



Photo Credit: Tracy Aviary



**ASSOCIATION  
OF ZOOS &  
AQUARIUMS**

# THE DUCK POND

Association of Zoos and Aquariums Anseriformes Taxon Advisory Group  
2024, Issue 1

## AROUND THE POND

Joanna Klass

Woodland Park Zoo

Hi everyone! My name is Joanna Klass and I am an Animal Care Manager at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, WA. I currently serve as the Co-Vice-Chair and Treasurer for the TAG, as well as the program leaders for the red-breasted goose and southern screamer SSPs. Outside of AZA, I volunteer at a waterfowl refuge and serve on the International Wild Waterfowl Association Board of Directors. Did I always know I would end up fascinated with the waterfowl world? Not really, but I should've seen the signs! While sifting through family photos several years ago, I came across some images of myself as a 7-year-old completely captivated by the Canada geese at the Milwaukee County Zoo. Friends and family would run, and I would be amazed by the tenacity of these grumpy, messy, feathered ruffians. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I took several bird-centric internships before finally landing my first full-time position as a Bird Keeper at the Caldwell Zoo in Tyler, TX. Here is where my passion for waterfowl really took off, and I thank my co-workers and curator for introducing me to caring for this diverse group of birds. Volunteering at Pinola Conservancy, attending workshops and conferences, and just getting out and meeting like-minded folks in this community have only added kindling to my bird nerdiness. So, welcome to the Waterfowl TAG, and I hope we can help you foster a love for all things Anseriformes!

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Hawaiian Goose, or nēnē  
(L & R) Photo Credit: Bill Robles

## Hawaiian Goose, or nēnē

*Branta sandvicensis*

Range: Hawaii

Program Status: TAG Monitored /  
Studbook

Program Leader: Bill Robles  
wrobles@auduboninstitute.org

**TAG Appeal:** Nēnē have a unique conservation story that should/ can be told often. Without human intervention, this species would likely have gone extinct in the 1960s. In 1962, 35 birds born and raised at Slimbridge (Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust) arrived in Hawaii to be released back into the wild. They were released across four sites on the main island and one site on Maui. Now, over fifty years since the birds were re-introduced, their numbers are above 2,000. In 2014 the first pair were spotted on a third island, having made their own way there. Fast forward to the present day, this species is mildly represented through AZA facilities and has been used in walk through aviaries and bird shows as ambassadors.

Range Map  
Photo Credit: IUCN Redlist

## SPECIES PROFILE: HAWAIIAN GOOSE, OR NĒNĒ

Land-dwelling waterfowl can be an odd way to describe a goose, but often that is how nēnē are regarded. They have less webbing on their feet than your normal duck or goose -thanks to their adaptation of living amongst the lava rocks on the Hawaiian Islands. For this reason, having a large pool in your exhibit is not a requirement for the species. Due to their small endemic range, many zoos often exhibit their nēnē in



different geographic zones. These birds mix well with all flamingo species, many ibis species, spoonbills, and many other waterfowl species. Exhibited in many ways from conservation status species to animal ambassadors to mixed species exhibits, this goose is about as versatile as they come.

Breeding and rearing of nēnē is well documented throughout AZA facilities. Documentation can be found about birds building nests in "A – Frames" and "Triangular log nests" with dried pine needles as a substrate. Generally, 3-5 white eggs are laid on consecutive days until the completion of the clutch. Males can become quite defensive during the female's incubation period. Unrelated birds can/will act semi-gregarious after the breeding season and families flock and wander together in search of food. Some facilities have had good success housing single sex flocks -males- up to 10 birds.



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Left Photo Credit: Aimee Milarski  
Right Photo Credit: Dr. Paul Rose

## FAREWELL, AND WELCOME!

The Anseriformes TAG Steering Committee wishes a happy retirement to our outgoing TAG Vice Chair, Steve Sarro. Though perhaps best known for his work with African Penguins (serving as the program leader for nearly 30 years), Steve had also been an active supporter of waterfowl programs. Previously having worked at the Brandywine, Maryland Zoo in Baltimore, Salisbury Zoo, and National Aviary, Steve's most recent position was at the Smithsonian National Zoo, where he served as a Curator for the past eleven years. At the 2024 AZA Midyear Meeting, he was presented with a lifetime achievement award in recognition for all that he has done to advance avian husbandry in AZA facilities. Happy retirement, Steve!

