

## = Prospect Park Zoo =

The Prospect Park Zoo is a 12 @-@ acre ( 4 @.@ 9 ha ) zoo located off Flatbush Avenue on the eastern side of Prospect Park , Brooklyn , New York City . Its precursor , the Menagerie , opened in 1890 . The present facility first opened as a city zoo on July 3 , 1935 , and was part of a larger revitalization program of city parks , playgrounds and zoos initiated in 1934 by Parks Commissioner Robert Moses . It was built , in large part , through Civil Works Administration and Works Project Administration ( WPA ) labor and funding .

After 53 years of operation as a city zoo run by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation , Prospect Park Zoo closed on June 1988 for reconstruction . The closure signaled the start of a five @-@ year , \$ 37 million renovation program , that , save for the exteriors of the 1930s @-@ era buildings , completely replaced the zoo . It was rededicated on October 5 , 1993 , as the Prospect Park Wildlife Conservation Center , joining an integrated system of four zoos and one aquarium managed by the Wildlife Conservation Society ( WCS ) , all of which are accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums ( AZA ) .

The Prospect Park Zoo presently offers children 's educational programs , is engaged in restoration of endangered species populations , runs a wildlife theater and reaches out to the local community through volunteer programs . The zoo houses nearly 630 animals representing about 101 species . It averages 300 @,@ 000 visitors annually .

## = = Features = =

The Prospect Park Zoo is part of the Wildlife Conservation Society integrated network of zoos and aquaria spread throughout New York City . Located at 450 Flatbush Avenue , across from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden , the zoo is situated on a 12 @-@ acre ( 4 @.@ 9 ha ) plot somewhat lower than street level in Prospect Park . Visitors may enter through the Flatbush Avenue entrance or from within Prospect Park , near Leffert 's Homestead and the Carousel .

## = = = Exhibits = = =

The zoo presents three themed exhibition venues , each housed in a dedicated building .

## = = = = World of Animals = = = =

The World of Animals in the southern quadrant of the zoo , features the Discovery Trail . The trail begins in the World of Animals building , but visitors quickly pass to an outdoor path that winds through the southern third of the zoo . Animals from diverse corners of the globe are shown in settings not unlike their natural habitats . Visitors may find along the trail black @-@ tailed prairie dogs , porcupines , red pandas , emus , dingos , North American river otters , and other animals . Signs often ask challenging questions , reinforcing presentations made in the zoo 's Discovery Center , or alert viewers to look for signs of animal habitation . Along one part of the Discovery Trail , young visitors may crawl through " underground burrows " to observation posts roofed with clear , hemispherical observation ports . They may observe prairie dogs in the ground , right in the midst of the animals themselves .

## = = = = Animal Lifestyles = = = =

Animal Lifestyles , in the western quadrant of the zoo , features indoor habitat exhibits . Visitors in the foyer of the building are shown Life in the Water , Life in Air , and Life on Land dioramas . Each diorama holds a carefully controlled environment that features select animals . These central displays broadly relate animals to their surrounds . Exhibits featuring more specific biota branch off from the central foyer . Side exhibits center on cotton @-@ top tamarins , meerkats , emerald tree boas , dwarf mongooses , desert monitors , among others . Some of these exhibits feature critically

endangered animals . The Prospect Park Zoo is engaged in breeding species in captivity , a part of the larger wild life recovery program of the Wildlife Conservation Society .

The main Animal Lifestyles exhibit consists of a troop of hamadryas baboons . Zoo visitors may observe the troop in a large glassed @-@ in gallery which looks out into a rocky outcrop . Small caves in the outcrop lead to interior burrows where the animals may avoid inclement weather . The rear wall of the gallery illustrates common forms of baboon signalling and behavior , along with other social aspects of the animals . Ample seating allows visitors to observe the troop .

