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Animal Conservation in St. Louis

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Introduction

Animal conservation is the preservation of species so that they may continue to live in the world. There are several reasons for why saving these species is important. Many animals offer ecosystem services, which include pollination, flood control, and carbon storage. Additionally, several animals act as keystone species, which are any organism that, once removed, cause an entire ecosystem to change or fall apart. Because of these reasons, more cities are starting to get involved with Animal Conservation, including St. Louis. St. Louis is home to a multitude of organizations including the St. Louis Zoo, Endangered Wolf Sanctuary, St. Louis Aquarium, and the World Bird Sanctuary. Although all of the mentioned organizations contribute to the conservation cause, they vary in just how much of their earnings go towards saving animal species.

St. Louis Zoo

Known as one of the best zoos in the world, the St. Louis Zoo is free to the public and takes up a portion of Forest Park. The organization houses a variety of species and has come to be a St. Louis favourite, in terms of entertainment.

Accomplishments

- Species survival plan (SSP) success; Bingwa bunch in 2018 raises 8 healthy and genetically diverse cubs
- Plans to expand land to "WildCare Park" as early as 2026, which will be primarily conservation
- WildCare Department involved with several outside organizations (34 total)
- Conservation success in 2020 (penguin numbers higher than in past 4 years, 1k hellbenders released into Ozark)

Critiques

- Elephant enclosure much smaller than normal habitat range (several other animals as well)
- Voted one of the worst zoo's for elephants in 2017 (8th place out of 10) primarily for elephant tuberculosis ignorance
- Systematic research revealed that average guests at zoos paused only at enclosures with babies or interesting behaviour (little education happening)
- In the 2020 annual report costs, there was no expenses labelled "entertainment" which suggests that the entertainment costs of the zoo were grouped with "conservation activities" (see image on the right)

Endangered Wolf Center

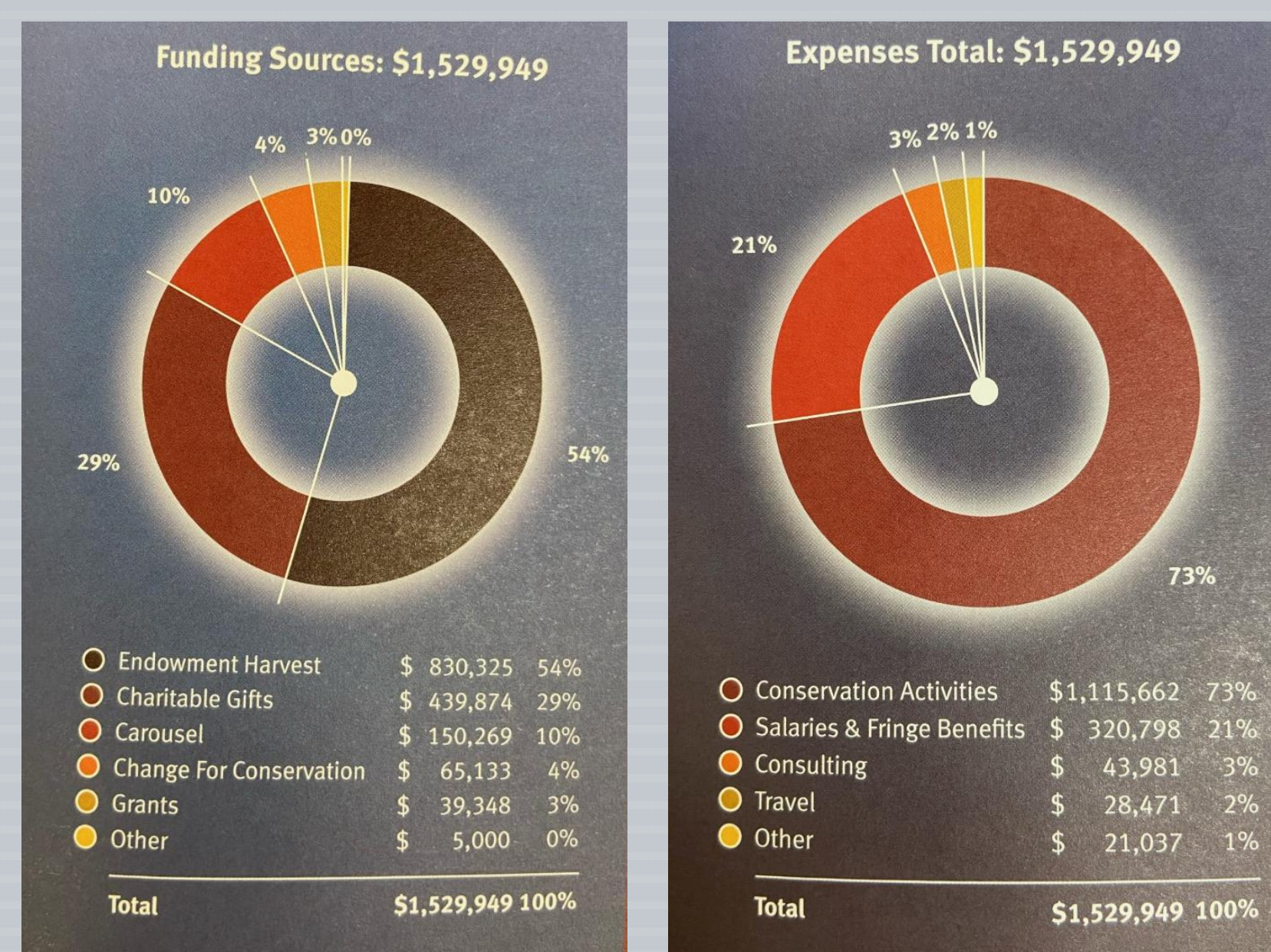
Located in Eureka, MO, since 1972, the Endangered Wolf Center (EWC) specializes in the conservation of Earth's canine species. Since their early beginnings, the EWC has continued to uphold their values and make significant steps towards their goals.

