



# The Crash

## June 2024 "The Summer Edition"

The IRKA newsletter: the leading network connecting rhino professionals.

### President's Perspective

Happy Summer everyone!

At the beginning of June, the Board of Directors met for our annual meeting hosted by the St. Louis Zoo. We would like to extend our great appreciation to the St. Louis Zoo and their new WildCare Park for their generous support of IRKA. We would also like to extend our thanks to Stephanie Richmond who did an amazing job in coordinating this visit!



The first two days of our meeting this year was devoted to our Strategic Plan for the next 5 years. This was lead by Dr. Susie Ellis, former Director of International Rhino Foundation and included a special guest - our former founding board member Wendy Shaffstall from Cincinnati Zoo.

It's amazing how much we have grown as an organization since the last Strategic Planning in 2018. The development of several new programs including TERS and webinars along with the continuation of the Rhino Keeper Workshop which allowed our members to advance knowledge and experience with their rhinos. We look forward to sharing all the new developments throughout the year.

It's an exciting time for our organization as we gear up for some important upcoming events. One of the most significant is the deadline for Board of Director nominations, which is fast approaching on June 30th. We encourage all members to consider putting their names forward or nominating someone who they believe would be an asset to our board. Additionally, we're thrilled to announce the finalized dates for the Rhino Keeper Workshop, which will take place from May 17th to May 21st in 2025. This promises to be an incredible opportunity for our members to learn from some of the top experts in the field and to network with other like-minded professionals. We can't wait to see you there!

In this edition, we have several great articles beginning with the Facility Focus on the new beautiful 350 acre Georgia Safari Park by Brittani Crenshaw. We also get an important update on the poaching crisis facing the Javan rhinos, and the hope for justice dealing with these horrendous crimes. As we all know, it is never easy doing procedures on our rhinos, but Janel Jankowski gives us insight into the medical

### Table of Contents:

#### President's Perspective

Chris Bobko

#### 2025 Rhino Keeper Workshop!

#### Georgia Safari Park

Brittani Crenshaw

#### Justice for Javan Rhinos

\*\*IRF blog reprint

#### BOD Elections in July

#### Archie's Abcess

Janel Jankowski

#### Volunteer updates

#### Article Review:

*Metabolic profiling implicates mitochondrial and immune dysfunction in disease syndromes of the critically endangered black rhino*

#### Correspondences

Natalie Sheridan

#### New Members

#### Conservation Partners

diagnosis and treatment for her 54 year old Southern White rhino "Archie".

Finally, we would like to extend a welcome to all our new members and those that are renewing members! This organization is amazing because of dedicated individuals like you!

Peace, Love, Rhinos

Chris Bobko

## Rhino Keeper Workshop 2025

Hosted by *Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium*



**Registration opens August 1st, 2024**

More Information Coming Soon



### Facility Focus: **Georgia Safari Conservation Park**

Georgia Safari Conservation Park is located an hour east of Atlanta and forty minutes south of Athens. The property is situated on over 530 acres with seven separate pastures fencing off 263 of those acres. Each pasture has been strategically planned and managed for the successful introduction of all our current acquisitions onto the park and to allow for our guests to experience a variety of natural behaviors and varied herd dynamics between interspecific and conspecific interactions. Five of the seven pastures are used for mixed-species herd management, one for our southern white rhino and one smaller giraffe holding pasture connected to a larger giraffe and mixed-species pasture.

Tour guides will take guests on a guided safari tour through two of our largest pastures which feature several different breeding and bachelor herds of ungulates. Guests will be able to enjoy presentations from our Ambassador Animal department while loading and unloading from the tour buses where we have a variety of small mammals and reptiles. There is also the opportunity for guests to experience several different lodging accommodations between our luxury safari style tents and private giraffe suite. The safari tents overlook our 3rd largest mixed-species habitat (The Veldt) that guests can view from their private decks. This pasture will house species such as giraffe, nyala, waterbuck, and ostrich among other species depending on the time of year and management plans. The private giraffe suite is attached to the giraffe and rhino barn where overnight guests have two large viewing windows that overlook the giraffe stalls.





