



WHITE OAK
CONSERVATION

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



FROM THE
DIRECTOR

03

WILDLIFE

04

LAND
STEWARDSHIP

08

ELEPHANTS MAKE
THEIR FINAL MOVE

06

BAT UPDATE

08

SUSTAINABILITY

09

EDUCATION

10

GUESTS
AND TOURS

11

SAVING
ENDANGERED
SPECIES AND
WILD PLACES

12

WOOF

13

THE YEAR THAT
WAS

14

Contents



From the Director

2020 WAS A YEAR THAT MANY WOULD like to forget. Our hearts go out to the millions of families around the world who experienced the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of loved ones. The virus also affected some White Oak Conservation team members and created anxiety in nearly every household. Throughout the pandemic, the Walter family has continued their unwavering support for the White Oak team and our conservation programs.

The most exciting project was the construction of the new elephant facility at White Oak. Starting in June we worked with local contractors to design and build the first phase of the project, which includes a barn for inclement weather and a large habitat and pond. This was an important next step as we now create the largest and best elephant facility of its kind in North America, and a peaceful home and sanctuary for former performing elephants.

Despite the challenges we remain dedicated to wildlife conservation on many fronts. The following pages of the 2020 Annual Report highlight the efforts of our team to sustain our wildlife recovery and habitat management achievements. We are steadfast in our commitment to saving endangered wildlife and preserving the places they call home, both here at White Oak and around the world.

We thank you and encourage your continued support of this incredible journey together. There is hope for the future of wildlife at White Oak Conservation.

Wildlife

THANKFULLY, THE ANIMALS

at White Oak never noticed that there was a global pandemic, and all are safe and sound, along with the very busy Wildlife team.

In January, two male Florida panthers arrived at White Oak. The brothers were brought into human care by Florida Wildlife Commission biologists after their mother was observed on trail cameras struggling to walk, the result of a disorder that was affecting other panthers and bobcats in the region. The panther kittens were estimated to be two weeks old and would not have survived on their own, so the decision was made to bring them into human care at Zoo Tampa for intensive care and observation. When the kittens were six months old, the healthy cats were transported to White Oak and released into their new habitat.

It is estimated there are only 200 panthers left in the wild. Since 1986, White Oak has worked with Florida wildlife officials to rehabilitate and release 19 panthers back into the wild. Although these two panthers will not be released, having been raised in human care, they are welcome 'ambassadors' to our program.

2
male Florida
panthers
arrived at White
Oak in January

In early 2020, we welcomed two female tigers that were rescued from a private facility in Texas. The tigers arrived at White Oak in March and settled into their new home quickly. They could soon be seen chasing each other around their habitat and enjoying their pool.

In August, a male black rhino was born at White Oak. He is the ninth black rhino calf born here and his birth represents new genetics to the black rhino population in the U.S. Needless to say, he was a welcome addition to the rhinos here at White Oak.

White Oak continues to participate with federal recovery programs

for wild populations of Florida grasshopper sparrows and Mississippi sandhill cranes. By the year's end, 128 Florida grasshopper sparrows and 6 Mississippi sandhill cranes, all raised at White Oak, were released into protected areas in both states. The grasshopper sparrows were transported for release to the prairies of southern Florida at Three Lakes Wildlife Refuge; the cranes were released into the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge. Both of these critically endangered species have benefitted immensely from the conservation breeding being done here at White Oak.



The Hoofstock Team was busy in 2020. There was a total of 64 births among the antelope, buffalo, giraffes, okapi, and zebras. The Grevy's zebra herd increased by five: three males and two females. They even made the local news!





Each elephant will have the ability to choose where and what they want to do on a daily basis. The ability to let the elephants roam in such a large space is wonderful for them and their wellness.

NICK NEWBY
Elephant Program Manager



Elephants Make Their Final Move

IN 2016, WHITE OAK ACQUIRED 33 ASIAN elephants. New habitats for them are under construction at White Oak, and the first phase was finished in early 2021. The new habitats will give the elephants room to wander, exercise, bathe and forage. At this time, the first elephant herd has arrived and they are enjoying 135 acres of grassland, wooded areas and a waterhole deep enough to allow them to swim.