Accomplishments

- Animal Ambassadors (Daisy, Lucky, Jethro) help educate guests on why they should care about animal conservation; one kid stated that "Jethro is a nice wolf... I hope men will realize that killing wolves will cause children from ever having the experience I had" (Perkins)
- Has helped increase the Mexican grey wolf population from less than 20, to over 200 individuals
- Has fulfilled their early goal of expanding from wolves to other wild canines (painted dogs, swift foxes, maned wolves)
- Spends majority of earnings on canine conservation

Critiques

- Not as "aesthetically" pleasing as the St. Louis Zoo
- Not as many people know about the EWC (little advertising, farther away)
- No other critiques found.



Figures 1 & 2: Pie chart showing the funding and expenses of the St. Louis Zoo in 2020

St. Louis Aquarium

Although much newer than the other organizations, the St. Louis Aquarium has already stated that they will be contributing to animal conservation. Located in downtown St. Louis, the aquarium is a part of Union Station, which seeks to provide entertainment to the public.

Accomplishments

- ZoOceanarium is a famous group for managing wildlife-based centers, and will be operating the St. Louis Aquarium
- One division of the team consists entirely of marine biologists that will be dedicated to the animals
- States that the aquarium will assist animal conservation efforts (blue lobster)

Critiques

- Besides taking in the rare blue lobster (Lord Stanley,) not much animal conservation has happened (that is known in media); though the St. Louis Aquarium has had less time to do so
- Blackfish* and other documentaries show how unethical it is to keep large fish or mammals in smaller tanks than their natural habitat (see image in the upper right corner)
- The St. Louis Aquarium was made to bring tourists into downtown St. Louis, Bob O'Loughlin (CEO and chairman of Lodging Hospitality Management) describes the organization as an "entertainment complex"