At the same time, we are also delighted to welcome Dr. Paul Rose as one of the TAG's newest education advisors. Dr. Rose lectures at the University of Exeter, specializing in animal behavior. He also serves as a research scientist for Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) in the UK and sits on the UK's Zoo Expert committee. We look forward to benefitting from his knowledge and experience about waterfowl, and sharing this with our AZA waterfowl community!

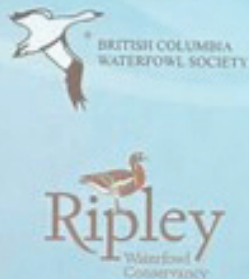
## QUESTION AND ANSWER — WATERFOWL TRIVIA

What species of waterfowl has the smallest natural geographic range of any duck species in the world?

Answer on Page 10







Panel Discussion at Woodland Park Zoo

## WORKING TOGETHER FOR WATERFOWL: THE ANSERIFORMES TAG AT THE 2024 WATERFOWL CONSERVATION WORKSHOP

Last October, the International Wild Waterfowl Association's Waterfowl Conservation Workshop (WCW) was held in Seattle, hosted by the Woodland Park Zoo. As a co-sponsors of this gathering, which brought together dozens of waterfowl professionals and hobbyists from across North America and Europe, the Anseriformes TAG was well-represented, both in the audience and at the speaker podium. Several zoo and aquarium professionals, including many members of our Steering Committee, spoke on a variety of topics, ranging from training and enrichment programs to management in extreme temperatures, from aviary construction to records management. Furthermore, we were able to take the opportunity to highlight the work that our TAG has done in the past year advancing waterfowl programs, including our conservation and professional development grants and our educational materials. In between lectures and keynote speakers, we were able to visit some excellent waterfowl facilities – both public and private – as well as see some gorgeous wild waterfowl (especially sea ducks) among the natural grandeur of the Pacific Northwest. The Seattle WCW provided an excellent networking opportunity for waterfowl enthusiasts to come together and share their knowledge of, and devotion to, the world's waterfowl (and the chance to see harlequin ducks in the wild certainly sweetened the deal even more!). We were especially pleased to see so many new faces from our zoo community attending for the first time. Here are some of the testimonials from our grant recipients, representing AZA zoos and aquariums from across the US!

*I received a grant from the Anseriformes TAG to travel from San Diego, CA to Seattle, WA for the 2023 Waterfowl Conservation Workshop at the Woodland Park Zoo. I wanted to go to this conference for the personal development opportunities and to meet fellow professionals who are as passionate about waterfowl as I am. I really enjoyed the variety of talks about all aspects of waterfowl care, especially the talks about habitat design and improvements. That really inspired me to modify our ponds and habitats to expand the usefulness of the space our waterfowl live. It was great to connect with new and old acquaintances that I look forward to communicating with them more in the future.*

- Eric Lutomski, San Diego Zoo Global

Photo Credits: Ian Shelley

Dr. Paul Rose delivering a keynote speech on waterfowl welfare





I was able to attend the 2023 Wild Waterfowl Conference this year with the support of the Waterfowl TAG grant. It was a great experience that allowed me to meet waterfowl experts from all around the world. Learning about husbandry, exhibit design, enrichment, conservation, and reproduction. Seeing multiple different waterfowl facilities gave me some new ideas and perspectives as well. I am excited to apply what I have learned towards bettering the care that I provide for the waterfowl I work with.

- Jacob Bufka, Tracy Aviary

I wanted to go to the waterfowl conference because I wanted to learn more about keeping/breeding waterfowl in human care. Getting the opportunity to meet and learn from some successful private breeders was extremely informative. The keynote speakers at the beginning and end of the conference were extremely interesting and really challenged my thoughts on welfare and collecting data. I have come away from this conference with some great ideas for breeding and a new thought process on the welfare of our animals. And who doesn't like to look at some good ducks and geese?

