

## About Us

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### **Mission Statement:**

- 1) To disseminate a knowledge of zoology and an appreciation of animal life.
  
- 2) To maintain a zoological garden where small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibian and tropical fish will be on display for observation and study.
  
- 3) Through local facilities readily accessible to all of Staten Island, to instill in children an understanding and appreciation of living creatures.
  
- 4) To provide lectures and facilities for group meetings devoted to the study of natural history.

### **History:**

#### ZOO ORIGINS A Brief History of the Zoo

In August 1933 the Staten Island Zoological Society was organized to create and administer a zoo located in Clarence T. Barrett Park on Staten Island. The formal goals of the Society articulated in the first bulletin in December 1934 have been adhered to throughout its history and are as follows:

- To disseminate a knowledge of zoology and an appreciation of animal life
- To maintain a zoological garden where small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and tropical fish will be on display for observation and study
- Through local facilities, accessible to all of Staten Island, instill in children an understanding and appreciation of living creatures
- To provide lectures and facilities for group meetings devoted to the study of natural history

Zoo construction commenced in 1933 as part of the Federal Government's works program on an eight-acre estate willed to New York City. It was opened on June 10, 1936, the first zoo in the U. S. specifically devoted to an educational mandate. The Staten Island Zoological Society was the first zoo in the country to specifically dedicate itself to fulfilling an educational mission. The Society has remained steadfast in its concentration on this goal, which is still a vital part of the Society's current mission.

The Staten Island Zoo was also the first zoo anywhere to exhibit all the 32 varieties of rattlesnakes known to occur in the United States. In the late 1960's the Zoo maintained the most complete rattlesnake collection in the world with 39 varieties. Since its opening in 1936, the Staten Island Zoo has been synonymous with snakes. This is due in great part to Carl Frederick Kauffeld, former Curator of Reptiles and Director. It was his focus on "herps" (reptiles and amphibians) and particularly rattlesnakes that brought international status to our reptile collection. Harold J. O'Connell, the organizer of the Staten Island Zoological Society and Carol Stryker, the first Director of the Zoo, shared Kauffeld's passion for herps. O'Connell and Stryker were pivotal in establishing our reptile collection and were instrumental in raising the public's consciousness of reptiles.

The Staten Island Zoo was also the first in the American zoo community to have a full time woman veterinarian on staff. In 1942 Dr. Patricia O Connor, was hired as the Zoo's veterinarian - a historic event. Dr. O Connor was also co-founder and first president of the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians and the first to serve two non-consecutive terms as president of the Association for Women Veterinarians.

Since the Zoo's opening, its human and physical resources have created this exemplary educational and recreational facility. Over the years New York City's "biggest little Zoo" evolved to accommodate the collection and serve the visiting public. The small one-building style Zoo originally designed in the 1930's had its first major renovation in 1969 when a Children's Center

was constructed. A focus group of children determined what kind of center they wanted including what kind of the animals. Designed as a farmyard, this facility focused on hands on activities for small children. After its completion the Zoo experienced a sizable increase in visitation especially among families with small children.

In the 1980's the Board of Trustees made a commitment to renovate its physical plant to reflect the new focus on environmental conservation and education. A thirty-page publication, "Developments in the 1980's," served as the blueprint for the redevelopment of the physical plant, which took place over the next twenty years. The Society spent over \$16 million to upgrade, modernize and transform 90% of the exhibits and public and staff facilities. Concurrently the educational staff was expanded and specific formal and informal curricula were developed for the education of preschool to seniors.

In 1988 the Zoo received accreditation by the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums. Paramount in developing new exhibits is the goal of providing a naturalistic setting conducive to the needs of the living collection. The objective was to provide the visitor with a simulation of how the animals live and interact in the wild. Construction of animal exhibits and visitor amenities continues into the new millennium as the Zoo expands to better serve and educate its growing visitorship.

Through effective wildlife exhibitions, promotion of species conservation, educational programs and community outreach the Society has become a powerful instrument for influencing and informing the public about the beauty, value and vulnerability of nature.