



NEWS RELEASE

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Santa Barbara Zoo Breaks Ground “Down Under”

Zoo begins construction on the Australian Walkabout, an immersive exhibit featuring iconic Australian species & focusing on wildlife conservation

(November 19, 2020) Santa Barbara, CA - The [Santa Barbara Zoo](#) has begun construction on its newest exhibit, the [Australian Walkabout](#), a 15,000 square-foot habitat designed to transport guests “Down Under,” where they can walk among the wallabies, kangaroos, emus, and native birds. The Australian Walkabout exhibit is anticipated to open to the public in the summer of 2021.

Australia is one of the most breathtakingly beautiful and biodiverse countries on the planet, and home to nearly 150,000 species of plants and animals, many of which are found nowhere else in the world. Unfortunately, due to climate change, drought, fires, habitat loss, and non-native predators, the continent currently has one of the most rapid rates of mammal extinctions worldwide.

“The recent megafires in Australia devastated enormous swaths of unique habitat and displaced or cost the lives of an estimated almost 3 billion animals which include native mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs,” explains Dr. Julie Barnes, native Australian and Vice President of Animal Care & Health of the Santa Barbara Zoo. “While the full extent of the long-term impact on the country's biodiversity as a result of these devastating bushfires is unknown, there is no doubt that many native species are at increased risk of extinction or becoming threatened due to habitat loss. This new exhibit will do more than connect people with unique wildlife, it also represents an ongoing connection between our community and dedicated conservation efforts in Australia.”

“Part of the Zoo’s mission is to call attention to the wonders of wildlife and the importance of its conservation,” shared Rich Block, President & CEO of the Santa Barbara Zoo. “The new Australian Walkabout is an adventure aimed to serve as a reminder to us all to take care of the planet’s living treasures...across the world and in our own backyards.”

The Australian Walkabout will be located in the former elephant exhibit space where the Zoo’s Asian elephants, Sujatha and Little Mac, spent 45 years together until their passing in 2018 and

2019, respectively. The new exhibit is specifically designed to put guests right in the middle of the action, exploring open pathways, beautiful landscapes, and seeing some of the most iconic and unique wildlife representatives from the continent of Australia, including emus, kangaroos, and wallabies, in addition to birds native to Australia.

Standing at around six feet tall, emus are the tallest native bird in Australia and the second tallest living bird in the world (after Africa's ostrich). These flightless avian speedsters can sprint up to 31 miles per hour, traveling great distances on their long legs to forage for a variety of plants and insects.

Bennett's wallaby is a medium-sized marsupial found along the eastern coast of Australia and on the island of Tasmania. Adults can weigh between 30 and 40 pounds and stand about three feet tall, with males being slightly larger than the females. Their native habitat ranges from eucalyptus forests to open areas adjacent to forests.

Western grey kangaroos are in the family of marsupials called Macropodidae ("big foot"), a family of 50 species that includes kangaroos and wallabies, among others. Adult Western grey males weigh in at around 120 pounds, and the females weigh in at around 60 pounds, making them one of the largest macropods.

Two aviaries are also planned to adjoin the exhibit, where guests will have the chance to meet three species of native Australian birds, including the sulphur-crested cockatoo, tawny frogmouth, and laughing kookaburra.

Along with creating a "closer" guest experience, the exhibit will provide opportunities to learn about Australian wildlife and conservation. The Zoo is also working with a representative from the Aboriginal nations to incorporate Aboriginal culture and language into the exhibit. This gives the organization an opportunity to not only be inclusive and respectful but also deepen the story of the exhibit, the country, and the animals for guests.

The Zoo continues to fundraise nearly \$3 million for the Australian Walkabout and the public is invited to contribute. All donors who give \$1,000+ will be recognized on a donor recognition wall at the Zoo. In addition, naming opportunities are available at the \$10,000+ giving level. For more about this giving opportunity, [click here](#) or contact Elaine K. Mah Best, Vice President of Advancement & Marketing at emahbest@sbzoo.org.

About The Santa Barbara Zoo

The Santa Barbara Zoo is open with limited capacity. Online ticket reservations are now required for all guests, including Zoo Members, available at www.sbzoo.org. Known as one of the world's most beautiful zoos, the Santa Barbara Zoo is located on 30 acres of botanic gardens and is home to more than 500 individual animals in open, naturalistic habitats. The

Santa Barbara Zoo is accredited by the [Association of Zoos & Aquariums](#) (AZA), representing the highest level of animal care, and participates in AZA endangered species programs for Masai giraffe, California condor, island fox, and Western lowland gorilla, among others. As a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, the Santa Barbara Zoo depends on community support, not tax dollars, for operations and improvements. Visit [sbzoo.org](#).

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