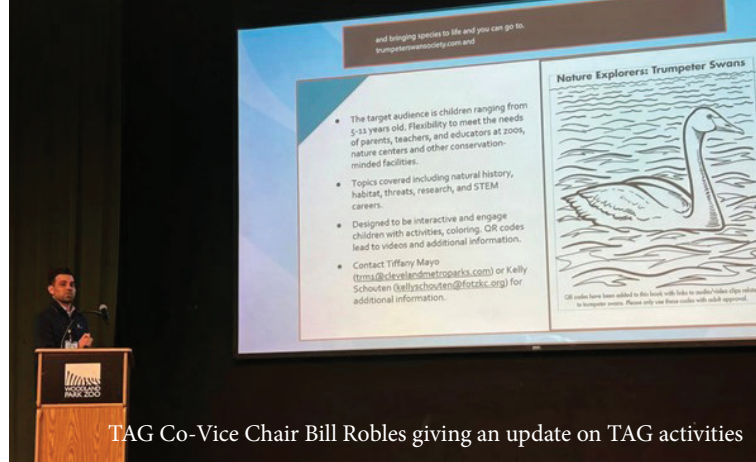
- Brice Smith, Audubon Aquarium

I was lucky enough to be able to receive a grant that allowed me to attend the 2023 Waterfowl Conservation Workshop in Seattle, hosted by the International Wild Waterfowl Association. I have only been caring for birds, specifically ducks, for about 2 years so my knowledge is not as robust as I'd like it to be. This conference was a terrific opportunity for me to expand my knowledge by learning from professionals across the world. I learned a lot of information through the two days of presentations and made even more connections that will and already have proved valuable to both my career and the animals in my care. I have already submitted or have plans in the works for a few things that will improve the welfare of the ducks in my care and can't wait to see them completed. It would not have been possible without the conference and the grant support from the Anseriformes TAG.

- Alex Peters Minnesota Zoo

I attended the IWWA Waterfowl Conservation Workshop because I had recently become a primary in charge of flamingos and ducks at my zoo. While I had a basic understanding of waterfowl, I wanted to improve my knowledge and expertise to better fulfill my new role. During the workshop, I had the opportunity to meet other waterfowl enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds, including private aviculturists, researchers, and zoo professionals. I am grateful for the connections I made and for the chance to expand my knowledge and understanding of these wonderful birds.

- Nicole Davis, Dallas Zoo



TAG Co-Vice Chair Bill Robles giving an update on TAG activities



Wetlands Aviary at Woodland Park Zoo



TAG Secretary Ian Shelley  
with a spectacled eider  
Photo Credit: Carolyn Kraemer



# It Takes a Village: The Story of an Injured Trumpeter Swan and How She Found Her Forever Home Just in the Nick of Time

Tiffany Mayo

AZA Trumpeter Swan Program Leader, Cleveland  
Metroparks Zoo, Cleveland, Ohio

Laura Atwood

Executive Director, Bird Treatment and Learning Center,  
Anchorage, Alaska

Maggie Watson, Animal Programs Coordinator

Tim Jasinski, Wildlife Rehabilitation Specialist

Lake Erie Nature & Science Center, Bay Village, Ohio

Mallory Balmert, Avian Lead Keeper, Akron Zoo, Akron, Ohio

Trumpeter swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) are the largest waterfowl in North America and were once abundant throughout the northern United States and Canada. Due to extensive market hunting for their meat, skin and feathers, trumpeter swans nearly went extinct by the early 1900's. They were then protected, and collective efforts began to bring back this iconic species. With the help of Federal and State agencies, zoos, organizations like The Trumpeter Swan Society and local citizens, trumpeter swans have made a tremendous comeback. Restoration efforts are still ongoing, and they now inhabit about one-third of their historic home range. Even though their story is considered a success, trumpeter swans are still susceptible to threats such as power line collisions, lead poisoning, illegal hunting, pollution, and habitat loss (Matteson et al, 1995).

There are times when wild trumpeter swans are injured and reported by citizens. The injured swans may be admitted to a rehabilitation facility to recover with the goal of releasing them back into the wild. Depending on the situation, some individuals may be deemed non-releasable. In these cases, the swans may have to be euthanized, or if possible, placed in a managed setting like a zoo, nature center or sanctuary. These non-releasable birds then become ambassadors for their species and help teach people about the importance of protecting animals and the environment.

