



ABC 2023 Virtual Webinar

2nd November, 2023

WELCOME!

The Bear Care Group is excited to host the Advancing Bear Care 2023 virtual webinar. This year's conference theme is *"Shaping the Future: Overcoming Challenges to Behavior-Based Bear Husbandry"*. As the science of husbandry and management of wildlife under human care evolves, an increasing number of facilities are adopting behavior-based husbandry practices. Challenges often arise when husbandry or management practices evolve; examples may range from insufficient resources (i.e., time, staff) to shifting internal cultures. This virtual one-day webinar will include a series of guest speakers discussing development of behavior-based husbandry and enrichment programs for bears, including ideas and methods to overcome various challenges.

After last year's sold-out and successful virtual BCG conference, we are once again excited to present an online learning opportunity. As the BCG works towards planning our first post-pandemic, in-person event (stay tuned!), the opportunity this year to discuss how we can overcome husbandry challenges, with specialists and experts from around the world, is too good an opportunity to pass up! At every conference or workshop I have attended or hosted, there are always a ton of questions for speakers and panellists asking, *"how do I address _____ issue with my bears?"* Our goal is always to provide resources for networking and feedback to bear caregivers who have questions, problems, and needs. We hope that this year's event will provide opportunities to discuss some common (and probably some unique) challenges that we face as bear caregivers. I know that between our speakers, seasoned board members, and all of you with your knowledge and experience, that this virtual webinar will provide ideas and solutions for the different obstacles we encounter on the path to improving the wellbeing of our animals.

Thank you, and as always, the Bear Care Group (and bears everywhere!) appreciates your support.

Sincerely,



Jay Pratte
President, The Bear Care Group

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.....	Bear Care Group Mission Statement
2.....	Bear Care Group Board of Directors
3.....	Bear Care Group Founder: Else Poulsen
5.....	ABC Virtual Webinar Schedule Nov 2nd
7.....	Lecture Abstracts
12.....	Presenter Biographies



Photo Credit: Philip Stublely

BEAR CARE GROUP MISSION STATEMENT

The Bear Care Group fosters improvements in global bear welfare and conservation through communication, cooperation, and education among international bear care professionals. We accomplish this by i) advancing and sharing information on bear behavior, husbandry, enrichment, training, veterinary care, and other welfare-related topics, ii) organizing bear care conferences and workshops focused on educating and sharing information to improve global bear welfare, and iii) producing publications and resources to support bear care professionals in achieving excellence in bear husbandry and care.



Bear Care
GROUP

Find us on Facebook here: [The Bear Care Group Facebook Group](#)

Visit our website for other ways to help out and join the Bear Care Group: [The Bear Care Group](#)