= = = Animals in our Lives = = =

Animals in our Lives in the northern quadrant of the zoo has both indoor and outdoor exhibits illustrating myriad relationships between animals and people and animal adaptations . The Animals in Art themed area occupies one side of the Animals in Our Lives building . At the art station , drawing supplies are provided , and young visitors learn to observe wildlife by taking the time to sketch it . Some animals found here have been the subjects of art through the ages , while other up @-@ close exhibits highlight the inherent beauty and form of certain species . The other side of the building showcases animals and their adaptations for a variety of survival needs . Here , visitors learn how colors help animals attract one another , blend into their surroundings or send off warning signals . A small nocturnal area showcases animals who have adapted to life at night .

A small working barn further north of the building contains the Animals in Our Lives exhibit . It is organized around a working barn with sheep , cows , goats , ducks , geese and other animals .

= = = Educational programs = = =

The zoo hosts educational venues as well as exhibits . These revolve around the Discovery Center , a building with classrooms and laboratories designed to introduce school @-@ age children to investigative practices of environmental and wildlife scientists . The Discovery Center introduces children to laboratory practices ; they learn about and use professional laboratory equipment and learn how to integrate what they observe into zoological theory . These programs are based on educational concepts developed through WIZE ( Wildlife Inquiry through Zoo Education ) , a program developed by Bronx Zoo educators .

The volunteer program at the Prospect Park Zoo engages members of the community ; it is a combination outreach and educational program for adults . Volunteer guides conduct tours for visitors , while volunteer docents augment the educational program . Docents enroll in a four @-@ month training program . Following their graduation , docents assist staff in putting on demonstrations and explaining exhibits .

= = = Facilities = = =

The zoo grounds and building exteriors were designed by Aymar Embury II . The facility consists of six red brick and lime @-@ stoned trimmed buildings grouped in a semi @-@ circular arrangement around a central courtyard with the sea lion pool occupying the center of the court . The building exteriors date to the 1930s while the interiors were built during the 1989 ? 1993 reconstruction . There is a freestanding wooden barn just north of the circular group of buildings . A set of stairs from the main entrance leads visitors down to zoo level . A small restaurant and the administrative center is immediately to the left , occupying the southeastern quadrant of the zoo . The Discovery Center is immediately to the right , occupying the northeastern quadrant of the zoo . Arrayed in front of the visitor are the three exhibit buildings , The World of Animals to the south , the Animal Lifestyles building , behind the sea lion pool directly in front of the visitor , Animals in our Lives is to the right . Visitors may view the exhibits in any order .

= = History and context = =

### == = Proposal and menagerie == =

The original 1866 proposal of Prospect Park featured a " Zoological Garden " on the western flank of the park , near the present Litchfield Villa , but the garden had not been started by the time Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux separated from the park in 1874 . This notwithstanding , a few features of the original park design did serve zoological purposes . A Wild Fowl Pond , once occupying the northern quadrant of the zoo grounds , served as a haven for water birds . A Deer Paddock , once occupying the southern quadrants of the zoo grounds , was a penned @-@ in area for deer . In addition , a flock of sheep regularly maintained the grass in the park meadows and were kept in a paddock on the eastern flank of Sullivan Hill , near the now @-@ demolished Dairy Farmhouse .

Interest in zoological gardens flowered in the last decade of the 19th century . An informal Menagerie began to take shape within Prospect Park in May 1890 when the newly appointed president of the City of Brooklyn Parks Commission , George V. Brower , donated " three young cinnamon bears . " State Treasurer Harry Adams followed with a donation of three white deer , establishing a pattern . It was mainly through donations of animals by rich or prominent individuals that the Menagerie grew . By 1893 , one observer noted that ? seven seals arrived , one buffalo , from the estate of Samuel B. Duryea , three red foxes , three bears , one sacred cow , two white deer , five red deer , seven seals , and twelve to fifteen peacocks . "

The animals were kept in pens on Sullivan Hill , situated across the East Drive from the zoo 's present location , near the sheep paddock and northeast of the Dairy Farmhouse . Of the original zoological facilities in the park , the Deer Paddock , located near the present Carousel , was converted into a meadow and the deer were moved to the new Menagerie , The Wild Fowl Pond remained , located on the east side of the park in a low area now forming the northern part of the zoo . The Menagerie continued to accrue animals in the first decades of the 20th century . These were generally donated by prominent individuals and institutions and formed a varied collection of specimens both native to North America and other regions of the world .

