some similarities between them and a pelican. Their beaks which can weigh a whooping 3kg and are made of keratin - which means they can pick up a 3ft-long lungfish and even cut it in half using their beaks. Like pelicans, they also have a small pouch in their beaks to allow for some extra space.



Forward-facing eyes... and a 4ft wingspan!

Why the forward-facing eyes?

Unlike most birds, the shoebill's forward-facing eyes are a giveaway that they evolved as predators, and only occasionally do they need to look out threats of their own. Quickly showing-off their 8ft wing span is normally enough for them to escape becoming prey themselves.

However, their numbers are dropping with only an estimated five thousand remaining in the wild. In a shoebill's annual clutch only one chick normally survives. Like some other predatory birds of prey, the second chick is often eaten by its older sibling. That one chick is then raised by both parents.

Before parenthood comes the courting. Shoebill are famous for a clattering sound which can be heard over mile away. The male will chatter to a female and only by her clatter in response will he be allowed enter her territory, where they then bow to each other.

Abou's keeper Tina described her as; "a magnificent creature to have and those of us that work with her and get to do experiences love to talk about shoebills and raise awareness for them as a species."

She has been at the zoo for five years, but surprises her keepers regularly. Recently she has been doing moves which keepers like to call a 'catwalk' or a 'fly by' - an action which shows off her massive wings.

Wingspan comes at a cost: shoebill have some of slowest wing flap rates of any bird at 150 flaps per minute. In comparison a hummingbird can flap 3200% faster - over eighty times a second!

Exmoor Zoo have found that their visitors all love Abou the shoebill for different reasons. Because she looks prehistoric, because shoebill are featured in games like The Legend of Zelda, and because they've seen them online and don't believe she's real!

Abou's keeper Tina also noted that in these five years with Abou she's still learning new facts. For example, a creator and puppeteer for The Muppets, Bill Diamond, helped create shoebill puppets to raise the second chicks in the captive rearing and rehab facility in the Bangweulu Wetlands!

WAZA 2030 Conservation Goal: Action. Evidence.Trust.

Paula Cerdán, Head of Conservation and Animal Welfare at WAZA (World Association of Zoos and Aquariums) on their 2030 Conservation Goal:

Zoos and aquariums are operating in an increasingly demanding conservation landscape. The 2024 Living Planet Report reported an average decline of 73% in monitored wildlife populations between 1970 and 2020, while the 2019 IPBES Global Assessment warned that up to one million species may be at risk of extinction.

In the face of an accelerating biodiversity crisis, it is no surprise that the expectations of zoos and aquariums from governments, funders, conservation partners and the public are rising, alongside scrutiny of impact and accountability.

The challenge facing our community is no longer whether we contribute to conservation – that is already expected – but how clearly, consistently and credibly our contribution can be demonstrated.

The WAZA 2030 Conservation Goal (30CG) aims to respond to these challenges. For more than a year, it has been shaped across regions, including with BIAZA and members in the UK and Ireland. The goal provides a shared framework for turning conservation commitment into measurable outcomes, making it possible to communicate the conservation contributions of zoos and aquariums in line with global biodiversity targets and relevant frameworks. The framework is now being finalised and will be presented to WAZA members later this year.

Action sits at the heart of the 2030 Conservation Goal, which requires WAZA member institutions, working through their regional associations, to actively contribute to halting extinctions, reversing species declines, restoring populations and securing a future for threatened species.

As highlighted in the recent IUCN Position Statement on the role of botanic gardens, aquariums and zoos, conservation action can take many forms. This approach also provides an opportunity to better align and recognise efforts that contribute to multiple targets within the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The goal also acknowledges the diversity of institutions and contexts worldwide.

The 2030 Conservation Goal will be WAZA's third global goal, following the 2023 Animal Welfare Goal and the 2027 Population Management Goal. Together, these goals form a framework that strengthens animal welfare and conservation globally.

For joint WAZA and BIAZA members, this emphasis on action will feel familiar. Zoos and aquariums across the UK and Ireland are already contributing across the conservation spectrum, supporting species as diverse as wildcats in Scotland at RZSS, freshwater fish at Bristol Zoo Project, banteng at Chester Zoo, Partula snails at ZSL, native species such as red squirrels and many other nationally and globally threatened taxa.