Our brand-new state of the art giraffe and rhino barn is 10,000 sq ft with three large giraffe stalls, three connecting giraffe outdoor paddocks, and two large rhino stalls with an outdoor paddock and encounter yard. Each rhino stall is equipped with its own auto waterer and shift door into the outdoor paddock. The outdoor paddock is connected to a larger encounter yard where guests can meet the keepers and experience an up-close look at the rhinos. Guests will be able to hear a keeper chat and watch a brief training session during these encounters. From the encounter yard there is a long aisle that connects to our 6-acre rhino pasture.



We currently house 2.0 Southern White Rhinoceros (Mo-Joe and Akagera); both are young bulls at 3.5 years old who were born and raised together in the same crash. Our current management plan is to allow them to stay together unless behaviors start to indicate that separation is needed. They share the two indoor stalls overnight and shift out onto their 6-acre habitat during the day. The habitat is fenced in by natural steel posts that are four rails high. Located on the habitat are two shade structures, a 200-gallon concrete auto waterer, and one large keeper created wallow. When designing their habitat's layout, we wanted to work with the land's natural topography while keeping guest experience in mind. We wanted to find a location for the wallow that allowed for more natural management and to place shade structures in areas where Mo-Joe and Akagera could feel secure but still be visible to tour guests. We were able to find the perfect spot for their large wallow in a section of the pasture that naturally slopes down into a small gully where rainwater naturally collects. This will allow for the wallow to maintain moisture on its own and we will only need to add supplemental water and turn the clay during some hotter months where rain is sparse. Both shade structures were placed along the back fence line so guests on tours would still be able to see Mo-Joe and Akagera during parts of the day where they are at rest and not actively grazing. One shade structure is at the highest flat part of the pasture, and one is down the slope in the lowest part of the pasture near their wallow. We plan to continue to add more natural elements that can easily be moved or changed to help create more dynamics within their environment such as large logs, boulders and various substrates.



Starting a brand-new facility and team has been extremely rewarding and challenging (in a good way) for all of us involved. We're currently in the process of developing new enrichment and behavior modification programs for our southern white rhinos. As a team we hope to create sustainable programs by implementing continuous staff development through a variety of resources and a commitment to learning new and improved scientific developments within our community. It's been important for us as a new team to work on building a strong relationship with our rhinos based on a foundation of trust and choice through positive reinforcement. Our goals for the enrichment and behavior modification programs aim to create a positive welfare focused environment where they can express species-

specific behaviors in a variety of ways by allowing them choice and control over certain aspects of the environment to meet their unique biological, social, environmental, cognitive, and medical needs. With Mo-Joe and Akagera being new to us we have been letting them acclimate to our facility, routine, and staff by allowing them to explore their new environments while slowly introducing them to new various stimuli and husbandry behaviors. As a team we are observing and learning their individual personalities and individualized care needs so that we can set them both up for great success in the future. Our plans and dreams are big, and we have a long way to go to accomplish those, but we can't wait to share more about our program and rhino boys in the future!



**Brittani Crenshaw**  
[Georgia Safari Conservation Park](#)

## IRKA Board of Director's Elections



The 2024 B.O.D. elections are underway  
**Nominations are accepted June 1st - 30th**  
**Voting will take place July 28th - August 11th**  
**New terms begin September 1st**

*The BOD is dedicated to ensuring that IRKA progresses toward its goals and is accountable to the membership.*

*As an organization, we need all BOD input to improve the future for all species of rhinoceros as well as directly addressing conservation, education and managed care issues.*

## **Justice For Javan Rhinos**

[\\*IRF blog reprint](#)

**In a surprising turn of events, a rhino poacher in Indonesia just received a higher sentence than what prosecutors originally recommended. On June 5, 2024, the panel of judges at Pandeglang District Court declared defendant Sunendi guilty of poaching Javan rhinos and sentenced him to 12 years in prison and a fine of 100 million rupiah (~\$6,130 USD). This sentence is particularly surprising considering most Indonesian court sentences are less than what the prosecutors recommend.**

Last year, camera traps documented Sunendi illegally entering Ujung Kulon National Park with firearms. He was apprehended in November, 2023 and brought to trial starting April, 2024 where he testified to killing six Javan rhinos from 2019 to 2023 with his gang. After hearing testimonies and presenting evidence, prosecutors had only asked for a 5-year and 10 million rupiah punishment – which is currently the maximum for wildlife crime in Indonesia. Sunendi was also charged with illegal possession of firearms and camera-trap theft, which was not accounted for in the prosecution's sentencing recommendation. Government officials and conservationists agreed that this recommendation undervalued the crimes committed and would not be an effective deterrent against future poaching crimes. Residents of the Pandeglang

community commented on the prosecution's request, asking the judges for a stronger punishment so that this doesn't happen again to their rhinos. Thankfully, the judges considered all of the charges and the weight of these crimes when deciding their final sentencing.

