



# Second-Hand Lion Food: The Challenge of Feeding 80 Wild Animals on a Budget

*While still adhering to our beliefs about animal  
welfare, safety, and minimizing waste and  
environmental impact*

# Conservators Center

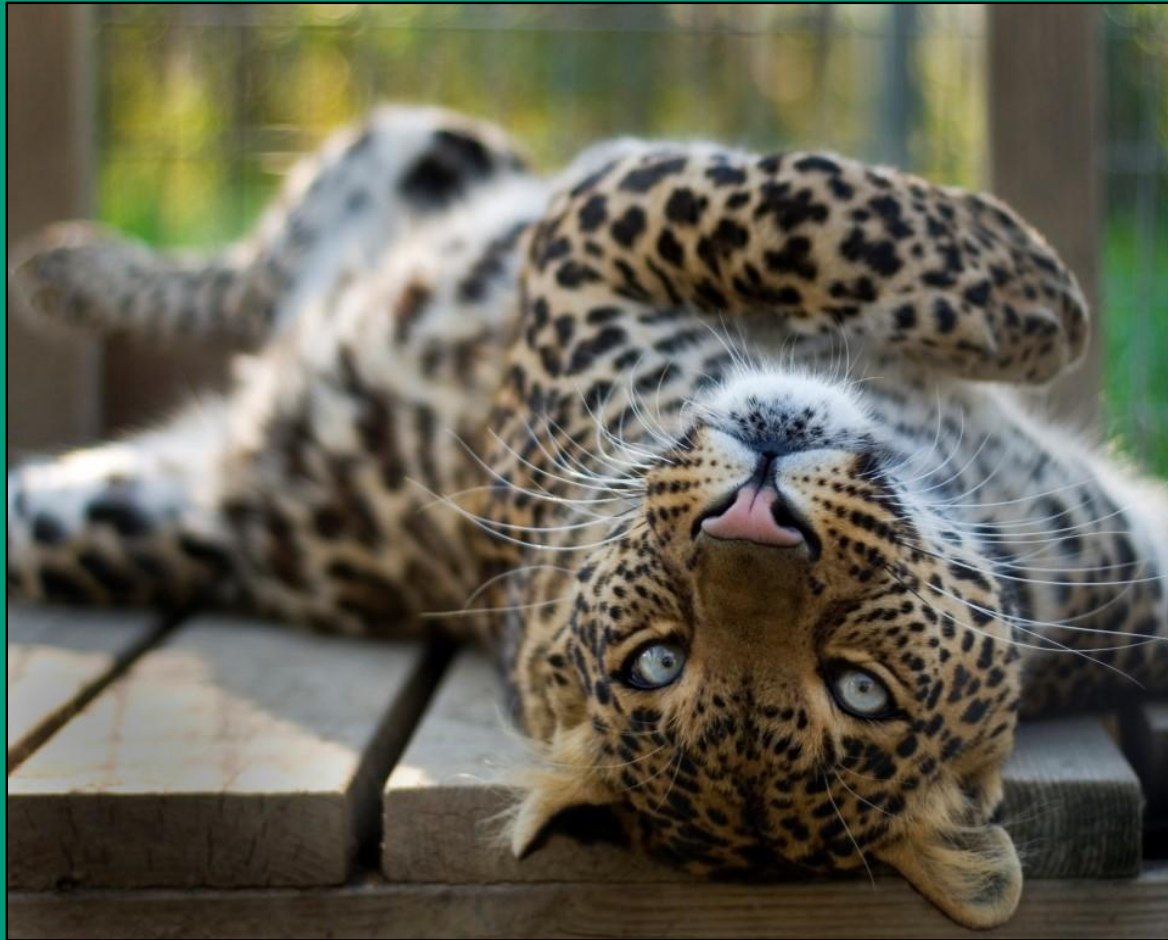


## Nonprofit zoological park specializing in wildlife and education

- 501(c)3 charity, tight budget
- Mission is to reconnect people with wildlife
- Provide a home for about 80 animals of more than 20 species
- Our residents are ambassadors for their wild counterparts
- Guided tours and events



# Why Am I Here?



# Once Upon a Time...



In 1999,  
some animal  
people  
decided to  
open an  
educational  
facility. I'm  
one of them.