Left: Saving Wildcats
Right: Bristol Zoological Society

Individual conservation projects represent the wide range of roles that zoos and aquariums can fulfil in conservation; breeding programmes, applied research, conservation partnerships, embedding conservation planning, social impact and engagement, all forming core parts of an organisation's mission.

Crucially, the Goal also strengthens the evidence base for conservation. Common measures implemented through regional associations will allow conservation efforts to be captured globally. This information will enable WAZA and its member regional associations to demonstrate collective impact both in national and international policy, supporting government biodiversity commitments and participation in advocacy forums such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the IUCN World Conservation Congress.

The WAZA 2030 Conservation Goal brings action, evidence and trust together at a time when all three are needed urgently. It ensures that the conservation work already happening across our community is not only delivered but also clearly evidenced and recognised.

In a modern world facing unprecedented biodiversity loss, increased action and adequate evidence will help ensure zoos and aquariums are seen not just as places that care for wildlife but as institutions actively helping to secure a future for nature.

WAZA
World Association of Zoos and Aquariums

Critically Endangered partula snail, saved from extinction by zoos (photo: ZSL)

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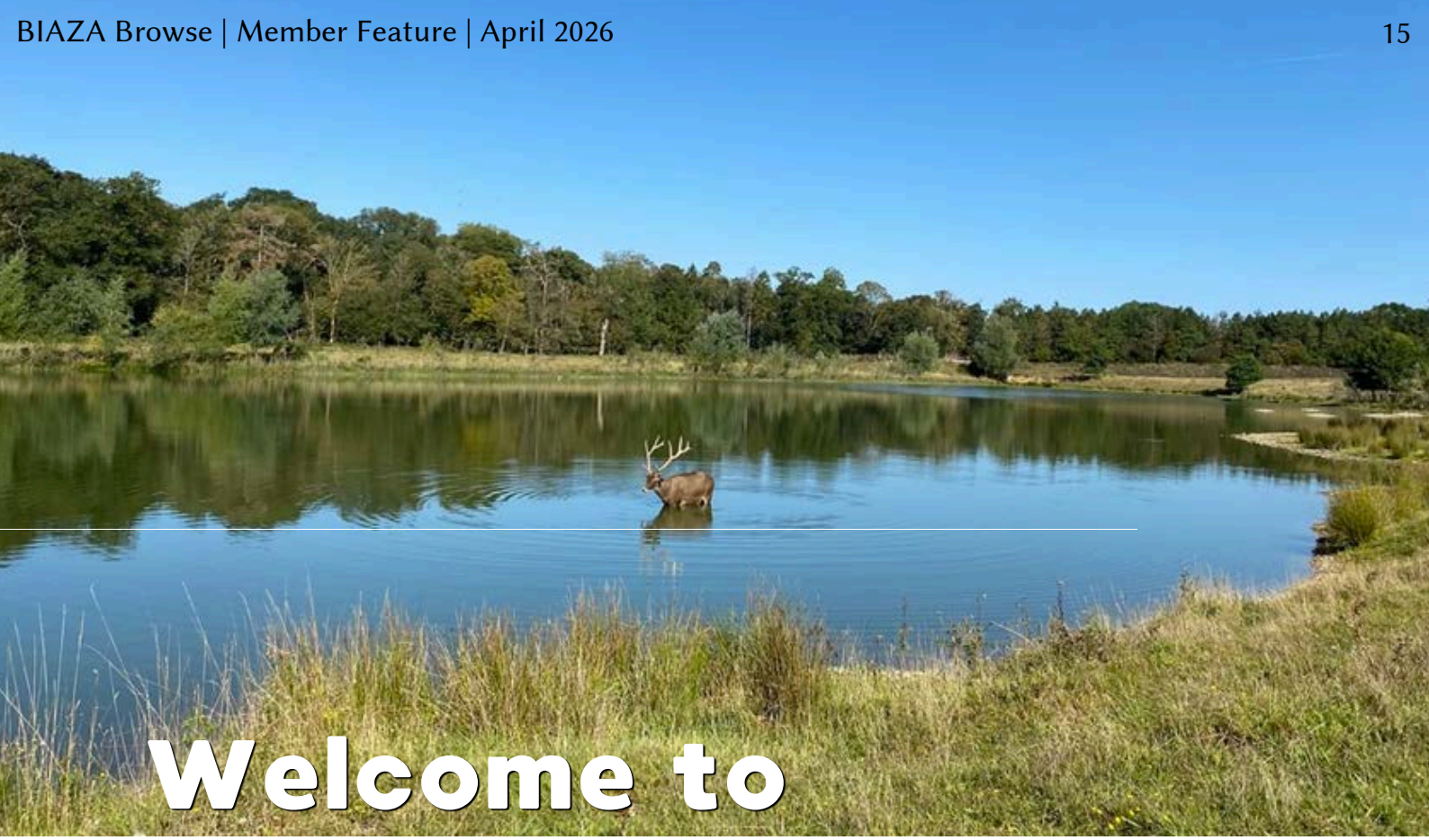


