

# Meet AAZK's Conservation Committee



## **Amanda Kamradt-** Co-Chair AAZK Conservation Committee

Institution: Zoo New England

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My career as an animal keeper began in 2006. I had always loved animals and enjoyed caring for them, but it wasn't until later in life that I realized I wanted to pursue a career with them. When I began college I thought I wanted to become a lawyer, then during an Anthropology class we were learning about the late Dian Fossey,

and the spark was ignited! I explored many animal-related career options, but ultimately chose animal keeping because of the unique opportunity this profession provides to contribute to animal welfare on both the individual and species-wide level.

I was also inspired by the level of dedication shown by animal keepers, as well as the dynamic and progressive nature of this field, and I wanted to become a part of it. I attended my first AAZK conference in 2006, and instantly made AAZK an integral part of my career. In 2007 I was asked to serve as Co-Chair of the Conservation Committee, in 2010 I joined the Bylaws Committee, and I have also served as Secretary and Treasurer for the New England Chapter.

This photo was taken at the base of a strangler fig tree at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. I visited Lewa in 2011 and witnessed the great work AAZK is doing through Bowling for Rhinos. I am incredibly proud of this Association and feel privileged to be a part of it.

Throughout my career I have worked with a variety of taxa at three different institutions, and currently work for Zoo New England of Boston, Massachusetts.



## **Christy Poelker-** Co-Chair AAZK Conservation Committee

Institution: Saint Louis Zoo

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I have a B.S. in Animal Science from the University of Missouri. I have been a keeper at the Saint Louis Zoo since 2000 and my current title is Antelope Area Senior Keeper. I have been involved in AAZK since 2002 and have served as Treasurer, Vice President and President of the St. Louis chapter. I am the 2015 National AAZK Conference Chairperson. I serve AZA as the Program Leader for the Grant's Gazelle Species Survival Plan (SSP) and as Vice-Coordinator of the Speke's Gazelle SSP. I serve as Co-Chair of the Animal Training Forum at the Saint Louis Zoo. In 2007, I participated in the Keeper Earthwatch program studying Grevy's Zebras in Kenya.



## Lauren Augustine- AAZK Conservation Committee Member

Institution: Smithsonian National Zoological Park

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I am a herpetology keeper at the Smithsonian National Zoological Park in the Reptile Discovery Center. My interest in Herpetology started at a very young age. As a child my father would take me out looking for snakes and measure their length against my height. This early interest in reptiles and amphibians led me to the University of North Carolina Asheville where I pursued a degree in ecology and environmental biology. After graduating with a bachelor's degree, I worked briefly as an environmental educator before applying and being accepted as the Panamanian golden frog keeper at the Maryland Zoo. This is where I was first introduced to AAZK and attended the annual conference in 2006. After two years at the Maryland Zoo I decided to move forward with my career and accepted a job in the Herpetology department at the Bronx Zoo in 2008. Here I became the founding treasurer of Bronx Zoo's AAZK Chapter. At this time I also began taking courses in animal behavior at Hunter University.

In 2011 I decided to pursue my education more seriously and looked into other opportunities. After learning about the relationship between the Smithsonian and George Mason University I applied for a position at the Reptile Discovery Center at the National Zoo. Once accepted I applied for graduate admissions at GMU and I was recently accepted into George Mason's conservation science and policy masters program and will begin classes this fall. I am a member of the turtle and tortoise propagation group(TTPG), the turtle survival alliance(TSA), the society for the study of amphibians and reptiles(SSAR) and several other herpetological organizations. I currently hold the studbook for *Cuora galbinifrons*, *bouretti* and *picturata* and hope to conduct my graduate research on these species. I am a co-chair of the National Capitals AAZK Chapter social committee.



## Bob Cisneros- AAZK President

Institution: Zoological Society of San Diego

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I am currently the President of the American Association of Zoo Keepers and have been a Board Member since 2007. I have been an active member of the Association since 1995, serving 13 years on the San Diego Chapter Board of Directors. I am currently Board Oversight for Professional Development.