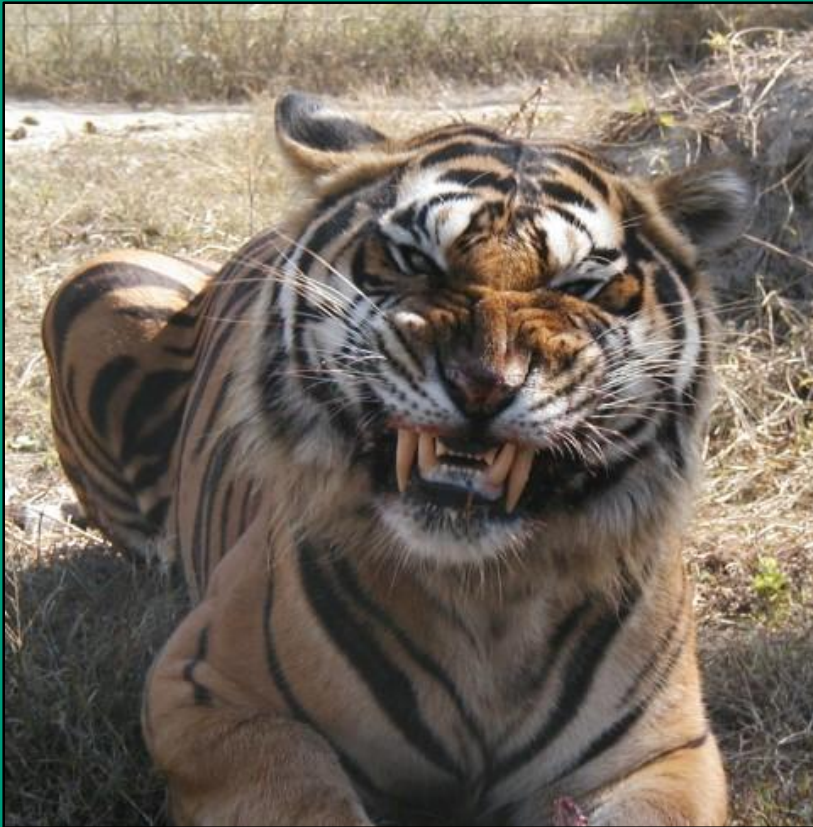


# Conservators Center History



- Founded by Douglas Evans and Mindy Stinner in 1999
- Early mission included a rescue focus
- Current mission is *Reconnecting People with Wildlife*

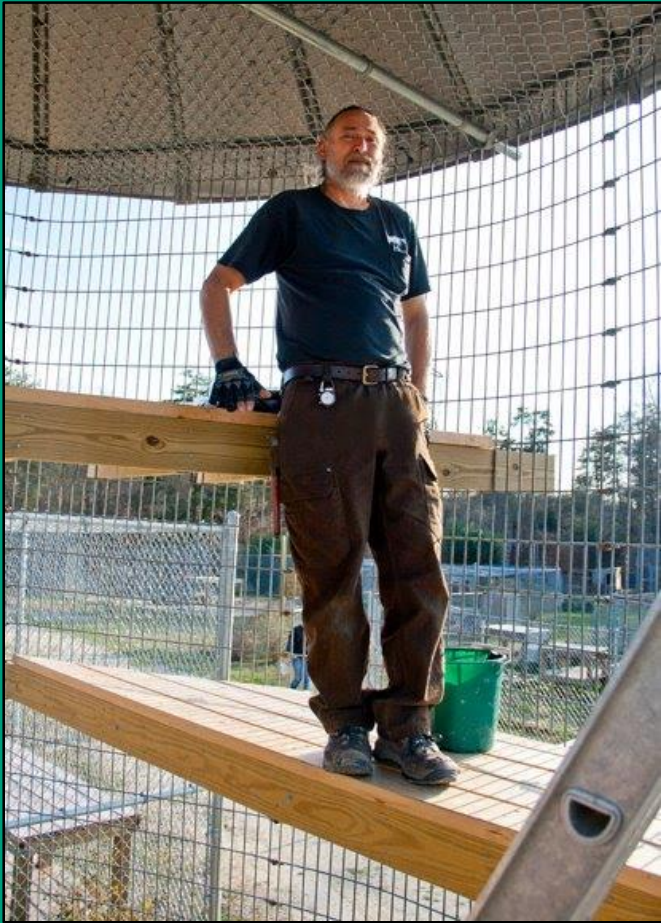
# Founders



We had backgrounds in education, security, construction, and managing captive wild carnivores.

Not so much business background.