Land Stewardship



ONE OF THE PRIORITIES of White Oak Conservation is responsible land stewardship. To that end, White Oak follows best practices for land management, including seasonal prescribed burns and planting native longleaf pine trees in areas that were previously under forestry

management. The results are already being noticed with increased sightings of protected species such as fox squirrels, red-headed woodpeckers, and swallow-tailed kites. Wild turkey and white-tailed deer are taking advantage of

established food plots and gopher tortoises (a protected species in Florida) have expanded their colonies. Along with expanding their ranges, the tortoises are helping the over 350 species that rely on them for shelter in the burrows.

Bat Update

In the past few years, White Oak has installed new bat houses around the property. One large bat house has new residents! Our local bat expert and member of the Florida Bat Working Group, Melissa Meyer, says it's "full of little bat faces". The house is designed to hold up to 4,000 Southeastern Myotis and Brazilian free-tail bats! We counted 3,993.



There are eight species of bats known to call White Oak's habitats home. Some reside in bat houses. Others prefer more naturalistic surroundings. Occasionally, bats may find themselves in places that are not ideal, like barns or storage buildings. That is when Melissa gently relocates them to another place, like this Rafinesque's Big-Eared bat she relocated from a storage shed to a quieter, more 'bat-friendly' site.

Sustainability

THE MISSION OF WHITE OAK Conservation is to "Save endangered wildlife and habitats through sustainable conservation breeding, education and responsible land stewardship." We recognize that in order to serve our mission, we need to operate daily in a sustainable manner, spanning all 17,000 acres.

Led by a Sustainability Team comprised of representatives of all departments, White Oak has committed to infusing green practices into our daily routines.

The White Oak Culinary Department plays its part by maintaining multiple gardens in which they harvest ingredients for their amazing creations. By using organic and local ingredients, we reduce the amount of chemicals entering the environment, as well as the impact of transporting food. The Culinary Team also manages two apiaries (beehives) at White Oak, harvesting the honey to share with guests and to use in their daily preparations.



//
Working with your team is always delightful. They all seem to truly want to promote conservation to our students and it is evident. It is also rejuvenating for us as faculty to see a team as dedicated to caring that our students have a meaningful experience. "