This next story is about the journey of one injured trumpeter swan in Alaska and how



Above: Lady Swan in her enclosure  
at Bird TLC in Anchorage, Alaska.  
Photo Credit: Bird TLC

Below Left: Lady Swan at Bird TLC  
in Anchorage, Alaska with a mirror  
in her enclosure to create a sense of  
another swan presence.  
Photo credit: Bird TLC

Below Right: Lady Swan arriving at  
Lake Erie Nature and Science Center  
from Alaska with Katie Thorman,  
Rehabilitation Assistant from Bird  
TLC, her mother who helped with  
transport, and Maggie Watson,  
Animal Programs Coordinator at the  
Nature Center.  
Photo credit: Tiffany Mayo



she found a home almost 4,000 miles away at the Akron Zoo in Ohio. As you will see, it took a community effort of many different people and organizations to provide a successful conclusion to this swan's story.

The story began last fall on Lake Lucille in Wasilla, Alaska, about an hour northeast of Anchorage. Local citizens noticed a trumpeter swan on the lake which could not fly. The community watched after her and worried about her.

Community members contacted Bird Treatment and Learning Center (Bird TLC) in Anchorage and Alaska WildBird in Houston, AK, asking what either rehabilitation facility could do to help this swan. Alaska WildBird agreed to try to capture the swan, and Bird TLC agreed to take the swan in and assess her situation.

The swan had become habituated to people, so she was easy to lure with food into a garage. Alaska WildBird placed her in a kennel and transported her to Bird TLC, where Dr. Karen Higgs, Avian Care Director and Veterinarian, examined her. Dr. Higgs found that her left wing had been broken and then fused in place, which prevented her from flying. Bird TLC housed the swan in a quarantine area for waterfowl and volunteers began the daily tasks of caring for her while a search for placement was launched. They even had a volunteer offer to cover the cost of the relocation of the bird if placement was found.

Alaska WildBird knew of a facility in Washington that was interested in a male swan as a companion to their female. However, biologists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) determined that the injured swan was a second-year female, so the search continued.

Tasha DiMarzio, Fish and Wildlife Biologist with ADF&G contacted Tiffany Mayo, Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Trumpeter Swan Species Survival Plan (SSP) Coordinator, hoping Tiffany could help find a permanent home for the swan. In her SSP position, Tiffany helps manage the AZA Zoological population of trumpeter swans in North America along with coordinating conservation and education efforts. She put the word out to other zoos to see if there was interest, but time was limited due to the water freezing soon in Alaska. A home needed to be found for this swan and fast.

In the meantime, volunteers at Bird TLC discovered that "Lady Swan," as they called her, appeared lonely. She seemed more comfortable in the company of humans, so volunteers spent as much time with her as possible and placed a mirror in her enclosure so she could see "another" swan.

On October 12, 2023, a month after Lady Swan arrived at Bird TLC, placement for the swan was found. Shane Good, Senior Director of Animal Care at the Akron Zoo, said they would be thrilled to give the swan a home as they were actively searching for a swan species to add to their waterfowl habitat. The Akron Zoo was researching which species of swan could be a good fit for their waterfowl habitat when the call came about Lady Swan. When transferring an animal to an AZA Zoo, there is a process that involves meetings with the leadership team and paperwork to ensure the animal and facility are a good match. This process usually takes several weeks or longer. Due to the urgent nature of the situation, Shane was tasked with coordinating the logistics at warp speed. Luckily, everyone at Akron Zoo felt strongly that this swan needed to find a home as soon as possible and that the Zoo could provide the right environment for her to thrive. In addition, having a local species that was once extinct from Ohio and now restored would inspire visitors to learn about trumpeter swans and their conservation story.

Even though things were moving along with the transfer, time was running out. The swan needed to move faster than anticipated so a local rehabilitation facility was contacted to help. Lake Erie Nature & Science Center in Bay Village, Ohio, stepped up and offered to hold the swan until Akron Zoo was ready to receive her. It looked like everything was falling into place as both Ohio facilities prepared for the swan's arrival.