Welcome to Watatunga Wildlife Reserve

Reserve Operations Manager Molly Ruder introduces this unique BIAZA member site, nestled in the heart of Norfolk.

My name is Molly, I'm the Reserve Operations Manager at Watatunga Wildlife Reserve, we are based in West Norfolk here in the UK. I thought I'd just introduce Watatunga properly as we are now officially fully accredited BIAZA members!

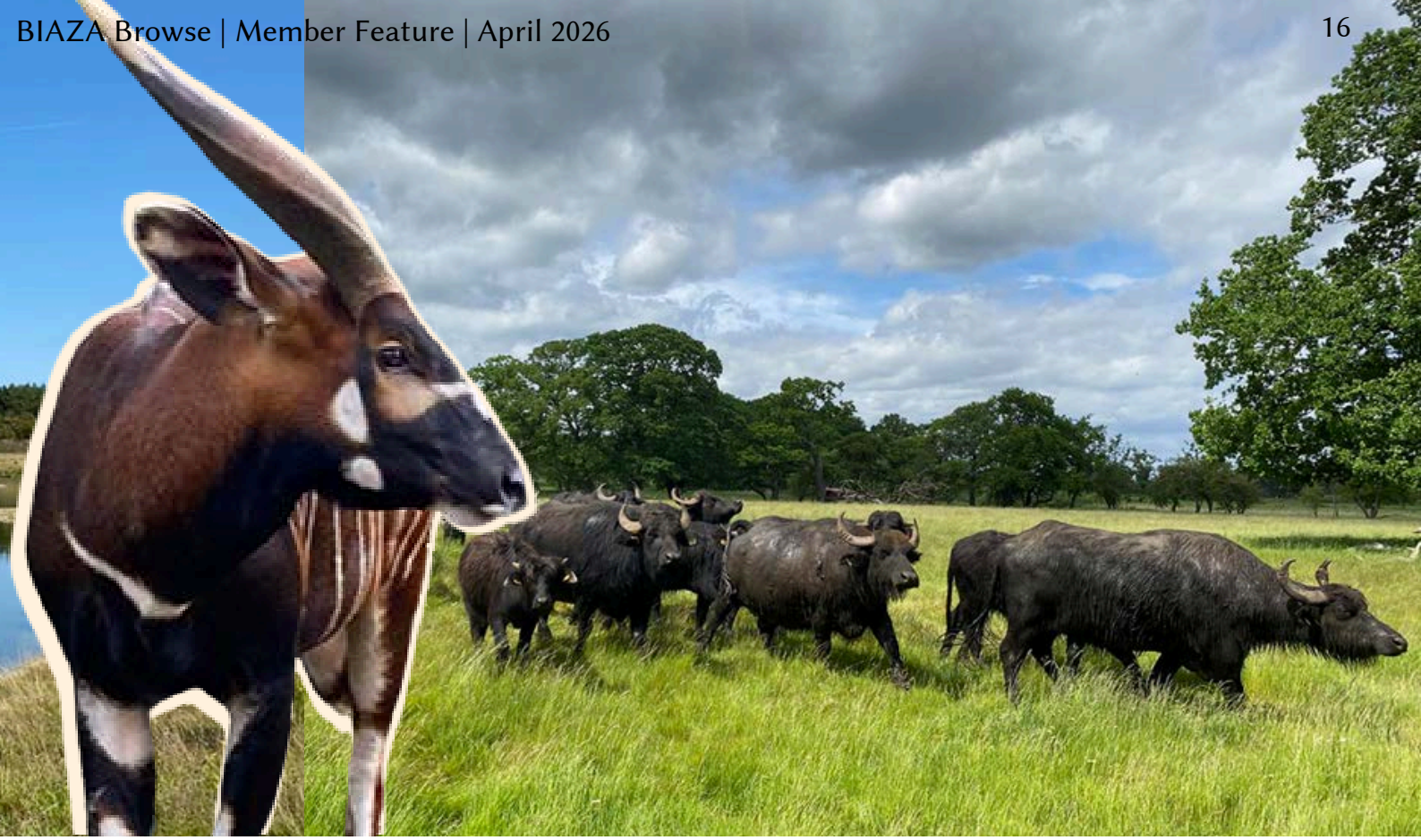
Watatunga is a portmanteau of 'Watlington' the village we are situated in, and 'Sitatunga' one of our species of antelope. We specialise in ungulates with a large focus on deer & antelope, as well as wetland bird species.

