

Conference Program

Performing Animal
Welfare Society (PAWS)
presents

**2026 INTERNATIONAL
CAPTIVE WILDLIFE CONFERENCE**

October 2-3

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA



2026 PAWS International Captive Wildlife Conference

October 2-3, 2026 • Sacramento, California

DAY ONE: Friday, October 2

Check-in Begins at 7:45 a.m.

8:45 to 9:00 a.m.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Catherine Doyle | *Director of Science, Research and Public Policy, PAWS*

Ed Stewart | *Co-founder and President of the Board, PAWS*

Morning Session

9:00 to 9:30 a.m.

Animal Hustlers: Revealing the Trafficking of Big Cats in Zoos in Eastern Europe

Michael Bird, Ovidiu Dunel-Stanco, DVM | *Investigative Journalists/Filmmakers at
Wild at Heart Association*

9:30 to 10:00 a.m.

Captive Ambassadors: The Hidden Cost for Zoo Animals

Eve D’Vincent | *Author, Captive Ambassadors*

BREAK | 10:00 to 10:15 a.m.

Sponsored by Kerr Family Foundation

10:15 to 10:45 a.m.

The Line in the Sand: Placing Animal Interests Above Human Entertainment

Brett Mitchell | *Co-founder and Director, WildChoices NPC; Founder and Chair,
Elephant Reintegration Trust*

10:45 to 11:30 a.m.

Stolen From the Canopy: The Growing Global Trade in Sloths for Tourism and Entertainment

Laura Hagen | *Managing Director-Wildlife, Humane World for Animals*

Grettel Delgadillo Molino | *Director, Programs and Policy, Latin America,
Humane World for Animals-Costa Rica/Latin America*

11:30 a.m. to Noon

Turning Evidence into Policy Change: Strategies and Lessons from the Campaign to Ban Animal Interactions at Zoos in South Korea

Hyung Ju Lee | *Founder and CEO, AWARE*
(*Animal Welfare Awareness, Research and Education*)

LUNCH | Noon to 1:00 p.m.

Sponsored by Humane World for Animals

Afternoon Session

1:00 to 1:30 p.m.

The Price of Proximity: Tackling the Wild Animal Encounter Crisis

Debbie Metzler | *Managing Director of Captive Animal Welfare, PETA Foundation*

1:30 to 2:10 p.m.

The Captive Primate Safety Act and the Fight to End the U.S. Pet Primate Trade

Kate Dylewsky | *Assistant Director, Government Affairs, Animal Welfare Institute*

Primates for Purchase: Social Media's Role in the Captive Primate Trade

Carson Barylak | *Senior Campaigns Manager, International Fund for Animal Welfare*

2:10 to 2:40 p.m.

Factory Farmed: Inside U.S. Parrot Mills

Liz Cabrera Holtz | *Senior Campaign Manager, World Animal Protection*

BREAK | 2:40 to 3:00 p.m.

Sponsored by PETA

3:00 to 3:30 p.m.

Laying the Groundwork for a Cetacean Sanctuary Movement

Lori Marino | *President, Whale Sanctuary Project*

3:30 to 4:00 p.m.

The Battle to Rescue America's Captive Big Cats

Carol Bradley | *Author, "Striped Reckoning: Tiger Kings and the Battle to Rescue America's Captive Big Cats"*

4:00 to 4:20 p.m.

A New Beginning: Emergency Mission in Argentina for Over 60 Big Cats and Bears

Marina Ivanova, DVM | *Rescue Expert, FOUR PAWS International*

4:20 to 5:00 p.m.

International Big Cat Rescues: Canada and Honduras

Emily McCormack | *Animal Curator and Intern Coordinator, Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge*

Tammy Thies | *Founder and Executive Director, The Wildcat Sanctuary*

Kathryn Bertok | *Assistant Director, Carolina Tiger Rescue*

5:00 to 5:15 p.m.

Big Cat Roundtable

Moderator: Catherine Doyle | *Director of Science, Research and Public Policy, PAWS*

5:15 p.m.

Housekeeping

Immediately Following the Conference

Icebreaker Reception

On Site at the Hotel

Sponsored by Fond O' Foods

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DAY TWO: Saturday, October 3

Morning Session

8:50 to 9:00 a.m.

Welcome, Housekeeping

Catherine Doyle, *Director of Science, Research and Public Policy, PAWS*

9:00 to 9:30 a.m.

The Elephant in the Anthropocene

Shermin de Silva | *Associate Professor, University of California-San Diego; President and Founder, Trunks & Leaves, Inc.*

9:30 to 10:00 a.m.

Introducing Pangea Elephant Sanctuary

Ryan Hockley | *Sanctuary Manager, Pangea Elephant Sanctuary, Portugal*

10:00 to 10:30 a.m.

Elephant Time: A Different Way of Noticing

Kat Rahmat | *Postdoctoral Scholar, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, Germany*

BREAK | 10:30 to 10:45 a.m.
Sponsored by FOUR PAWS International

10:45 to 11:15 a.m.

**From Subjects to Participants: Reframing Elephant Well-being
Through Autonomy and Voice**

Liv Baker | *Research Director, Mahouts Elephant Foundation; Chair, PAN Works;
Adjunct Professor, University of British Columbia*

11:15 to 11:45 a.m.

The Zoo at the End of the World

Andrew Westoll | *Author; Associate Professor, University of Toronto Scarborough*

LUNCH | 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Sponsored by Animal Legal Defense Fund

Afternoon Session

1:00 to 1:30 p.m.

**Facing the Fear of Change: Overcoming Legal and Societal Obstacles
on the Path to Sanctuary**

Scott Blais | *CEO and Board President, Global Sanctuary for Elephants*

1:30 to 2:00 p.m.

**Tracking Change in Captive Elephant Tourism – Insights and Trends
From 15 years of Research**

Jan Schmidt Burbach, DVM | *Director of Wildlife Research and Veterinary Expertise,
World Animal Protection Denmark*

2:00 to 2:30 p.m.

How Can We Help More Elephants? One Sanctuary's Outreach and Impacts

Steve Shurter | *President and CEO, The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee*

BREAK | 2:30 to 2:45 p.m.
Sponsored by Kerr Family Foundation

2:45 to 3:15 p.m.

Rest, Recovery, and Resilience: The Role of Sleep in Elephant Well-Being

Jackie Gai, DVM | *Director of Veterinary Services, PAWS*

3:15 to 3:30 p.m.

Elephant Reintegration Trust Update

Brett Mitchell | *Co-founder and Director, WildChoices NPC; Founder and Chair, Elephant Reintegration Trust*

3:30 to 4:00 p.m.

The Endgame: From Captivity to Freedom—The Legal Fight for Elephant Liberty

Courtney Fern | *Director of Campaigns, Nonhuman Rights Project*

4:00 to 4:15 p.m.

The Elephant Declaration

Catherine Doyle | *Director of Science, Research and Public Policy, PAWS*

Courtney Fern | *Director of Campaigns, Nonhuman Rights Project*

4:15 to 4:30 p.m.

Elephant Roundtable

Moderator: Catherine Doyle | *Director of Science, Research and Public Policy, PAWS*

4:30 p.m.

Closing Remarks | End Conference

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PAWS Sanctuary Visit | Sunday, October 4

Shuttle check-in at 8:30 a.m., with prompt departure from hotel at 9:00 a.m.

Lunch Sponsored by The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee

Thank You to Our Conference Sponsors

Kerr Family Foundation



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PAWS' David Reuben Memorial Scholarships