



David M. Jones, DVM
Zoo Director

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA ZOO

Responding to an idea developed by Raleigh civic leaders to establish a state zoo, the Raleigh Jaycees held an exhibition professional football game in August 1967 and raised \$18,000 to fund a feasibility study.

Later that year, the N.C. General Assembly passed a bill creating the N.C. Zoological Garden Study Commission to conduct the study. The nine-member commission found a state zoo was not only possible, but also desirable.

In late 1968, the N.C. Zoological Society, a non-profit support organization, was created to raise funds for the zoo. The State Legislature followed by creating the N.C. Zoological Authority to oversee development of the zoo. The Authority members formed a Site Selection Committee and spend two years studying various locations.

In February 1971, the Authority approved the Site Committee's recommendation to locate the zoo near Asheboro in Randolph County. At a joint meeting of the Authority and the Society, the Randolph County Society for Zoological Development donated 1,371 acres to the Zoo Society. The Society turned the land over to the Authority for the State of North Carolina.

The zoo site was dedicated as a primitive recreation area by Gov. Robert W. Scott in spring 1972. In May of the same year, North Carolina voters approved a \$2 million zoo bond referendum. The first animals—two Galapagos tortoises purchased by the Society—arrived at the zoo in summer 1973.

The Zoo Authority approved a master plan concept in late 1973 reflecting the total anticipated development of the zoo over 1974. The Interim Zoo, consisting of nine outdoor paddocks, an Orientation Building and an Animal Display Building, was opened in August 1974.

Momentum grew in 1976 as Gov. James E. Holshouser officiated at the groundbreaking ceremony for initial construction of natural habitats in Africa—the first of seven geographic exhibit regions planned for the park. Over the next three years, the General Assembly appropriated \$11.8 million for construction of Africa.

The Forest Edge, the first permanent African exhibit with zebras, ostriches and giraffes, opened to the public in 1979 along with several public service facilities. The Forest Edge, along with five new habitats for elephants, rhinos, lions, chimpanzees and baboons, were dedicated by Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., in summer 1980. The R.J. Reynolds Forest Aviary, the zoo's first permanent indoor exhibit, was dedicated in August 1982.

The zoo became a total natural habitat park in October 1983 with the closing of the Interim Zoo as visitors were directed to the permanent facilities in Africa. The zoo received accreditation from the American Zoo & Aquarium Association in August 1984.





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The African region was expanded in October 1984 with the grand opening of the 53,500-square-foot African Pavilion and the adjacent 40-acre African Plains exhibit. Additional African habitats were added in August 1989 with the opening of the Forest Glade outdoor gorilla exhibit and in July 1992 with the unveiling of an African Wart Hog exhibit.

Construction of the park's second geographic region, North America, began in April 1987. Spanning 200 acres and including 40 new exhibits, the North American region displays 95 species of animals and 200 plant species. Ecosystems represented range from the Arctic Circle to the Sonora Desert of Mexico.

The \$1.95 million Frederick Moir Hanes Veterinary Medical Center was dedicated in October 1988 as the first facility completed as part of the North American expansion. The W. David Stedman Education Center was opened in March 1990, providing meeting spaces, a library and other public facilities as well as housing the zoo and zoo society administrative offices.

The Sonora Desert, first of the North American habitats to open to the public, was unveiled in September 1993. Two months later, Dr. David Jones, former director of the London Zoological Society, was named the fourth director in the N.C. Zoo's 20-year-history

Four North American region exhibits were added in August 1994 with the opening of the RJR Nabisco Rocky Coast, the Cypress Swamp, the Marsh and the Hardee's Touch & Learn Center. Among the new animals added to the collection were polar bears, sea lions, alligators, waterfowl and domestic animals in a barnyard setting. Opened at the same time were a new zoo entrance, parking lot, gift shops, restaurants and other visitor amenities.

Seven additional North American habitats were added in April 1995 with the unveiling of the Prairie, Black Bear, Grizzly Bear and Red Wolf habitats, along with Alaskan Seabird and Peregrine Falcon exhibits in the Rocky Coast complex. The final North American exhibit, Streamside, opened in June 1996, representing a North Carolina stream flowing from the mountains to the coast.

Two major entrance sculptures were installed in October 1998. A life-size group of four bronze elephants was placed at the Zoo Parkway (N.C. 159) entrance to the zoo and a large cube collection sculpture, representing the status of our environment (healthy ecosystems, endangered species and extinct species) was installed at the zoo's North American entrance.

Major renovations to the zoo's African section began in 1998 and included improvements to the R.J. Reynolds Forest Aviary and the African Pavilion. A new African Plaza and pedestrian bridge at the African entrance and a completely renovated Chimpanzee Exhibit were opened in April and May 2001.

The Australian Walkabout, a temporary exhibit featuring kangaroos, wallabies, emus, kookaburra and other Australian animals, replaced the





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former Hardee's Touch & Learn Center from May 2004 through October 2006. The same area was converted to the "kidZone," an interactive area designed to teach children about the natural, and opened in April 2007. The kidZone will remain open through 2008 and serve as a prototype for a permanent children's nature center still in the planning stage.

In April 2008, grand opening ceremonies were held for the "Watani Grasslands Reserve," an \$8.5-million expansion and renovation of the zoo's elephant and rhinoceros exhibits and holding facilities. The Watani project enables the zoo to exhibit up to 10 elephants and 10 rhinos while improving the chances of breeding both species.