### == = Modern zoo creation == =

After assuming office in January 1934 , New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia tapped Robert Moses to head a newly unified Parks Department . Moses soon prepared extensive plans to reconstruct the city 's parks , renovate existing facilities and create new swimming pools , zoos , playgrounds and parks . Moses acquired substantial Civil Works Administration , and later , Works Progress Administration funding and soon embarked upon an eight @-@ year city @-@ wide construction program , relieving some of the high unemployment in New York City in this Depression year .

Plans for the new Prospect Park Zoo , prepared by Aymar Embury II , were announced in March 1934 . The area between the Wild Fowl Pond and former Deer Paddock on the east side of the park , situated across the East Drive from the Menagerie , was chosen as the site for the new zoo . Architect Embury designed a half circle of six brick buildings centered on a seal pool . Built of red brick with limestone trim , the buildings featured bas @-@ relief scenes from Rudyard Kipling 's The Jungle Book .

Five sculptors executed a total of thirteen such scenes , not only on the front and back walls of zoo buildings , but also on all four sides of both brick entrance shelters at Flatbush Avenue . However , the positioning of some of the bas @-@ reliefs makes them less accessible than others .

Dedicated on July 3 , 1935 , as the Prospect Park Zoo , the buildings constituted an integrated facility and were seen as a great improvement over the somewhat haphazardly developed Menagerie . The zoo featured an extensive bear pit , a seal pool , a lion 's house ( the current Animals in our Lives building ) an elephant 's house ( the current Animal Lifestyles building ) and a house for monkeys , birds , and horned animals ( now the World of Animals building ) . With the completion of the new zoo , The Dairy Farmhouse , sheep paddock , and Menagerie were

demolished and the sheep flock was replaced with mechanical mowers . The site of the old Menagerie has since been allowed to revert to forest land .

== Decline ==

For the next fifty years , the zoo served as a showcase of large animals from far away places , appealing to a sense of wonder . An estimated one million people visited the Prospect Park Zoo annually prior to World War II , but attendance gradually declined , reaching about a half million by the early 1980s . Around this time , the facility showed signs of deterioration . Writing in New York Magazine in late 1970 , writer Erik Sanberg @-@ Diment termed the zoo the ' rattiest ' in New York ? " in the literal sense of the word . ( I 've never been there without seeing several rodents romping in the bear lair ) " . He reported that ' Vultch ' , a Southern United States black vulture which was one of the zoo 's earliest residents " ? is still there , looking down his beak at visitors littering the walks , and celebrating his 35th anniversary in the same old cage . "

A decade later , a New York Times reporter visiting the zoo noted that " ... an Asiatic Black Bear lay on a rock a short distance from a guard rail . A shattered wine bottle , a cracked stick , and a number of empty beer cans were strewn about the ground a few feet in front of him . ' How many times have I seen a bear lift his foot and leave a bloody foot print ? ' said John Kinzig , a park supervisor at the Prospect Park Zoo . ' Vandalism is a major problem , and deterioration is overtaking repairs . ' " Activists were pressing for major renovations of the zoo , which , in 1983 , was rated by the Humane Society of the United States as one of the " 10 worst " zoos in the country . Others felt that a zoo was not in keeping with the original design of Prospect Park and urged its complete removal from the grounds . A fatal accident of an 11 @-@ year @-@ old boy scaling the fence to the polar bear pit only served to underscore difficulties with the fifty @-@ year @-@ old facility .

After fifteen years of off @-@ again , on @-@ again , conversations , The Koch Administration and the then @-@ named NY Zoological Society ( now Wildlife Conservation Society ) , signed a fifty @-@ year agreement in April 1980 , where the Central , Prospect , and Queens zoos would be administered by the Society . Specific plans for Prospect Park Zoo were another seven years in the making . By late summer 1987 , an \$ 18 million , two and a half year renovation plan was put forth to renovate Prospect Park Zoo and coordinate its venue with other facilities to avoid redundant programming . Prospect Park Zoo was slated to specialize in children programs and house smaller , unaggressive animal species .