As an expansive wildlife reserve, guests can pre-book onto a guided tour and view our animals in a convoy driving their own golf buggy. All visits are supervised as the animals are free roaming in a complex 170-acre habitat. It's important to us that guests understand we are in their space therefore the animals always come first.

As well as our tours at set times, we also offer guided trailer tours, art experiences, pop-up dining events, corporate experiences, photography tours, private tours, & school trips across all ages. Not to mention our four holiday lets on site.

In addition to BIAZA accreditation, in the past year we have become a Visit England accredited attraction, achieved a Gold Green Tourism Award, and we have implemented Accessibility guides across all properties and the visitor centre at reception.

We are huge on accessibility, one of our lodges is an accessible lodge with a profiling bed and accessible wet room. We have a wheelchair trailer on site for tours and a wheelchair buggy. We also have a wheelchair accessible bird hide for the accessible lodge.



With our emphasis on ungulates, we are home to the UK's only bachelor bongo herd. We also have niche species like Indian Sambar, Malayan Sambar & White Lipped Deer. Overall, we have over twenty-three different species of ungulate and multiple wetland species of bird as well as a breeding group of Great Bustard. We also farm a herd of sixty water buffalo.

We are quite different to your average zoo and have some different approaches towards animal management. We directly drill Sainfoin & clover mixes into the ground creating forage patches that we can give and restrict access to. We make our own haylage by utilising the farm on the wider estate, as well as our own hay and straw.

We take all animals off any supplementary feeding for around 6 months of the year where possible. To enable us to do this, we carry out annual water and soil testing and implement changes based on the results. For example, this year we've put on a liquid fertiliser containing any nutrients that the soil was deficient in. In water sources that have high iron we have placed high level copper salt licks next to them so that the iron doesn't inhibit copper absorption.

We're very passionate about seasonal feeding and access to natural grazing and foraging where possible.

Watatunga may be home to some incredibly endangered species, but we care just as much about the native species living in it as well. We work closely with the British Trust of Ornithology, the Norfolk Moth Society, the British Entomological and Natural History Society, a local fungus expert, the Norfolk Record Society on Dragonflies and Damselflies & the Norfolk Bat Group to carry out annual surveys on the reserve.

We hope you can come along and see the reserve for yourself! We open to the public March-October but we're more than happy to show our fellow keepers from BIAZA organisations around all year round :)

WATATUNGA
WILDLIFE RESERVE

Zoo&A

with Zoo Educator and SEND Changemaker: Natasha Kyle

With Woburn Safari Park's groundbreaking new SEND classroom making waves, we interviewed the park's Head of Education:

As a zoo educator, what does your typical workday look like?

It's wonderfully varied, which is exactly what I enjoy about the role. My mornings often begin with preparing resources, checking in with keepers for any animal updates, and setting up learning spaces.

From there, the day can take many different directions. I might be leading guided coach tours for school groups, delivering hands-on workshops, or welcoming families to our SEN Friendly Workshop Days.

Some of the most rewarding parts of the job are witnessing children encounter an animal for the very first time - the look of wonder on their faces – and seeing them grow in confidence learning new skills.

Alongside all of this, I have spent the last three years helping to develop our SENse the Safari project, which has shaped the way I think about inclusive learning across the entire park.

What is the SENse the Safari classroom and what does it provide?