IRF commends all involved with this investigation and case – the government agencies, police, local NGOs and the community members who spoke out in support of their rhinos.

**“This punishment won't bring back the poached rhinos, but it sends a strong message and should act as a deterrent to anyone considering wildlife crime in Indonesia,”** said Nina Fascione, executive director of the International Rhino Foundation.

Banten Police have made other critical arrests related to this case, including the remaining members of Sunendi's poaching gang, most members of a second poaching group, and two middlemen – buyers and sellers of the rhino horn who are expected to go on trial soon. The other suspected poachers reportedly confessed to police that they killed a total of 26 Javan rhinos, which would be detrimental to the species' already low population number.

As long-time funders of Indonesian rhino conservation, we are encouraged by this outcome and we hope all agencies involved use this momentum to complete their investigation of what happened and how, as well as bringing all criminals involved to justice to prevent any future poaching attempts in Indonesia.



*Original photo by Tobias Nowlan, courtesy of Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry*

**“It will take time to undo the damage done by these criminals, but we have brought Javan rhinos back from the brink of extinction once, and we can do so again,”** said Fascione. **“We know that despite this poaching activity, Javan rhinos continue to breed and have calves, so if stronger protections are put in place and we put an end to poaching, they'll rebound again. This strong sentence is a significant step to ensuring no one tries to poach a rhino in Indonesia again.”**

## **Happy Birthday Dolly!!**

Beautiful Dolly the rhino celebrated her **56th** birthday May 30th with all the staff and guests at Zoo Knoxville !

What a testament to the care she has received from the keeper team, and an inspiration for all of us to keep pushing "best practices" to always improve.



**We would like to congratulate the team on Dolly's special day, and the design of a new rhino facility coming soon.**



## Archie's Abscess

Our 54-year-old male Southern White Rhino "Archie" has lived at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens since 1975 and is believed to be the oldest known male rhino in the world! All rhinos are special as we know, but Archie is extraordinary. Just ask anyone that has met him.

Archie gets a daily spa treatment in the form of clay application. This acts as a protectant to shield against sun, heat, and pests. During this treatment in the training chute in September of 2023, animal care specialists noticed a slightly raised spot on the left side of his face. This spot was closely monitored for changes. Treatments attempted to remedy the abscess included: warm compresses applied daily, antibiotics, and the voluntary procedure of trying to lance the area. Archie participated wonderfully but the abscess did not decrease and in fact increased in size over the next few months.



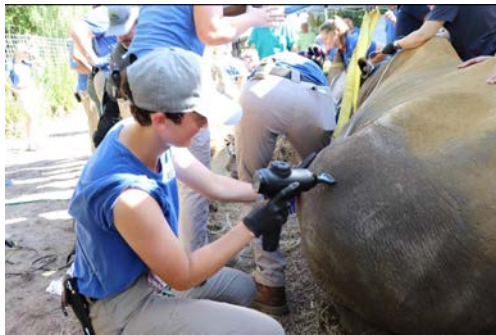
Vet staff and animal care staff held multiple meetings discussing the risk vs. the reward of Archie's situation and deciding to immobilize him or not. Archie had exhibited choking episodes occasionally when eating both hay and grain. He has never been one to eat copious amounts of hay, and he presents quid clumps from his diet overnight and sometimes on exhibit during the day. Due to all these factors, Archie's coastal hay is chopped into small pieces and his grain is offered in long shallow lines to prevent ingestion of large amounts of food at once. When we started chopping Archie's coastal hay, we did appreciate an increase in his hay consumption amount, he appeared to gain weight, and his fecal quality did improve from his normal. While Archie was still eating the same amount of food out of the amount that was offered to him, once he was presented with this facial abscess, his body condition was indicating that he was starting to lose weight.