BEAR CARE GROUP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

info@bearcaregroup.org

Jason Pratte - President

Mindy Babitz - Vice President/Treasurer

Laurie Vanderwal - Secretary

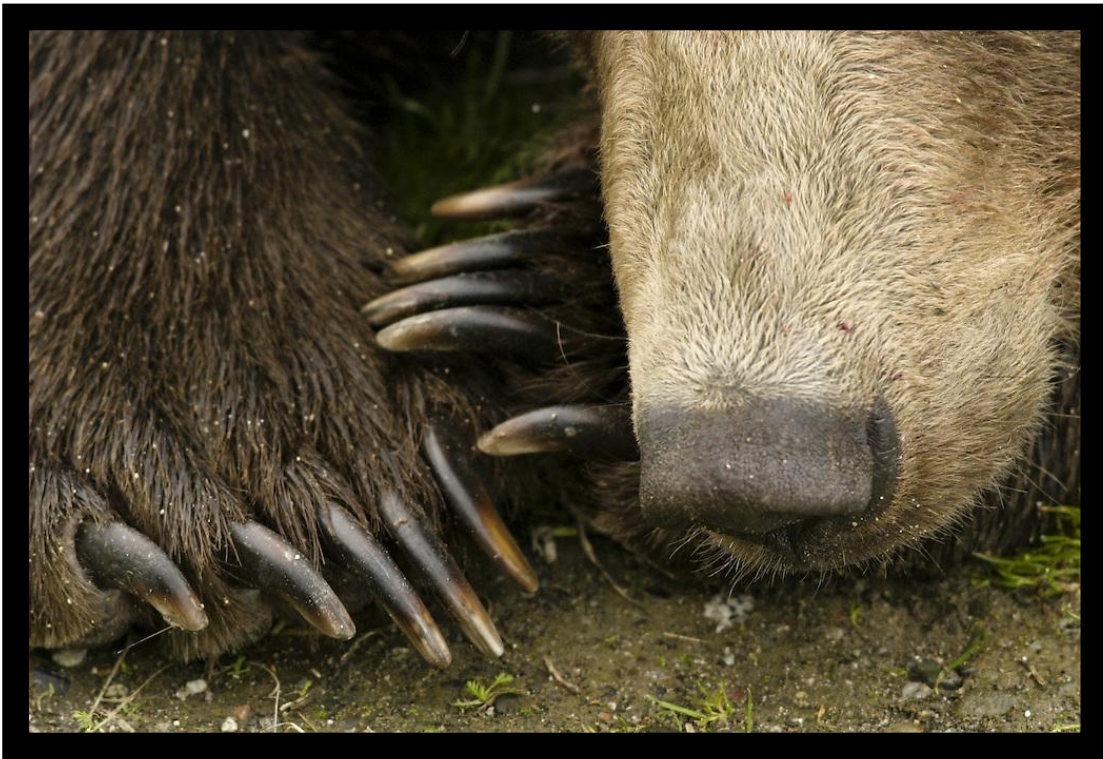
Angela Gibson - Social Media and Communications Officer

Heather Bacon - Director

Gary Lunsford - Director

Agnieszka Sergiel - Director

Philip Stublely – Director



BEAR CARE GROUP FOUNDER: ELSE POULSEN



In 2007, a symposium for bear experts from around the world was hosted in Pomona, California. Nearly 100 individuals came together to present on bear husbandry and welfare related topics. It was clear from the engaged discussions and feedback that a need existed for a group dedicated to developing resources for bear caregivers. Creating a recognizable network to connect bear caregivers around the world, providing resources to improve their knowledge and skills, would consequently improve the lives of all bears. Else Poulsen was one of the original symposium hosts, and upon recognizing this need immediately laid plans to create the non-profit The Bear Care Group (BCG). The BCG was incorporated less than a year later by several original founders from various disciplines. This team began working on researching and providing resources, advice and guidance to bear caregivers worldwide. Else's vision was for the BCG to be a non-partisan entity, welcoming people from all disciplines (zoos, sanctuaries, rehab, field research...) into discussions, teaching and learning opportunities in an effort to increase understanding and care of all bears.

Since the inception, the BCG has maintained a listserv to discuss any bear-related topics, a Facebook group to encourage discussion and sharing of resources via social media, and our

primary website. The BCG has also planned and hosted several international “Advancing Bear Care” conferences in both North America and Europe, inviting regional and international delegates to attend, learn and share their insight on bear care methodologies. As the BCG network grew, collaborations with other organizations dedicated to bear welfare that Else and the Board members were familiar with developed, increasing our understanding of issues impacting bear species in different countries. This led to the BCG partnering with organizations like Animals Asia and Wildlife SOS to host workshops tailored to meet the needs of caregivers facing unique challenges, such as bile farming or trafficking. The BCG developed an evolving curriculum based on input from our partners and impacts on the bears to provide new insights and ideas on addressing issues affecting the animals and their caretakers. Over time, the BCG has been able to use the nonprofit monies generated by the conferences to fund these regional workshops, often hosted in low-middle income areas. Long-time sponsors and donors aid in providing grants and expertise.