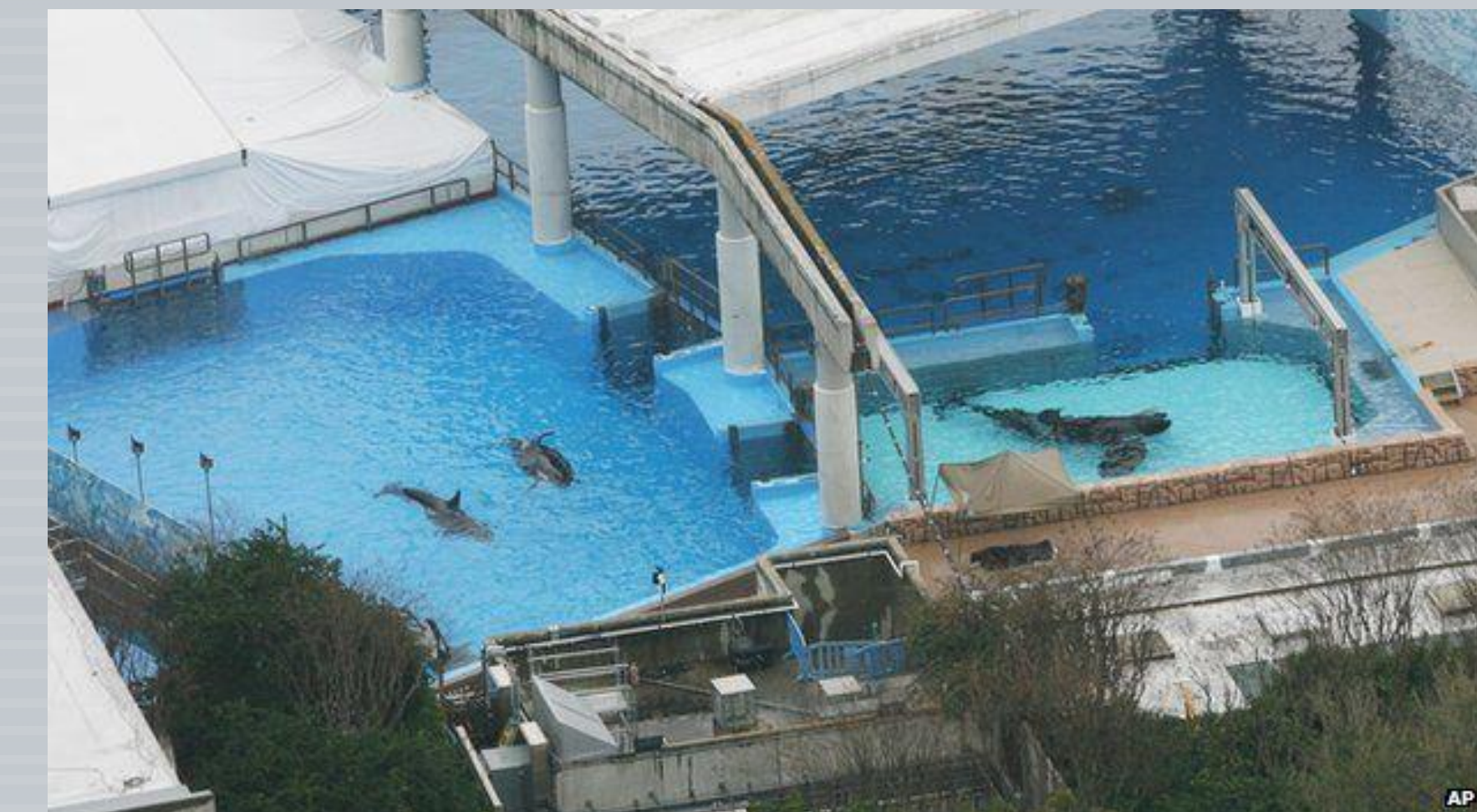


Figure 3: Picture of SeaWorld's orca enclosures, as described in the film *Blackfish*

World Bird Sanctuary

Founded by Walter C. Crawford in 1977, the World Bird Sanctuary (WBS) specializes in birds. In addition to behind-the-scenes conservation efforts, the WBS also helps nurse injured birds back to health.

Accomplishments

- WBS dedicated not only to saving birds, but also to producing sustainable habitats for the birds
- Sandhill crane mating pair at the WBS produced young, which was eventually released into the wild in North Missouri

Critiques

- Public component in medical center that allows guests to see the rehabilitating birds (much smaller in comparison with the Zoo)
- Never said that the sandhill crane reintroduction was successful, just stated that it happened
- Like the EWC, the location is farther out and not as advertised (not as many people know about it)

Conclusion

Although all of the organizations mentioned contribute to animal conservation in some way, the intensity of each contribution varies from site to site. Some place a significant portion of their funds into public entertainment, or aesthetics, while others place almost all of their earnings into animal conservation itself. For this reason, it would be best for animal conservation advocates to support the Endangered Wolf Center and the World Bird Sanctuary the most, since these organizations use almost all of their earnings on animal conservation, and less on public entertainment. Furthermore, it is encouraged that those who want to support the St. Louis Zoo or St. Louis Aquarium, do so by donating to the Zoo's affiliate field organizations and/or the AZA's species survival plans. It is important to note that all of the organizations mentioned today may grow for better or worse. But as of 2023, if guests want to make sure their money is going straight to animal conservation, then it is best to support the Endangered Wolf Center and World Bird Sanctuary, rather than the St. Louis Zoo and St. Louis Aquarium.

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