With everything factored into Archie's situation and consultations with veterinary and rhino experts across the country, it was decided to attempt an immobilization. We are very fortunate to have close partnerships with White Oak Conservation vet and animal care staff, exotic animal anesthesiologist Dr. Bailey, and world-renowned rhino dentist Dr. Lowder. The summers in Florida are a bit steamy to say the least. Due to this, Archie's procedure was scheduled as early as possible for all involved parties in May. Archie has a routine that he participates in each morning in terms of shifting around the barn and participating in clay treatment. JZG animal care specialists consulted with all parties involved in Archie's procedure to formulate a game plan for the morning of the immobilization. This allowed time to train Archie to acclimate to small changes in his morning routine to accommodate needs of the immobilization. Archie participates in voluntary injections in the training chute. We chose to perform the immobilization in the larger of our two outdoor holding yards to allow space for machinery to enter to assist if needed. We also chose to position Archie near the yard perimeter fence to allow for closer proximity to oxygen tanks outside the yard. All these factors were taken into account in Archie's training. Archie typically enters the training chute for clay application. We started with this normal routine of entering the training chute first thing in the morning, then started touching his neck each morning with one handful of grain present before feeding him more food to simulate his fasting protocol in relation to an injection. We placed large belly straps in the training chute to desensitize him to if needed to assist him the day of the procedure. During clay treatment and feeding we would wrap a rope around his horn and produce tension and pull on it to simulate ropes guiding him upon his induction. We had vet staff join in training sessions, so they were familiar with the barn setup and how Archie typically reacts to interactions. Animal care staff even practiced wearing face shields a few days before the procedure to expose Archie to their sight and sound during his injection.



Archie typically stands in the training chute for clay treatment on one side, then exits and turns around to have clay applied to his other side. For his induction we were looking to pole syringe Archie in the training chute, have him shift through the smaller holding yard, and follow us to the larger holding yard to be closed in. For this step, weeks before his procedure we started placing a large acrylic board near the training chute. Anytime overnight or in the morning that Archie was going to have access to this space we placed a small amount of grain. As his interest in this grain increased, we would incrementally move the board further little by little. The final destination for the board was near the gate to the larger holding yard. Once interacted with in the chute, animal care specialists would walk and call Archie along the fence line to the acrylic board and then kneel with and reward Archie once he reached the board. As a failsafe to ensure Archie did not go into the unintended smaller holding yard once injected with anesthetics, zoo facilities staff provided large removable cables that created a temporary chute from the training chute to the larger holding yard. We tried to move at pace Archie was indicating he was comfortable with during training. He progressed quickly with each added step.

The morning of the immobilization, Archie was a rockstar. He participated in his chute shifting routine just as we had planned. He was pole syringed for his injection and he followed the keeper to the far holding yard as practiced. Once in the larger holding yard, Archie stayed in one spot. Once he was starting to show effects, staff wrapped ropes around his horn to station him and try to have him lie down on his side opposite of his facial abscess. Pads were placed under his shoulder and hip as he became recumbent. Rhino care staff at JZG have also participated in other large mammal immobilizations such as bull elephants and giraffes. There is great care taken with each procedure to create step by step husbandry and veterinary plans that coincide with each other to produce a timeline leading up to and the day of the procedures. Animal care specialists and veterinary staff were delegated with certain roles and tasks throughout the procedure to ensure nothing was forgotten and all team members were able to play a role in the immobilization. Zoo facilities staff also assisted with lifting and operating machinery.



First tasks once Archie was recumbent were inserting IV catheters into Archie's ear, providing shade and closely monitoring his temperature, and intubating him. Once these were accomplished and Archie was relaxed enough, Dr. Lowder started his assessment of Archie's dental situation. During the procedure Archie was rocked back and forth periodically to provide better access for Dr. Lowder and to also keep Archie from lying on joints of a certain side for too long. Four muscle massage guns were also utilized throughout the entire procedure to continuously stimulate his muscles to prevent atrophy or nerve damage. The determination was made to attempt to remove the tooth associated with the location of Archie's abscess, which was in the back of his mouth. While veterinary staff was able to gain access into Archie's mouth, they were not able to access the area needed to remove the infected tooth. The decision was made to attempt the standing retropulsion technique that is believed to never have been performed on a rhino before to remove the tooth. This included gaining access through the outside of the face to the intended site to be able to access the tooth base and roots. After lots of maneuvering and manipulating the large molar was successfully detached and removed from Archie's mouth! Due to the complexity of the tooth removal the procedure time ran longer than anticipated, but close attention was being kept. Anesthesiologist Dr. Bailey and vet techs were collecting blood samples incrementally throughout the entire immobilization to run blood gas tests to monitor Archie's oxygen, carbon dioxide, and pH levels. Several IV lines were placed to provide fluids throughout the procedure as well as rectal fluids via an enema.