TINA SACHS
Science Teacher, St. John's
Country Day School

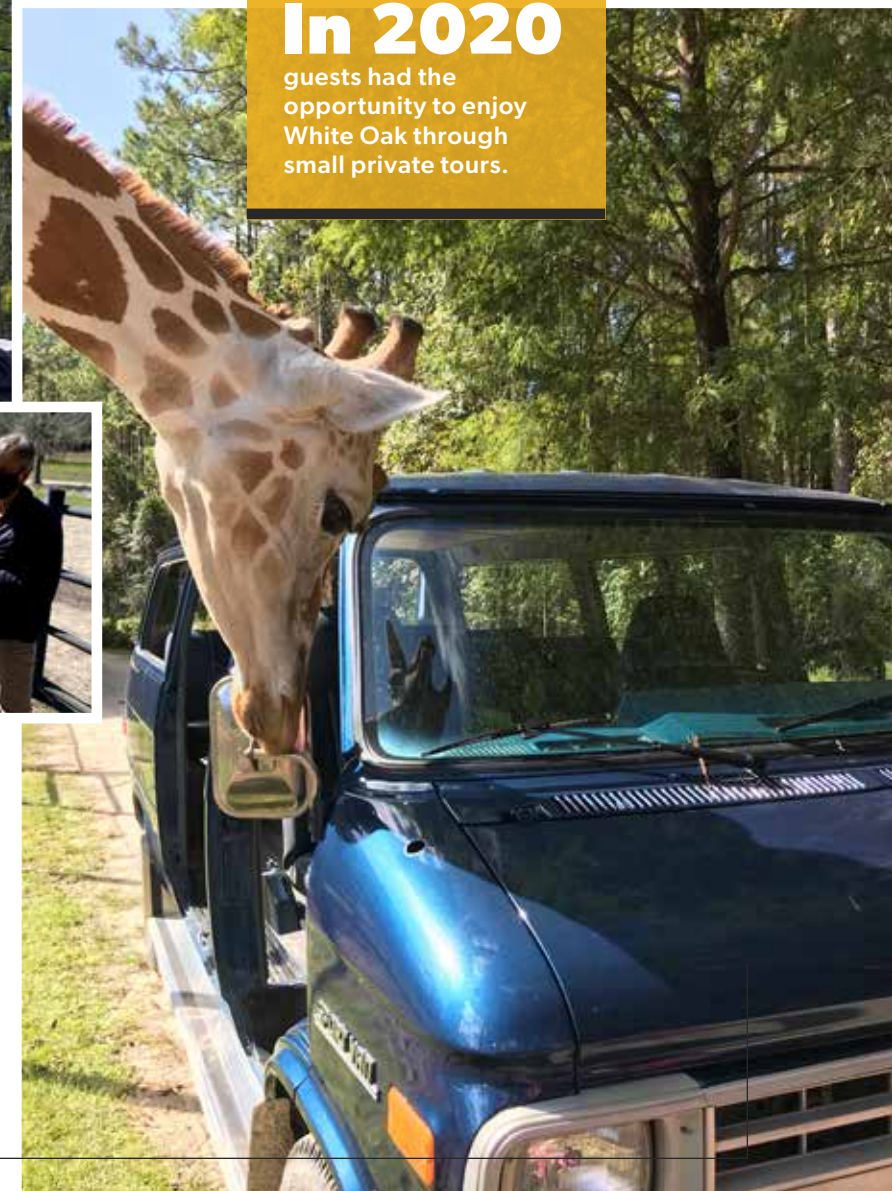
Guests And Tours

THE CHALLENGES OF 2020, including social distancing, led to some new ideas on how we could continue to provide opportunities for guests to visit us while keeping them and our teams safe. Our tour teams rose to the occasion, and guests had the opportunity to enjoy White Oak through small private tours. The tours were a huge success, and we anticipate that the model will continue to be popular in years to come. Many thanks to our guides for taking good care of our guests and being great ambassadors for White Oak and our conservation programs.



In 2020

guests had the opportunity to enjoy White Oak through small private tours.



//
It was amazing!! Far exceeded our expectations, such an amazing place. Thank you! We make donations every year in December and White Oak is on my list now to donate to yearly.

WHITE OAK GUEST

Education

WITH THE CONSTRAINTS of COVID-19 in 2020, the Education Department became creative in its efforts to continue to reach out to and engage students of all ages. Conservation Summer Camps were postponed after three weeks, and later in the year the Education Team moved to Day Camps that were a success. Day Campers engaged in special activities such as getting up close to a babirusa as well as learning about what it takes to care for giraffes. They also participated in a scent enrichment exercise for the tigers. Virtual classrooms were also a part of the department's 2020 school year and they were able to reach 300 students in 12 partner schools, teaching about Florida panthers and pollinators among other topics. The internship programs for college-age students were minimally impacted by COVID-19 and 28 students were able to participate in 2020.

Saving Endangered Species And Wild Places

THROUGH WALTER CONSERVATION, the Walter family conserves rare species and wild places around the world. Efforts include improving the quality of life of individual animals, recovering rare species, restoring ecosystems, and protecting wilderness areas. Thus far, their philanthropy supports important areas in North America and Africa. The Walter Conservation approach is to provide wildlife security and management, to collaborate with local residents and host-country governments and to invest in sustainable enterprises.



Besides White Oak, Walter Conservation supports efforts in Zimbabwe and Namibia and here at home at the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago and Chimp Haven in Louisiana.



Join
the herd

White Oak Conservation Foundation

THE WORK DONE AT WHITE OAK CONSERVATION - from elephant care to K-12 education - is funded by White Oak Conservation Foundation (WOCF). WOCF is a 501c3 nonprofit organization committed to preserving and protecting wildlife and habitats at White Oak, and inspiring the next generation of conservationists.

We are grateful to our donors, tour guests and partners who support WOCF, allowing the work described in this report to be done. Every dollar given makes a direct impact, and we rely on the philanthropic generosity of wildlife lovers to continue to Conserve, Protect and Educate.

If you would like to learn about supporting WOCF, please email donate@white-oak.org or call 904-225-3383.

Donate Now

The Year that Was





THROUGHOUT 2020 the various teams at White Oak stayed busy, catching up on projects, helping in areas outside their departments, and supporting each other during an unusual time. #teamwhiteoak





CONNECT WITH US

www.whiteoakwildlife.org
904.225.3200
581705 White Oak Road
Yulee, Florida 32097

 [whiteoakwildlife](https://www.facebook.com/whiteoakwildlife)
 [@whiteoakconservation](https://www.instagram.com/whiteoakconservation)

*White Oak's annual report was printed
sustainably on recycled paper.*