I worked as a research technician for the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology during the early 80's. I assisted with construction and population management of artificial reefs, various aquaculture and mariculture projects, and water quality analysis. My experience in water chemistry took me on a number of research cruises in the French Frigate Shoals and south of the Equator.

I have been a zookeeper with the Zoological Society of San Diego since 1993. I am currently an Animal Care Supervisor in the Collections, Husbandry, Science Department, mammals division. I have been both Lead Keeper and Supervisor of San Diego Zoo's Children's Zoo and prior to that; I was a Senior Hospital Keeper with Veterinary

Services where I worked for over 9 years. As a hospital keeper, I worked with practically every species that is represented at the San Diego Zoo. This working knowledge included, being able to clean, feed, house, capture and restrain, train, and provide enrichment for any animal that stayed at the veterinary hospital. Previous to working at the hospital, I was a mammal keeper for four years, working primarily with primates and carnivores.

Field work experience includes Lumholtz Tree Kangaroo Project 2000 (Australia) and Female Black Bear Reproductive Project 2004-2006 (South Dakota). In 2009, I traveled to Indonesia as a representative of AAZK, assessing the impact of Rhino Protection Units in Java and Sumatra.

I have been a volunteer with the California Wolf Center since 2004. The California Wolf Center is an active participant in the Mexican wolf SSP breeding program. In May 2005, I became a member of the Board of Directors. As an Executive Board Member, I am responsible for animal transfers, volunteer coordination, food acquisition, administrative help, education, and research and internships. I also help organize and instruct our annual Chemical Immobilization and Restraint course designed for wildlife professionals. I am currently co-chair of the Wolf Center's future planning committee.

I am currently on the University of San Diego's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).



## **Mary Ann Cisneros- AAZK Conservation Committee Member**

Institution: Mesker Park Zoo and Botanic Garden

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I have been a keeper for nine years. I started my zoo career at the San Antonio Zoo in the bird department and have been at Mesker Park Zoo and Botanic Garden now for six years. I have a B.S. in Environmental Science from the University of Iowa. In San Antonio I started in the Amazonia Aviary and Big Lake area. I later moved up to the incubation keeper and later still to relief keeper. I also helped implement psitticine training during my employment. Currently, I am working with giraffes, zebras, sitatungas, and North American raptors at Mesker Park Zoo.

As a keeper in San Antonio, I was a part of Whooping Crane breeding and raising as well as Attwater Prairie chickens. In my employment at Mesker Park Zoo I have reinstated zoo- wide cardboard recycling, involved MPZ AAZK in a demonstration rain garden, initiated MPZ AAZK's purchase of a partial share of a local CSA(Community Supported Agriculture) for enrichment purposes, and helped in the restoration of BFR at our zoo. Outside of the zoo field, I have been involved in water monitoring, non-native plant removal, and litter pickups.

I have been a national member of AAZK since a chapter was restarted at Mesker Park Zoo in 2008. I am an active member and am currently the secretary of our chapter. I presented a paper with a fellow keeper at the 2010 AAZK conference on relief keeping and am excited to be a part of the Conservation Committee. I am presently a co-coordinator of the Conservation Station with Amanda Ista.