Immediately following removal of the tooth, all supplies and extra people were removed from the holding yard and Archie was reversed. He was a little weak in his back legs but attempted to stand right after receiving his reversal drugs. After a couple wobbles with his back end, Archie started walking around and hobbled over to the corner of the holding yard adjacent to the exhibit where female rhinos Gabby and Kipenzi had come to visit him the minute he was up. It was heartwarming to see them greet each other. Archie spent some time in the holding yards then chose to nap under the ceiling fans in his barn.



We initially saw a surprising increase in his diet consumption immediately following his procedure. He has tapered off back towards his "normal" amount. We have observed a few days of larger quantity of nasal

discharge than normal, some opaque in color, and a small amount of blood which is to be expected. We have continued to treat Archie's abscess at this time as it has not yet fully diminished. It has opened up to a small wound in the middle which we are treating and protecting from pests such as bugs and native birds. Current treatments for this include warm compresses, fly repellent, bandages, and a new acquired rhino fly mask that we will be desensitizing Archie to soon. Overall, we are extremely happy with the results from this phenomenal event.

**All of the JZG team and Archie greatly appreciate the information and advice provided by rhino staff at multiple institutions and unparalleled support and expertise from White Oak Conservation staff, Dr. Bailey, and Dr. Lowder.**



**Janel Jankowski**  
*Jacksonville Zoo*

## IRKA Merchandise



**Do you want to support IRKA?**

Need a new hat?  
A decal on your water bottle?  
Enjoy bigfoot conservation?



Check out the new merchandise available in limited quantities at our website

[rhinokeeperassociation.org](http://rhinokeeperassociation.org)



## Volunteer Opportunities



The volunteer committee would like to thank all the amazing volunteers who have come forward to get involved and helped the IRKA since the committee's inception. Thanks to their help, we are making strides in improving social media experiences and keeping the website relevant with the latest information and content. We are also continuing our volunteer partnership with the International Rhino Foundation, providing research on special projects.

**Volunteer Opportunities include:**

*Rhino Husbandry Manual review and revision*



Webinar content curation  
Facility focus curation  
Video content for training/enrichment

**For more information contact:**

Jason Faessler at [jfaessler@nashvillezoo.org](mailto:jfaessler@nashvillezoo.org) or Jade Tuttle at [jade.tuttle@nczoo.org](mailto:jade.tuttle@nczoo.org)

**We can always use content for our social media sites!**

Anyone interested in helping out can contact Pat Fountain at [pfountain@ingham.org](mailto:pfountain@ingham.org)



**Rhino Research Review:**

*Metabolic profiling implicates mitochondrial and immune dysfunction in disease syndromes of the critically endangered black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*)*

Compared to their wild counterpart, black rhinos in managed care exhibit several unusual diseases whose causes are largely unknown. These include hemolytic anemia, superficial necrolytic dermatitis, and toxic hepatopathy, among others. With their causes being unknown, preventative measures to halt disease onset and in many cases, treatments are limited. To address this issue, Corder et al. (2023) performed metabolic profiling on 30 black rhinos from 15 US zoological institutions.

Metabolic profiling is a technique that looks at the entire suite of biomolecules present in a biological sample (in this study, serum) and allows for a comprehensive assessment of its physiological state. By comparing serum samples from rhino with a history of disease to those from presumed healthy individuals, this study was able to identify biomarkers that provide insight into the etiology of the various disease states. These include molecules involved in a number of inflammatory response pathways, the bile acid synthesis pathway, which can affect immune function, and glucose metabolism. While this study does not identify causes of specific disease black rhinos experience, it is a critical first step in that it provides the physiological context within which these diseases exist. The authors propose that future studies should focus on the cellular mechanisms that underlie the observed metabolic shifts to gain a deeper understanding of the exact causes of the observed disease states.