# Building a New Park



With grassroots support from volunteers, donations, and a lot of passion, we built a site on 45 donated acres in rural NC.



We began by taking in animals  
in need of new homes.





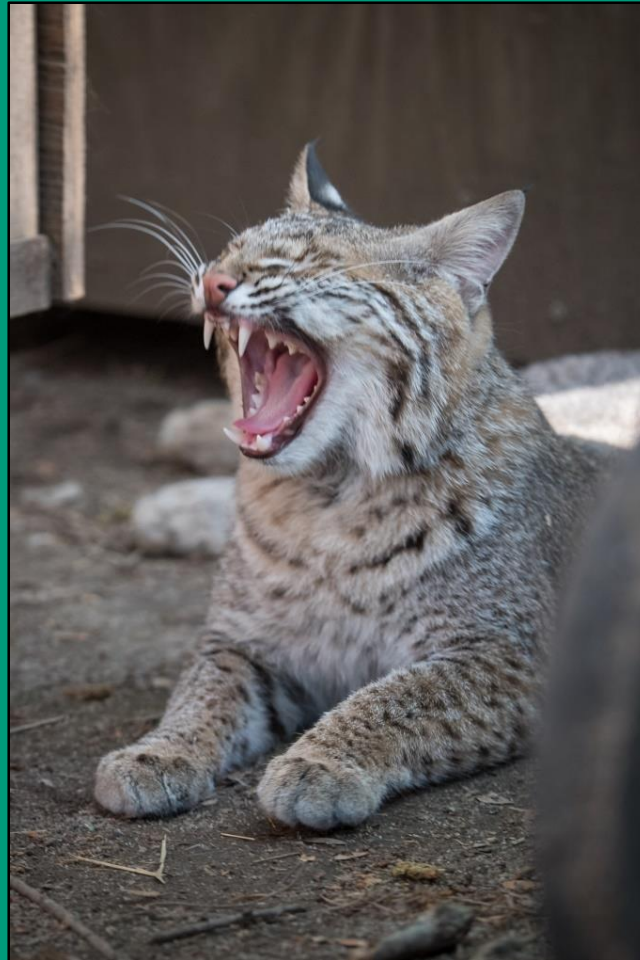
And then animals that would help us fulfill  
our educational mission.



# Hungry!



Feeding  
those 35  
animals on a  
tight budget  
was  
challenging.



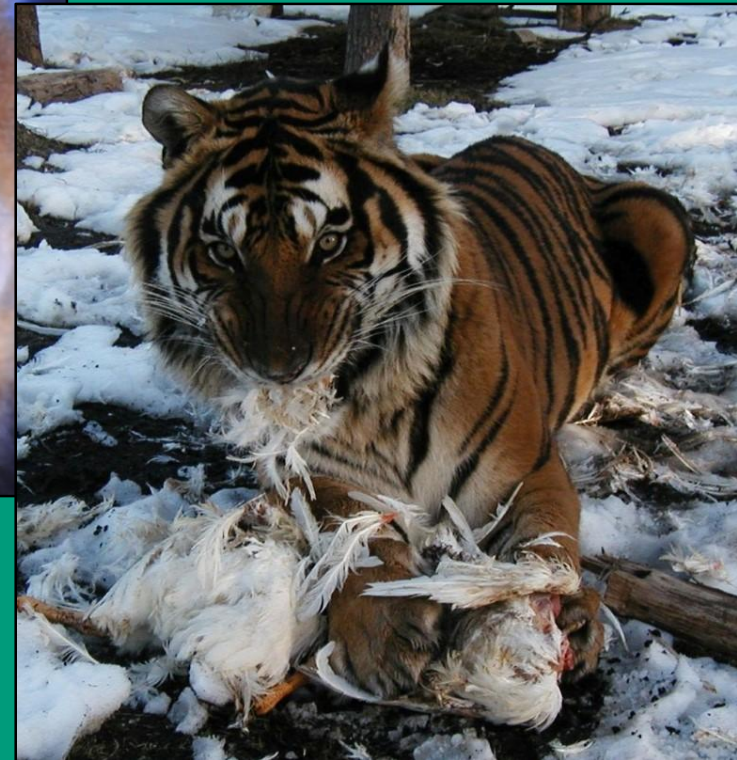
# The Challenge: How do we feed our animals on a tight budget?