From the beginning, Else worked with many groups and individuals dedicated to improving the lives of bears. The BCG continues to meet Else’s original vision, while evolving to remain apace of current science and our understanding of bear welfare. Our Board remains diverse, dedicated and excited to continue moving forward. The BCG encourages you to join our network and bring your knowledge and skills to the table. Else Poulsen was the original founder and force behind the Bear Care Group, a true hero for bears everywhere. Else has over forty publications to her name and a big part in the textbook *Stereotypic Animal Behavior – Fundamentals and Applications to Welfare*, 2nd Edition. Her first bear book *Smiling Bears – A Zookeeper Explores the Behavior and Emotional Life of Bears* was published in May 2009. Her second book, *Bärle’s Story - One Polar Bear's Amazing Recovery from Life as a Circus Act* was released in Spring 2014.

A link to her publications can be found here <https://www.bearcaregroup.org/else-publications>

It remains up to all of us to continue her legacy. We welcome you to the Bear Care Group!

ABC VIRTUAL WEBINAR SCHEDULE NOV 2nd

12:00pm – 4:00pm Eastern Daylight Time 4:00pm – 8:00pm GMT 5:00pm – 9:00pm Central European Time 11:00pm – 3:00am Indochina Time		
TIME	ACTIVITY	SPEAKER(s)
12:00-12:05	HOST INTRODUCTION	
12:05-12:50	Improving Animal Wellbeing Using Behavior-Based Methodologies: A Discussion on Enrichment and Bears Under Human Care	Mindy Babitz <i>Bear Care Group /Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute</i>
12:50-1:00	Questions	
1:00-1:20	Obstacles to Seasonal Enrichment Calendars and How to Overcome Them	Sarah van Herpt <i>Animals Asia Vietnam Bear Rescue Center</i>
1:20-1:25	Questions	
1:25-1:45	The Application of a Seasonal Feeding Strategy for Brown Bears at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo	Sarah McGregor & Amanda Ferguson <i>ZSL Whipsnade Zoo</i>
1:45-1:50	Questions	
1:50-2:00	Break	
2:00-2:20	Bespoke Animal Welfare: Realistic Behavior-Based Strategies	Nicola Field <i>Global Animal Welfare</i>
2:20-2:25	Questions	
2:25-2:45	All Aboard: Getting Zoological Staff on Board with Behavior-based Bear Husbandry	Marie Filipek <i>ZooTampa</i>
2:45-2:50	Questions	
2:50-3:10	Ochsner Park Zoo Behavior Based Husbandry	Katie Gries & Ellen Vossekui <i>Ochsner Park Zoo</i>
3:10-3:15	Questions	
3:15-3:35	This Is How We Do It: Building a Resilient Outcome Based Care Program Through Collaboration, Patience and Innovation at San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance	Jessica Sheftel <i>San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance</i>
3:35-3:40	Questions	
3:40-4:00	Wrap up	



Photo Credit: Shutterstock.com

LECTURE ABSTRACTS (in order of appearance)

IMPROVING ANIMAL WELLBEING USING BEHAVIOR-BASED METHODOLOGIES: A DISCUSSION ON ENRICHMENT AND BEARS UNDER HUMAN CARE

Mindy Babitz

Bear Care Group

Smithsonian National Zoo & Conservation Biology Institute, Washington, DC, USA

The Bear Care Group's behavior-based bear husbandry philosophy focuses on the importance of programs built on the knowledge of species' natural histories, living strategies, and observed daily and seasonal routines. This philosophy and methods for program development will be discussed, detailing the benefits to animal wellbeing, including the reduction of chronic stress and frustration that lead to abnormal or stereotypical behaviors. These concepts will be illustrated through a discussion of enrichment programming, how to provide opportunities for bears to engage in species-specific living strategies, and how to integrate this into their natural daily and seasonal routines under human care.