Then on October 16, 2023, the staff at Lake Erie Nature & Science Center received some last-minute news that Alaska Airlines would not be flying out animals for at least a week, so the swan needed to get on a flight by the next day. The team at the Nature Center did not skip a beat and made sure they were available to receive the swan on short notice. On October 17, Lady Swan was booked on an Alaska Airlines cargo flight to Cleveland, Ohio, which left at 2:55 AM. Bird TLC's Rehabilitation Assistant, Katie Thorman, was booked on another Alaska Airlines flight that would put her in Cleveland before Lady Swan arrived.

An Ohio native, Katie had family nearby, so she enlisted her mother to meet her and the swan at the airport and drive them to the Nature Center. Thanks to Katie's mom, Lady Swan arrived safely at the Nature Center, the first stop on her way to her new home at Akron Zoo. Lake Erie Nature & Science Center staff including Tim Jasinski, Wildlife Rehabilitation Specialist, Maggie Watson, Animal Programs Coordinator, Kyle Koprowski, Lead Wildlife Specialist as well as Tiffany Mayo were able to meet Katie and her mom on the night of October 17th to get the swan settled in her temporary home. It took her some time to exit the crate, but with Katie's reassurance, Lady Swan came out and immediately took a drink of water from her new pool. Katie and the rest of the crew were able to spend some time with her and as everyone left the enclosure she vocalized and was finally able to rest after her long day of travels.

Lake Erie Nature & Science Center specializes in the rehabilitation of waterfowl and water birds. In 2023, they admitted close to 600 waterfowl and water birds, including ducks, geese, gulls, swans and more. This made the Nature Center an ideal temporary home



for Lady Swan. Although the rehabilitation protocols for patients are quite different than the practices for permanent residents, the Nature Center works with both permanent residents and animals in need of rehabilitation. The Nature Center's rehabilitation facility is set up for the safe and successful care of wild animals that are there temporarily, but the staff are also equipped to train and interact with resident animals. This combination of resources provided a perfect link from rehabilitation facility to zoo. And the staff was ecstatic to temporarily house Lady Swan even on short notice – it is what they are accustomed to.

The first morning of her week-long stay, Lady Swan was already calm and comfortable as she swam and ate. So comfortable in fact that she was following staff around as they cleaned her enclosure. Her trumpets of “hello” could be heard by staff, volunteers, and guests, and brought big smiles to see such a large, beautiful bird. Her motivation to be near people was viewed as a training opportunity. A scale was brought near her. With the encouragement of staff and the reward of fresh greens and mealworms in sight, Lady Swan stepped onto the scale within minutes, revealing a healthy weight of 20 pounds. The week flew by. Although her time at the Nature Center was short, her impact on the guests and staff will last long.

On October 24, 2023, Lady Swan arrived at her final stop, Akron Zoo. She underwent a standard quarantine period where she was housed in the veterinary clinic in a space with indoor/outdoor access and a large pool. She immediately took to the hospital keepers and spent time with her swan “buddy” in the reflection of a mirror given for enrichment. Avian keepers would spend time with her and started to build a relationship with her while she was in quarantine. The team was incredibly excited about adding this species back to the collection, particularly since Lady Swan had such a friendly personality. Before taking over her care, the



team was already brainstorming training projects, enrichment ideas, and potential names for this special swan.

After receiving over 15 potential name ideas from different team members, the Avian team voted on the name Sakari for her. Sakari (suh-car-ee) means “sweet” in Iñupiaq, which is one of the languages of the Inuit, the Indigenous peoples in Alaska. The team thought it was fitting based on her sweet personality. Knowing that she is a social lady, the Akron Zoo wanted to acquire another female trumpeter swan as a companion for her. The SSP was once again able to find a fitting individual and Ila was acquired on January 24, 2024.

Ila (eye-luh) is an Alaska Inuit name meaning “companion” and the Avian Team felt that would be a suitable name for the new swan being acquired from Livingston Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy. Ila was a young female, just over six months of age when she arrived, and the hope was for her and Sakari to form a bond when Ila finished her quarantine.