## **Christy Conk- AAZK Conservation Committee Member**

Institution: Disney's Animal Kingdom

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Growing up in rural Branford Florida, I was active in showing horses, exercising racehorses, and was a member of the Future Farmers of America. In 1994 I received an A.S. Degree in Zoo

Animal Technology from Santa Fe Community College Teaching Zoo and in 2007 I earned her B.A. Degree in Psychology from the University of Central Florida. In my career I have worked as a racehorse exerciser, an animal keeper at Brevard Zoo, a veterinary technician at Minton Animal Hospital, as well as an educator at Sea World of Florida. In my current role as an animal keeper at Disney's Animal Kingdom since 1998, I'm primarily responsible for the care, health, and training of birds (parrots, birds of prey, vulture, turkey, and tawny frogmouth) but I also work with reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. Each day I inspire Disney guests to conserve wildlife and the environment through presentations utilizing the bird's trained behaviors as well as the reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates in their naturally fascinating ways. As a leader of the Disney's Animal Kingdom Green Team, I work to inspire Disney Cast Members (employees) from all lines of business to action aligning with the Disney Green Standards as well as to become a Disney "VoluntEAR" in their community. I serve as a leader for butterfly monitoring in Disney's conservation area, active in bluebird nest box monitoring within Disney's Animal Kingdom, and have participated in Operation Migration by raising whooping crane chicks in Petuxant Maryland for release. As a volunteer in the community I participate in many road and lake cleanups, work with the National Wildlife Federation as a Certified Habitat Steward, serve as Vice President for the Board Directors for the Friends of Lake Louisa State Park, manage the annual Lake Louisa State Park Nature Fest event, created an ADA accessible "Sensory Garden" to allow people of all abilities to enjoy nature, work with area schools to create outdoor curriculum and satisfy the Florida Sunshine State Standards, speak to junior volunteers at the SPCA of Central Florida about safety with wildlife and being a responsible exotic pet owner, have served as a horse trainer and Special Olympics instructor for the Lake County Special Olympics Equestrian team, and in 2012 became a Conservation Committee member for the National AAZK organization.



## **T'Noya Thompson Gonzales- AAZK Conservation Committee Member**

Institution: Moody Gardens

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I began my career at a young age, volunteering at a small aquarium in Nassau Bahamas. After working with a variety of taxa, I was convinced that this was my future career! Through the years, I continued to volunteer at various shelters and facilities.

In 2003, I graduated from San Jacinto Central College with a Associates in Chemistry. I then transferred to Texas A&M at Galveston to pursue a Marine Biology degree. During my senior semester, I began interning at Moody Gardens Aquarium in the Penguin and Pinniped department. Upon graduating May of 2005, I was hired on at Moody Gardens as a fulltime keeper. In 2005 I became a professional member of AAZK and in 2008 a member of the

National AAZK Conservation Committee. In the summer of 2010, I transferred to the Rainforest department at Moody Gardens working with many taxa as a senior keeper! That same year, I became a part of the National AAZK Professional Development Committee.

Over the years I have met many inspiring people, worked with amazing animals and learned so much! I hope to continue my growth as an animal keeper and trainer for many years in this amazing field!



## **Amy Hanna-** AAZK Conservation Committee Member

Institution: The kasiisi project

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I received my B.A.s in Zoology and Biological Aspects of Conservation in 2002, and a Master in Education- Biology in 2004. I was a zookeeper and trainer for eight years at Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, Illinois where I worked in the following houses: Hoofstock, Primate House, Farm in the Zoo, African Journey, Seal Pool, Lion House, and Small Mammal/Reptile. Within this timeframe, I also ventured into the field, volunteering at the Gibbon Conservation Center in Santa Clarita, CA; transporting wild animals with a game capture team in South Africa; and volunteering in Zambia as an Education Manager for animal husbandry and education department staff at Munda Wanga Animal Sanctuary and Education Center. At the end of 2010, I left the zoo to pursue more permanent field experiences in Africa and volunteered for The Kasiisi Project in Uganda. I eventually became a full time/ paid Field Director for this project in 2012! I have been a member of the AAZK Conservation Committee since 2008.



## **Amanda Ista-** AAZK Conservation Committee Member

Institution: Milwaukee County Zoo

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I graduated in 2001 from St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN with a degree in Biology and Environmental Studies. I began my zoo career as an intern at Minnesota Zoo and have since worked at Utah's Hogle Zoo, Minnesota Zoo and most recently at Milwaukee County Zoo where I am a keeper in Big Cat Country. I have worked with a wide variety of animals but have always had a special interest in carnivores, specifically mustelids. I am also very interested in enhancing animal welfare through enrichment and training programs and expanding keepers' impacts on conservation.