OBSTACLES TO SEASONAL ENRICHMENT CALENDARS AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Sarah van Herpt

Vietnam Bear Rescue Centre, Vietnam

Behaviour-based husbandry is crucial to ensuring that the bears in our care have the greatest opportunity to experience and show their natural and instinctive behaviours. However, it can come with challenges. At the Vietnam Bear Rescue Centre we recently went through a process of re-assessing our yearly enrichment calendar and breaking it down into four, seasonal enrichment calendars. We did this to incorporate more behaviour-based husbandry into our enrichment. In order to achieve this, we had to overcome obstacles such as staff capacity, large

numbers of bears, budgetary constraints and item availability. We paired more experienced and less experienced staff, and together they researched behaviours expected from the bears during each season. Together, the pairs came up with a guide of natural behaviours to increase and adapted the new calendars to include enrichment aimed at encouraging those behaviours. We were given specific budgetary constraints to work with, so had to plan accordingly for any specialised item needs, ensuring we could afford multiples of each item to avoid creating unnecessary competition between the bears. We also researched various substitutes for items, as it can be difficult in Vietnam to source some common things. We cannot always replicate the food or vegetation items we researched, but we tried to provide items that would elicit the same behaviours. In the future, we plan to use a similar process with hyperphagia and feeding techniques in order to more closely match the time budgets and consumption changes that wild bears exhibit during hyperphagia.

THE APPLICATION OF A SEASONAL FEEDING STRATEGY FOR BROWN BEARS AT ZSL WHIPSNADE ZOO

Sarah McGregor and Amanda Ferguson

ZSL Whipsnade Zoo, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, United Kingdom

The feeding programme for brown bears at the Zoological Society of London's (ZSL) Whipsnade Zoo was reviewed in 2020 with the aim of applying a more naturalistic feeding strategy that was led by the bears' behaviour and their seasonal preferences. Initial data collection was carried out by keepers with the objective of documenting the bears' seasonal food preferences, challenges to providing more choice in their diet, and making sure seasonal preferences met nutritional recommendations. After this review the following changes were made: replacement of cultivated fruits with a variety of seasonally available vegetables, the provision of some food groups seasonally when the bears' behavioural cues indicated change in their nutritional requirements, and all food items were fed according to the bears' preferences. Data was then collected daily for one year and included: weight of food presented, bear food preferences, and bear weights. The nutrient composition of the diet (seasonal and year average) was calculated

using Zootrition and compared to published recommendations for polar bears, cats and dogs. The results showed that the bears did show a preference for different food groups and items at different times of the year. Each of the seasonal diets met nutritional recommendations, with bears selecting a ratio of diet items that produced a consistent protein content which aligned with that seen in free ranging bears and studies on captive bears fed ad lib. The dietary fat content however, changed markedly between the Autumn and Spring diets. By making these changes we were able to implement a naturalistic, bear-led, flexible diet which provided the animals with more choice whilst meeting nutritional recommendations and ensuring the bears met their seasonal physiological and behavioural milestones. From an operational perspective, the frequent adaptations required to achieve this new diet could be managed effectively in the daily routine by keepers.

BESPOKE ANIMAL WELFARE: REALISTIC BEHAVIOUR-BASED STRATEGIES

Nicola Field

Global Animal Welfare

Global Animal Welfare works internationally with wildlife sanctuaries and rescue centres providing support and training for staff. The focus is very much on providing staff in sanctuaries and rescue centres with the appropriate knowledge that will ensure the welfare of the animals in their care and provide opportunity for wild release where possible. The support provided is bespoke to the facility; considering what is available locally both in resources and people power to successfully ensure animal welfare whilst providing unique and valuable training opportunities for local staff. Global Animal Welfare addresses challenges faced by wildlife sanctuaries and rescue centres by realistic means which includes developing and applying behavioural based husbandry techniques.

ALL ABOARD: GETTING ZOOLOGICAL STAFF ON BOARD WITH BEHAVIOR-BASED BEAR HUSBANDRY

Marie Filipek

ZooTampa, Tampa, FL, USA

Planning and implementing a behavior-based bear husbandry program comes with many challenges, sometimes ones that do not involve the bears themselves. These challenges many times include getting animal care staff and zoo leadership teams on board, as well as incorporating guest engagement teams and docents. At ZooTampa, we were able to utilize past behavioral observations of the zoo's three North American black bears as well as research from other facilities to create, propose, and implement a behavior-based management plan that would be effective not only for our bears, but for our animal and leadership teams as well. With the implementation of this type of management, we were aware there would be a possibility that the black bears would not be visible to guests. For that reason, we used this as an opportunity to work even more closely with our Guest Engagement team and our docents, educating them about the seasonality of North American black bears and our behavior-based management plan. By approaching the introduction of a new management plan in this manner, it was a success for the staff and guests of ZooTampa, but most importantly, it improved the welfare of our bears.