Before Ila's arrival at the Akron Zoo, Sakari moved out to her new home at the Akron Zoo's Legends of the Wild Waterfowl Pond on December 21, 2023. This allowed her to get outside in a more natural environment and be with other waterfowl. The Waterfowl Pond was already home to 18 ducks, representing six different species. The pond has a variety of substrates and water levels, which provides a diverse habitat for each species to utilize. Sakari was able to walk calmly out of her crate into the pond and started exploring immediately. On her first day, she took many baths and was seen wading, swimming, foraging, exploring all parts of the habitat, and of course trumpeting. Her keepers kept a close eye on her to see how she would adjust to the new environment and to make sure she could safely traverse the terrain, get in and out of the pond, and navigate under the bridge that separates the two halves of the pond. She passed all her milestones with flying colors and seemed to be comfortable around her new duck friends as well. Most of the ducks seemed unfazed by her presence and adjusted quickly to her being there.

Katie Thorman, Rehabilitation Assistant at Bird TLC, coaxing Lady Swan out of her crate when she arrived at Lake Erie Nature & Science Center. Photo Credit: Tiffany Mayo



Sakari stretching her wings in her new exhibit at Akron Zoo.  
Photo credit: Mallory Balmert



The Introduction of Sakari to her new companion, Ila, at Akron Zoo.  
Photo credit: Jena Pugliese



Lady Swan voluntarily getting on a scale for staff at Lake Erie Nature & Science Center.  
Photo credit: Lake Erie Nature & Science Center



Avian keepers quickly started to adjust their routines to accommodate Sakari's needs, such as increasing the frequency and complexity of enrichment given on the Waterfowl Pond, conducting daily relationship sessions with her, adjusting and adding shelters, and finding out Sakari's favorite snacks. Sakari would often follow keepers around as they cleaned, and trumpet at them or guests as they walked by. Unsurprisingly, Sakari was an instant fan-favorite with many guests stopping to say hello, ask questions about her, and observe this beautiful bird. With that big step out of the way, the only thing left was to add Ila! After passing her quarantine period, Ila was moved out to the Pond on February 10, 2024. Sakari was slightly hesitant at first, but Ila was insistent that she wanted to be near another swan. Within hours, the two swans were swimming, eating, and resting together. Both swans are now inseparable and call to each other constantly when they happen to move beyond the other's line of sight.

If it were not for this network of citizens, biologists, rehabilitators, and zoo staff working together, this swan's story could have looked quite different. Luckily for Sakari and other swans like her, the quick action and collaborative effort in these situations gives these swans a second chance at life and an opportunity for visitors to learn about these beautiful birds.

Lady Swan getting ready for her final trip to her forever home at Akron Zoo with Tim Jasinski, Wildlife Rehabilitation Specialist at the Nature Center, and Shane Good, Senior Director at Akron Zoo. Photo Credit: Lake Erie Nature & Science Center



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Newly named Sakari (meaning "sweet" in Iñupiaq) being introduced to her new enclosure at Akron Zoo.  
Photo Credit: Mallory Balmert



## ANSERIFORMES TAG MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the AZA Anseriformes Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) is to provide leadership in the captive management of ducks, geese, swans, and screamers in North America. The TAG is committed to maintaining sustainable captive populations, improving the welfare of waterfowl within AZA, and raising awareness for conservation of waterfowl worldwide.



## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE!

### ANSERIFORMES TAG GRANTS

Would you like to expand your knowledge of waterfowl care and husbandry? Do you have a vision for how to make a difference towards the conservation of ducks, geese, swans, or screamers in the wild? Do you wish you could do more for waterfowl, but don't know where to begin?

Here is your chance!

The AZA Anseriformes TAG is pleased to be offering not one, but two grants in the amount of up to \$500 US each. One grant is designated for Conservation and Research, the other one is for Professional Development.

For application materials, or to request more information, please contact TAG Steering Committee members Joanna Klass ([Joanna.Klass@Zoo.org](mailto:Joanna.Klass@Zoo.org)) and/or Ian Shelley ([ian.shelley@marylandzoo.org](mailto:ian.shelley@marylandzoo.org)).

Applications are accepted on a rolling annual basis.

## Trivia Anser: Laysan Teal



Photo Credit: Ian Gereg