

Lincoln Park Zoo: Leading the Way

One of the oldest zoos in the United States, Lincoln Park Zoo is also one of the most modern.



Lincoln Park Zoo began with the gift of two swans in 1868, and nearly 150 years later, visitors can still see these stately birds paddling across the water. But while swans have been a constant throughout the zoo's long history, the institution that houses them has been utterly transformed.

Today's Lincoln Park Zoo is one of the most modern zoos in the country. Chimpanzees climb in lush green habitats designed to mirror their wild homes. African lions thrive under the state-of-the-art care of veterinarians and zookeepers.

Black rhinos provide insights to conservationists saving their wild cousins in South Africa. Students receive unforgettable lessons in Chicago's premier living classroom. And more than 3 million annual visitors enjoy a zoo that is free and open to all every day of the year.

Proud Past, Progressive Present

Each tour of Lincoln Park Zoo's 49 urban acres offers ample evidence of how the zoo has grown and changed since its inception. Modern buildings share space with classical landmarks, with each offering exceptional homes for the zoo's amazing animals.



History is close at hand with each stroll through the Kovler Lion House. Designed by noted Prairie Style architect Dwight Perkins in 1912, this Chicago landmark features detailed brick and terra-cotta decorations beneath an ornate, vaulted roof. African lions, Amur tigers, leopards and other big cats share this impressive space, which has been enhanced over the years with a number of outdoor expansions.

The building's male and female African lions offer a living link to their wild cousins. Zoo scientists are leading a vaccination campaign to conserve lions and other predators in the famed Serengeti ecosystem. By vaccinating the region's domestic dogs against rabies and canine distemper, researchers prevent these diseases from devastating carnivore populations. The inoculations also safeguard the health of local residents, producing an end result that benefits the entire ecosystem.

Another African animal that highlights the zoo's commitment to global conservation is the black rhino. Three of these massive mammals occupy the zoo's new Harris Family Foundation Black Rhinoceros Exhibit. These endangered herbivores enjoy mud wallows, mounds of browse and plenty of room to roam. A movable gate system makes it possible to combine adjacent yards, a necessity for future breeding plans (once the juvenile female adds a couple years and a few hundred pounds).

The zoo's black rhinos are also helping their endangered peers regain a foothold in South Africa. And they're doing it with a substance that's in plentiful supply: their feces. A field kit developed at the zoo using these prodigious piles of waste enables researchers to monitor parasites and hormonal activity in rhinos in South Africa's Addo Elephant National Park. Collected feces can provide a window into health and reproduction without disturbing the wild animals. The resulting data is crucial for recovery efforts—and possible because of research that began at Lincoln Park Zoo.



While rhino research provides a reminder of how zoos have changed, nowhere is Lincoln Park Zoo's evolution more apparent than Regenstein Center for African Apes. This state-of-the-art building offers three spacious exhibits for the zoo's gorillas and chimpanzees. Vines and platforms prompt plenty of climbing, outdoor yards encourage exploration and natural social groups promote a full range of rich behavior.

The building also provides a laboratory for learning more about our closest living relatives. Zoo scientists with the Lester E. Fisher Center for the Study and Conservation of Apes work with the animals to study ape tool-use, space-use, cognition, behavior and play. Data from the zoo is compared to information from wild sites in Africa's Gombe National Park and Goualougo Triangle. The resulting findings boost our understanding of animals and contribute to great ape conservation.

Advancing Conservation, Education and Care

A free oasis in the heart of Chicago, Lincoln Park Zoo has always introduced guests to the wonders of wildlife. But even as the zoo remains free and open to all, it has moved forward on a new commitment to educating visitors about animals and working with partners around the globe to conserve wildlife. While Lincoln Park Zoo is proud of its rich history, its greatest days continue to lie ahead.

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