OCHSNER PARK ZOO BEHAVIOR BASED HUSBANDRY

Katie Gries and Ellen Vossekuil

Ochsner Park Zoo, Baraboo, WI, USA

After the loss of our two elderly black bears, we updated our bear husbandry program to more closely resemble the natural schedules of wild black bears, and elicit natural behaviors from our two new orphaned cubs from Alaska. This was done in an effort to ensure the long-term wellbeing of both the bears and the arctic fox that would share an exhibit with them. A lot of research and planning went into creating behavior-based enrichment, diet, and seasonal

schedules, while also carefully introducing the bears to the resident fox. After three years, our rescued black bears have adapted well to the behavior-based husbandry program at Ochsner Park Zoo, exhibiting positive interactions with enrichment and eagerly participating in a training program. The integration of the bears and resident fox has resulted in increased social behaviors and physical activity, while also providing zoo guests with an active exhibit in winter while the bears are in torpor. Overall, this program has proven successful; the workload on staff has not increased and the bears and fox are thriving.

**THIS IS HOW WE DO IT: BUILDING A RESILIENT OUTCOME BASED CARE
PROGRAM THROUGH COLLABORATION, PATIENCE AND INNOVATION AT SAN
DIEGO ZOO WILDLIFE ALLIANCE**

Jessica Sheftel

San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, San Diego, CA, USA

Implementing behavior-based husbandry programs is a crucial aspect of wildlife care in zoos, aquariums and other wildlife conservation facilities. Incorporating a behavior first mindset into standard husbandry routines is difficult and impossible to quickly achieve. Resource constraints, resistance to change, and long-term commitment can halt progress toward an effective long-term application. San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance's (SDZWA) Outcome Based Care program focuses on desired outcomes to determine appropriate inputs, by developing dynamic husbandry and enriched experiences to form a life story based on wildlife's natural history, abilities and seasonal influences. Management support, a clear direction forward, buy in from the ground level, and patience is integral to success. Case studies from SDZWA and conservation partners will highlight unique challenges to implementing and assessing a behavior-based husbandry program. Integrating non wildlife care departments is crucial to advancing the whole facility's understanding of outcome-based care by supporting requests and educating guests. Removing roadblocks, instilling trust, and making behavioral outcomes a priority allows a culture of collaboration and innovation to thrive, along with the wildlife.

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES (alphabetized by last name)

MINDY BABITZ worked as an animal caregiver for more than two decades with a variety of species including sloth bears, Andean bears, and giant pandas. With a PhD in Psychology focused on animal behavior and cognition, she has conducted behavioral and cognitive research with bears in an effort to improve their management in zoos. Mindy has consulted with a variety of NGOs, accredited and non-accredited zoos globally, state animal law enforcement, and has educated caregivers on proper husbandry for bears and other species. Mindy is the Vice President of the Bear Care Group and the studbook keeper for the AZA sun bear population.

For details of projects and publications:

email: Mindy.babitz@bearcaregroup.org; babitzm@si.edu

AMANDA FERGUSON has a BSc in Animal Science and has worked at Zoological Society of London in several roles from keeper to Zoo Research Coordinator. For the last ten years she has been responsible for the diet management of all animals at the ZSL London and Whipsnade Zoo sites. Amanda is currently chair of the BIAZA Nutrition sub-group.

For details of projects and publications:

email: amanda.ferguson@zsl.org

NICOLA (NIC) FIELD is the Co-Founder/Director of Global Animal Welfare, an international NGO building capacity in wildlife rescue facilities and sanctuaries. She also lectures in animal behaviour and welfare. Nic spent 6 years as co-chair of the IUCN Captive Bear Expert Team and is a Trustee for Wild Futures, a UK primate welfare and conservation charity rescuing, campaigning, educating and providing sanctuary to primates in need. Nic has 25 years' experience working with wildlife particularly bears and primates. She is the former Bear & Vet Team Director at Animals Asia's China Bear Rescue Centre, where she worked for 12 years. Nic

worked for 8 years as a zoo-keeper with a range of species. Nic has an MSc in Wildlife Biology & Conservation, as well as Animal Management and Education and Training qualifications. She has also spent time working with wildlife in Uganda, Vietnam, Borneo, Kenya, Jordan, Ethiopia, Laos and Indonesia.