1. Identify each animal's nutritional requirements and preferences
2. Identify options for obtaining preferred foods and establish backups
3. Assess the risks and benefits of using any given food source
4. Choose the most cost-effective option to keep our animals healthy
5. Ensure quality control while implementing
6. Monitor the long term health of our resident animals



# 1. Identify each animal's nutritional requirements and preferences

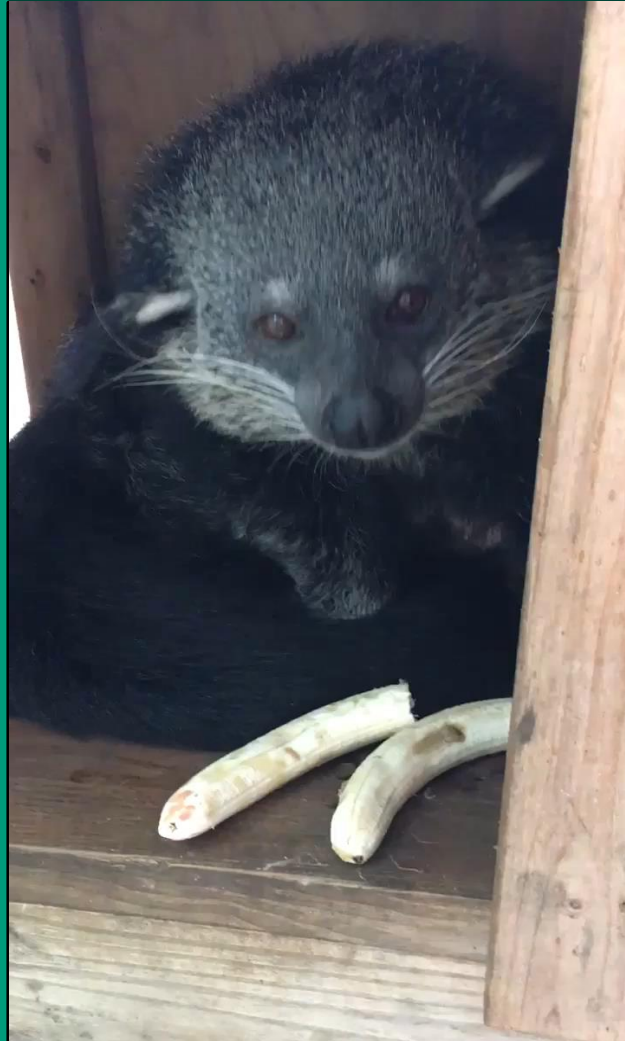


Babies don't eat as much...





# Binturong Eating Bananas





# Meeting their needs



## 2. Identify options for obtaining needed foods and establish backups



Our initial Brainstorm session for possible sourcing options:

Big box stores

Meat processing plants

Farmers markets

Local produce stands

Local farms of all kinds

Hunters

Local butchers

Taxidermists

Experimental control groups

### 3. Assess the risks and benefits of using any given food source



- Appropriateness for our needs
- Ability to transport without too much spoilage
- Availability – regular schedule or intermittent?
- Quality of product
- Security of food from this location
- Location relative to us
- Cost of acquisition
- Health and Safety!!





# Health and Safety Concerns: Food Safety and Biosecurity



## Possible introduction of a toxin or contaminant



- Food, medications, bedding, construction materials, enrichment items (toys, platforms, etc.)
- Their environment, including landscaping maintenance
- Human contact and our contaminants
- Spoilage is a threat to animal lives
- Disease carried by whole prey (risk to animals and people)

# Whole prey from specific suppliers



- Raised in a clean environment
- No exposure to outside illnesses
- No parasites
- Overstock is euthanized already

# Health and Safety Concerns: Food Safety and Biosecurity



Wolves  
enjoying whole  
bunnies, or  
more  
specifically,  
Trekkie  
taunting his  
brother with a  
bunny.