== Renovation of a re @-@ purposed zoo ==

The Prospect Park Zoo closed to the public in June 1988 . Over the next six months , new homes were found for the displaced animals in other zoos throughout the US . Demolition was managed by the Parks Department and began in June 1989 , commencing what became nearly a five @-@ year , \$ 37 million effort , overrunning initial estimates by two years and \$ 19 million . The exteriors of the Aymar Embury buildings were preserved , but badly deteriorated interiors were gutted , pits and cages were demolished , and new structures were built . The facilities were turned over to the NY Zoological Society in April 1993 .

A further six months were needed to repopulate the zoo , prepare exhibits , and ready the facility for the public . The re @-@ purposed zoo opened on October 5 , 1993 under the rubric " Prospect Park Wildlife Conservation Center " . The Zoological Society hoped that the new name would suggest that the ' Wildlife Conservation Center ' was far more than a mere ' zoo ' ; it was indeed a facility designed to preserve animal species . This name change coincided with the renaming of the zoological society to the ' Wildlife Conservation Society ' .

The programs of the new center were geared toward educating children . Classrooms for the Discovery Center were housed in a dedicated building on the north wing of the zoo . Exhibits housed smaller species , eschewing elephants , tigers , and lions , and augmented displays with interactive exhibits . The public , however , continued to call the facility ' The Prospect Park Zoo ' ,

and over the ensuing thirteen years the old name quietly stuck . Even in WCS literature ' Prospect Park Zoo ' is now used interchangeably with the new name .

= = = Budget issues = = =

The Wildlife Conservation Society , which supports the Prospect Park Zoo through a combination of private funds and subsidies from the city , is vulnerable to funding shortfalls such as the one on April 15 , 2003 , when Mayor Michael Bloomberg published his " doomsday budget " proposal for the fiscal year beginning in July 2003 . Among other cuts to help close an overall \$ 3 @. @ 8 billion budget deficit , the Mayor proposed to cut all city funding for the Prospect Park Zoo and the Queens Zoo , as well as trim funding for the New York Aquarium and the Bronx Zoo . The two zoos were the smallest among the facilities managed by the Wildlife Conservation Society , and had the lowest annual attendance rates , approximately 200 @, @ 000 for each threatened zoo . In contrast , the Bronx Zoo boasted annual attendance of two million and the Central Park Zoo enjoyed one million visitors annually . Over the next two months , the fate of the two zoos hung in limbo while the city 's executive branch and City Council hammered out a compromise budget . While there were a number of items on the budget , the zoo closures remained among the more visible of anticipated losses .

In the middle of June , City Council Speaker Gifford Miller visited the zoo , and in a press conference outlined some of the pragmatic consequences of closure : a savings estimated by the city of \$ 6 million for both facilities that would be offset by a WCS estimated expenditure of \$ 8 million , to decommission facilities and ? on short notice ? find homes for 160 displaced animals . If the estimates were correct , reasoning went , it would be cheaper to run the zoos than to shut them down .

By the start of the new fiscal year in July 2003 , the approved budget restored a reduced funding level to the affected WCS facilities . To keep the Prospect Park and Queens Zoos open , the WCS had to close two classroom @- @ based instructional programs , lay off the supporting full- and part @- @ time instructors , and double admission fees . Funding levels for the Wildlife Conservation Society were restored in the 2007 city budget , though vulnerability to shortfalls remain . In the opening months of 2009 , the WCS itself faced the prospect of losing its fiscal year 2010 New York State funding . While not citing specifics concerning Prospect Park Zoo , the Wildlife Conservation Society reported in the NY Daily News that the proposed cuts will involve " ' layoffs [ that ] would cut across the board , ' and include ' front @- @ line workers ' in sales , groundskeeping and other positions , and include both union and nonunion positions " .

In 2007 , 234 @, @ 000 people visited the Prospect Park Zoo , a drop of 1 @, @ 000 from the 2006 level of 235 @, @ 000 . Visitation since then has shown a steady increase , with 269 @, @ 914 people visiting in 2009 .