I have been an active AAZK member since 2002 and have served on the National AAZK Conservation Committee since 2008. I am currently the co-coordinator of the Conservation Station column for the Animal Keepers' Forum and have worked on developing green guidelines for national conferences. I have recently taken on the role of the AAZK liaison to the AZA Animal Welfare Committee and am a 2011 Polar Bears International Leadership Camp graduate/Arctic Ambassador. I have been active in my local AAZK chapters serving as the treasurer for the Utah AAZK Chapter and both president and treasurer for the Milwaukee AAZK Chapter. In addition, I am a professional member of AZA and have taken an interest in population management. I have been the rock-hopper penguin SSP coordinator and studbook keeper since 2009 and have recently taken on the roles of the Canadian lynx studbook keeper and tayra studbook keeper/program leader.



## **Penny L. Jolly- AAZK Vice President**

Institution: Disney's Animal Kingdom

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I have been a zoo keeper for over 20 years and have been a member of The American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK), almost as long. I have participated with my local chapters in Kansas City and Orlando by being an officer, participating in fundraisers and conservation projects including BFR and as the 2001 National Conference Treasurer Chair. I became Co-Chair of the newly formed National Conservation

Committee in 2007 and helped develop the committee. In 2009 I was honored to become an AAZK Board Member and I currently hold the office of Vice-President.

My BS Degree in Zoology is from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, IL and I have had the privilege to care for, train and provide enrichment for many species of animals at the Utica Zoo, NY, the Kansas City Zoo, MO and Disney's Animal Kingdom, FL. I am fortunate to find all animals fascinating, which makes it hard to have favorites! African elephants, chimpanzees, California sea lions and currently Roseate spoonbills and Patagonian Cavy have been highlights. Mainly because they are inquisitive species!

I enjoy being at home with my husband Matt, our dogs, Apollo and Heather and our cat, Curiosity! AAZK and learning about and enjoying nature are my passions.



## **Wendy Lenhart- AAZK**

Conservation Committee Member

Institution: Philadelphia Zoo

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I have been a keeper at the Philadelphia Zoo for 10 years. After many years as a bird keeper, I recently switched to the mammal department and am the primary keeper for our river hippopotamus, red kangaroos, and white-nosed coati. Despite my

currently furry charges, southern ground hornbills, keas, and Andean condors will always hold a special place in my heart. I am currently the Chapter Liason for the Greater Philadelphia Chapter of AAZK and for 7 years prior was the chair for our Conservation Committee. In 2011 I received a Certificate of Merit in Conservation from National AAZK for the GPCAAZK's work with raising awareness about native bird collisions with plate glass on Zoo grounds. Our project was published in the October 2011 issue of the Animal Keeper's Forum. I became a member of the National AAZK Conservation Committee in 2012.

I have a B.S. in Agricultural Education with a minor in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from the Pennsylvania State University. In 2009 I received a Certificate of Graduate Study in Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology from Villanova University. I have done ornithological field work in St. Lucia, Mexico, South Florida, Belize and Southeastern Pennsylvania. The emphasis on the majority of these experiences was on behavioral ecology and a few included the use of bioacoustics. Prior to being a keeper at the Philadelphia Zoo, I worked there as an intern and a part-time classroom educator. I also interned at the Tracy Aviary, Hawk Mountain, and was a Bird Keeper at the San Antonio Zoo. In recent years, I have focused heavily on training the Philadelphia Zoo's red kangaroo mob to accept routine volunteer medical husbandry and am attempting the same with our hippos and coatis. Outside of work I enjoy singing, theater and living in the heart of the fantastic city of Philadelphia.