# Food Safety and Biosecurity



## Warnings to hunters from the AVMA:

[Anaplasmosis](#)

[Avian Influenza](#)

[Babesiosis](#)

[Brucellosis](#)

[Campylobacteriosis](#) (*Campylobacter jejuni*)

[Chronic Wasting Disease \(CWD\)](#)

[Cryptosporidiosis](#)

[Deer Parapoxvirus](#)

[Hydatid](#) Tapeworms (*Echinococcus*)

[Ehrlichiosis](#)

[Equine Encephalitis Viruses](#)

[Escherichia coli Infection \(\*E. coli\*\)](#)

[Giardiasis](#)

[Hantavirus](#)

[Leptospirosis](#)

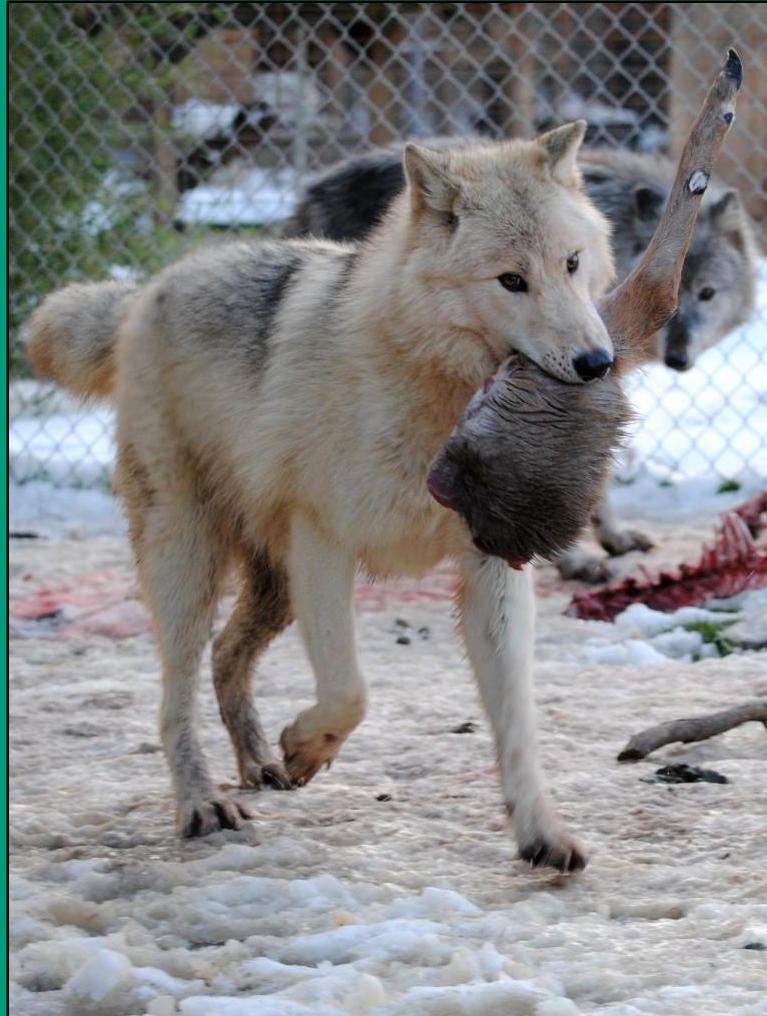
[Lyme Disease \(Lyme borreliosis\)](#)

[Plague](#)

[Q fever](#)

[Rabies](#)

But it's their natural food source!



# Whole prey from other sources





# Food Safety and Biosecurity



## Zoos pose a biological risk to agricultural enterprises

- Cross-contamination via people, supply delivery vehicles, local and migrating wildlife



- Different business models equal different levels of risk
- Public visitation v. production/product movement

## 4. Choose the most cost-effective, safe options to keep our animals healthy



### Sourcing whole prey:

Clean lab animal production facilities  
Specific local farms  
Hunters\*



Big box stores  
Meat processing plants  
Farmers markets  
Local produce stands  
Local farms of all kinds  
Local butchers  
Taxidermists  
Experimental control groups  
Wildlife rehabilitators  
Taxidermists  
Road kills  
Permitted depredation activities  
Staff gardens  
On-site plantings

\* Pose special risks we work to manage

# Whole prey is very desirable





# Whole prey is very desirable



# Whole prey is very desirable...to the animals





## 4. Choose the most cost-effective, safe options to keep our animals healthy



### Sourcing “slab” meat, fruits and vegetables:

- Local produce stands
- Meat packaging centers
- Hunters/farmers who butcher their own meat

Big box stores  
Farmers markets  
Local farms of all kinds  
Local butchers  
Taxidermists  
Experimental control groups  
Wildlife rehabilitators  
Taxidermists  
Road kills  
Permitted depredation activities  
Staff gardens  
On-site plantings  
Clean lab animal production facilities  
Specific local farms  
Hunters



# Variety



## 5. Ensure quality control while implementing



- Maintaining the product and ensuring limited deterioration of quality from acquisition to “table”
- How do we ensure quality of product both as we interact with a source and when processing and feeding out?