It is a purpose-built SEND classroom which has been designed from the ground up to meet the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The facility provides a space where learners who may find traditional zoo environments overwhelming can explore at their own pace in a calm and supportive setting.

Inside, the classroom spaces can be used for activities like animal artefact handling, animal food preparation, enrichment making, arts and crafts, species talks, and even handling animals under supervision. With accessibility at the forefront, it's designed to encourage curiosity and independence. There is also a fully equipped sensory room which can be used as a decompression zone, plus adaptable workspaces with rising benches and lowered sinks, and outdoor areas as well.

SENse the Safari is such an exciting new development that represents a major step forward in inclusive learning in zoos.

What were some of the considerations you made when developing the classroom?

We knew that to create a space that genuinely worked for our learners, we needed to listen closely to their experiences. This included consulting with local authority staff, SEND specialists, and parents to understand the barriers that often make days out challenging.

One of the team of architects, Neil Reynolds from Louis de Soissons is a parent of children with SEND needs and his lived experience as a parent was an invaluable input into the project.

Every aspect of the layout was carefully considered, from lighting and acoustics to colour contrast, signage, and the flow between rooms. Accessibility was the number one priority throughout, with wide doorways, adaptable furniture, and clear visual cues to help visitors navigate the space confidently.

The result is a facility that will make visits to the safari park possible for those who might have previously felt unable to visit - it's a welcoming environment where learners can engage fully and comfortably in their own way.

Why is it so valuable to have inclusive learning opportunities?

These opportunities ensure that every child has the chance to experience the joy that a zoo visit can offer. By prioritising inclusion, we can remove or reduce barriers and create spaces where all learners feel safe, supported, and able to thrive.

When children are given access to meaningful experiences with animals and nature, it can have a profound impact on their confidence, wellbeing, and communication skills. These moments often stay with them long after the visit, helping to build a lifelong interest in the natural world.

Inclusive learning also benefits families and teachers, who gain reassurance that their needs have been considered and respected.

Ultimately, inclusive learning is about ensuring that every visitor has the opportunity to learn, explore, and feel a sense of belonging.

"When children are given access to meaningful experiences with animals and nature, it can have a profound impact on their confidence, wellbeing, and communication skills."

What are some ways zoos and aquariums can boost their inclusivity?

Zoos and aquariums can make a significant difference to SEND visitors starting with some simple, practical steps that do not always require large budgets. One of the most effective starting points is to provide clear communication tools, such as free communication boards, visual maps, and social scripts that help families plan their visit and understand what to expect.

Offering sensory-friendly sessions or quiet hours can also make the environment more manageable for visitors who find busy spaces overwhelming.

Staff training is another valuable investment. When teams understand different SEND needs and feel confident in how to support visitors, it creates a more welcoming atmosphere across the entire site. Sensory bags with items like ear defenders or fidget tools can be offered on loan, and clear signage can help reduce anxiety by making navigation easier.

Reaching out to local authorities can open doors to funding opportunities for facilities such as Changing Places Toilets, which can transform accessibility for many families. Partnerships with SEND networks, schools, and holiday programmes such as the Holiday Activities and Food initiative can also help extend support to broader communities, and in turn help to build long-term connections with visitors.

WHAT'S ON: Q2 2026

Follow the links to find out more.

28 – 29 Apr	**Pinniped Conference** Deep Sea World
6 – 7 May	**Mammal Working Group Conference** Marwell Wildlife
25 – 29 May	**BIAZA Love Your Zoo and Love Your Aquarium** *Our annual campaign celebrating zoos!*
from 12 May	**BIAZA Glow Worm Patrol**
4 – 5 Jun	**Deer Conference** Watatunga Wildlife Reserve
9 – 11 Jun	**BIAZA Annual Conference** RZSS Edinburgh Zoo
6 – 13 Jun	**BIAZA Shark Awareness Week**

All BIAZA Events can be found on our website

Best practice welfare:

Care sheet highlight for BIAZA members:

Hissing Cockroach

Gromphadorhini

Download

About the BIAZA Group:

The Terrestrial Invertebrate Working Group (TIWG) are dedicated to the welfare of some of the most ubiquitous animals on Earth. Their resources provide crucial guidance on the care, and sometimes cultivation, of species - from cockroaches to pancake slugs.

BIAZA Terrestrial Invertebrate Working Group

Created through collaboration with nutritionists and keepers

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