**Reference**

Corder, M.L., Petricoin, E.F., Li, Y. et al. Metabolomic profiling implicates mitochondrial and immune dysfunction in disease syndromes of the critically endangered black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*). Sci Rep 13, 15464 (2023). n <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-41508-4>

**Correspondences**

**Births:**

Fossil Rim Wildlife Center ----- male SWR "Rocket"  
Indianapolis Zoo ----- female SWR "Xola"  
San Diego Zoo Safari Park ----- female GOH "Aalu" and a male calf  
Lion country Safari ----- male SWR "Orion"  
Natural Bridge Wildlife Park ----- SWR, their first birth  
West Midland Safari Park ----- female SWR "Malaika"  
Parc de Branfere ----- GOH calf  
Yorkshire Wildlife Park ----- male black "Rocco"  
Knowsley Safari Park ----- female SWR "Bindi"  
Whipsnade Zoo ----- male SWR "Benja"

**Deaths:**

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo ----- female black "Inge"

**Birmingham Zoo** ----- male black "**Moyo**"  
**Colchester Zoo** ----- male SWR "**Otto**"  
**Paignton Zoo** ----- female black "**Sita**"

**Transfers:**

**San Diego Zoo** received female GOH "**Shomili**" **White Oak**, and male SWR "**Bwana**" from **Ellen Trout Zoo**  
**Rolling Hills Zoo** received male SWR "**Kenegele**" from **The Wilds**  
**Safari North** received male SWR "**Gunner**" from **Chahinkapa Zoo**  
**Southland Safari** received male SWR "**Chopper**" from **ABQ Biopark**, *their first SWR*

**New Habitat:**

**Georgia Safari Conservation Park** has opened a new SWR habitat, receiving males "**Mo-Joe**" and "**Akagera**" from **The Wilds**.  
**Congrats G.S.C.P!**

**New Members**

**Jason Green** ----- Zoo Midland  
**Eric Dempsey** ----- Busch Gardens  
**Ben Zalles** ----- Zoo Tampa  
**Mallory Register** ----- Zoo Tampa  
**Katie Seefeldt** ----- Zoo Tampa  
**Kelli Mayers** ----- Zoo Tampa  
**Kayla Maxwell** ----- Zoo Tampa  
**Grace Clements** ----- Zoo Tampa  
**Jordan Risner** ----- North Carolina Zoo  
**Josh Wiseman** ----- Nashville Zoo  
**Katelin Franklin** ----- Miami Zoo  
**Kayla Jordan** ----- Sedgewick County Zoo  
**Laurel Connolly** ----- World Wildlife Zoo  
**Mars Hebert** ----- Baton Rouge Zoo  
**Rhiannon Russell** ----- Monterey Zoo  
**Seth Cantrel** ----- Monterey Zoo  
**Kathryn Shweizer** ----- Disney's Animal Kingdom  
**Kelli Scott** ----- Disney's Animal Kingdom  
**Kaleb Brown** ----- North Carolina Zoo  
**Griselda Martinez** ----- El Paso Zoo  
**Gabriel Moya** ----- El Paso Zoo  
**Hollyanne Ebner** ----- San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance  
**Leah Russell**----- Longleat Safari Park



**New Conservation Partner**



**Conservation Partners** are conservation organization or zoological institution which supports rhino conservation in accordance with the objectives and purpose of the IRKA. These partnerships often provide discounts for the supporting institution . It is important that as the IRKA grows we continue to garner the support from all facilities that are responsible for the protection and management of rhinoceros. We would like to extend our appreciation for the support from the following institutions, and hopefully we can add your zoo to this growing list! If you or your institution are interested in becoming a

Conservation Partner, please visit:

[Support IRKA](#)

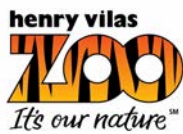
**Platinum Conservation Partners**

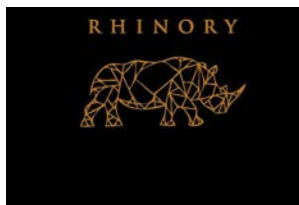


IRKA Partners



2024 Conservation Partners





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