## 6. Monitor the long term health of our resident animals



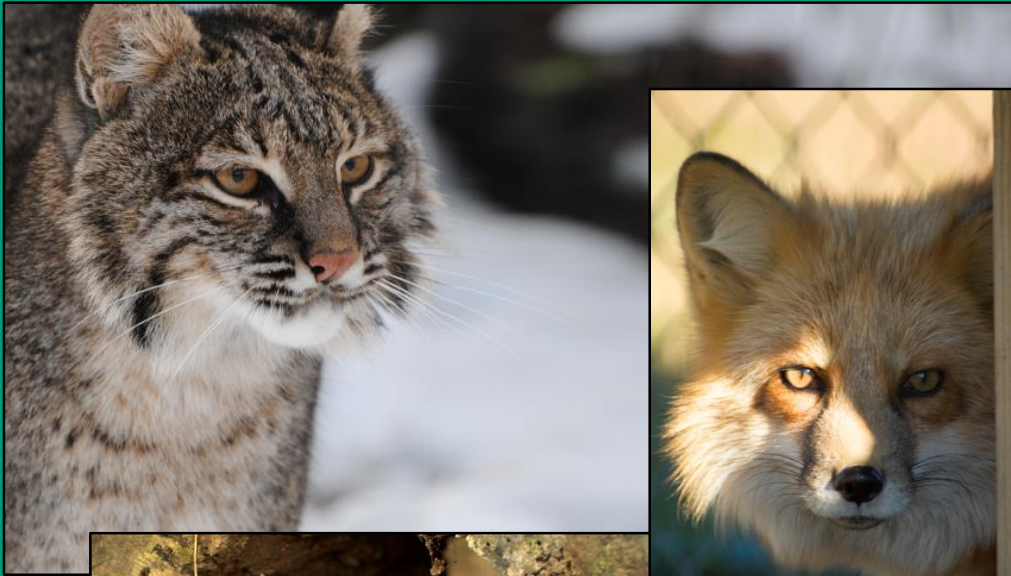
Tres Ocelot turns 25 this year (she loves semi-frozen chicks, small rats, canned food and a little rabbit if she is feeling frisky)

Hopa Wolf lived into her late teens (chicken, venison, beef, pork, small rat, quail, rabbit, and eggs)



# Back to our story

We continued to slowly grow...





Until Summer 2004  
when we took in 14 big cats





And they had 15 cubs.  
Time for a new plan.





This is what the world saw...





This is what I saw.



Conservators Center.



# Hungry Cats





# Carnivores can be gross.



# Lions and Tigers Growing Up





# Managing Expectations





# Perception



# Reality



## We revisited step 4:

Choose the most cost-effective, safe options to keep our animals healthy



### Sourcing whole prey:

- Clean breeding facilities
- Farms
- Hunters\*
- Depredation activities\*
- Known wildlife rehabilitators\*
- Specific instances of road kill\*



\* All pose special risks we work to manage



## 4. Choose the most cost-effective, safe options to keep our animals healthy



### Sourcing “slab” meat, fruits and vegetables:

- Local produce stands
- Meat packaging centers
- Hunters/farmers who butcher their own meat
- Co-op group bulk purchasing – one group
- Local taxidermists and butchers
- Farms that sell directly to consumers
- Restaurants – one big steakhouse
- Our gardens and on-site plants
- Big box stores and distribution centers



# How to expand while staying safe?



- Large chain stores and distribution centers want to reduce their costs and impact on landfills
- Many contract outside companies to assist with products that might have gone to waste



# Collaborative National Effort



- A company providing services to most of the US reached out to zoos and sanctuaries to offer the option to participate in a program





# “Meat Run”



# Staff, interns and volunteers prep food in our original field kitchen



# Original All-Purpose Building





# Nutrition Center



# Nutrition Center



# Nutrition Center





# Nutrition Center



# And a Separate Laundry Room!!!



# All to good use





# Training to Target





# Training Day(s)



Keepers, volunteers and interns learn how to train the animals for husbandry purposes, and to reward them for their efforts



We love to make a party out of  
cool donated stuff!





# A Christmas tree event



# Tree Toss





# Hundreds of Donated Pumpkins plus our animals and volunteers = Pumpkin Prowl





# Pumpkin Prowl



# Pumpkin Prowl



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# Pumpkin Prowl





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Conservators Center.