For details of projects and publications:

Email: nfield@globalanimalwelfare.org.uk

MARIE FILIPEK is a Senior Animal Care Professional in the Florida Realm at ZooTampa in Tampa, Florida. She has 15 years of experience working with a variety of taxa at a few different facilities and has always prided herself on providing animals the opportunity to engage in natural behaviors. After an expansion of the North American black bears' habitats and nighthouses was completed at ZooTampa, she led the Florida Realm team in creating and implementing a behavior-based bear husbandry management plan and presented the research at the 2023 AZA Annual Conference.

For details of projects and publications:

Email: marie.filipek@zootampa.org

KATIE GRIES is the current Zoo Manager at Ochsner Park Zoo. She started her career interning at the National Aquarium and Northwest Trek. She then worked at Denver Zoo, Dallas Zoo, and the NEW Zoo in Green Bay. Katie has been working at Ochsner Park Zoo since 2016 and became Manager in 2019. She has worked with 8 different individual Black Bears. Bears are truly her favorite animal, and she is very passionate about providing the best care possible.

For details of projects and publications:

Email: kgries@cityofbaraboo.com

SARAH MCGREGOR has been working as a keeper for over 16 years and has a Diploma in the Management of Zoo and Aquarium Animals. She is currently the Section Manager on the

predator section at ZSL Whipsnade zoo in the UK and a Co-Chair on the BIAZA Bear Focus group.

For details of projects and publications:

Email: sarah.mcgregor@zsl.org

JESSICA SHEFTEL is the Applied Wildlife Welfare Manager at San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance and holds a B.A. in Physical Anthropology and Behavioral Studies from Beloit College. Her early career involved assisting with behavioral research at Zoo Atlanta and working with great apes at Georgia State University's Language Research Center. In 2002 she started at San Diego Zoo as a part time keeper, and has since held the roles of Senior, Lead Keeper, and Enrichment Supervisor. Her professional journey has been dedicated to the advancement of wildlife welfare worldwide. Through collaborations with wildlife facilities across the country and around the globe, her focus has been on implementing transformative strategies that elevate the well-being of wildlife in managed care. Jessica continues to explore and promote the importance of species natural history, challenge, and novel approaches to husbandry from beetles to elephants.

For details of projects and publications:

Email: jsheftel@sdzwa.org

SARAH VAN HERPT is the Senior Bear Team Manager at Animals Asia's award-winning Vietnam Bear Rescue Centre. Animals Asia works to end the bear bile trade in Vietnam and China and has rescued over 680 bears from the industry since it was established. Heading up the sanctuary bear care team, Sarah ensures the care and welfare of over 200 Asiatic black bears and Malayan sun bears. Sarah has innovated bear care at the sanctuary using her more than 14 years of theoretical and practical experience in animal husbandry and behaviour. Her specialities are cooperative care and the rehabilitation of psychologically traumatised bears. A native New Zealander, Sarah holds a BSc in Ecology and Zoology and MSc in Conservation Biology from Massey University and a certificate in Veterinary Nursing from Otago Polytechnic.

For details of projects and publications:

Email: svanherpt@animalsasia.org

ELLEN VOSSEKUIL is the current Zoo Specialist at Ochsner Park Zoo. She did her internship at Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge, and has been a full-time keeper at Hogle Zoo in Utah and John Ball Zoo in Michigan, working primarily with primates and large carnivores. She has been at OPZ since 2016. Her favorite part of being a zoo keeper is behavioral enrichment, and she overhauled the OPZ enrichment program in 2021 to include behavior-based enrichment categories.

For details of projects and publications:

Email: boozoo@cityofbaraboo.com