



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Santa Barbara Zoo Welcomes Guests “Down Under” With Grand Opening of Australian Walkabout Habitat**

***New immersive habitat offers up-close experiences with iconic Australian species  
& promotes wildlife conservation***

(January 5, 2022) Santa Barbara, CA - The [Santa Barbara Zoo](#) is excited to announce the grand opening on January 8, 2022, of its newest habitat, the [Australian Walkabout](#), a 15,000 square-foot habitat designed to transport guests “Down Under,” where they can walk among the wallabies, kangaroos, emus, see native birds, and develop a deeper understanding of and connection to wildlife conservation.

“We are thrilled to welcome guests to discover our new Australian Walkabout,” shared Rich Block, President & CEO of the Santa Barbara Zoo. “Core to the Zoo’s mission is to showcase the wonders of wildlife and the importance of its conservation. The new Australian Walkabout is an adventure aimed to serve as a reminder to us all to take care of the planet’s living treasures...across the world and in our own backyards.”

The Australian Walkabout, located in the former elephant habitat, is designed to put guests right in the middle of the action, exploring open pathways, beautiful native landscapes, and seeing some of the most iconic and unique wildlife representatives from the continent of Australia. Guests will enter the space and are asked to remain on the pathways, which lead them through an expansive native landscape, home to two emus, four Bennet’s wallabies, and three Western grey kangaroos, who will all be roaming freely (unless they choose to be in their barn, behind the scenes).

Australia is one of the most breathtakingly beautiful and biodiverse countries on the planet, and home to nearly 150,000 species of plants and animals, many of which are found nowhere else in the world. Unfortunately, due to climate change, drought, fires, habitat loss, and non-native predators, the continent currently has one of the most rapid rates of mammal extinctions worldwide.

“Our new Australian Walkabout is very near and dear to my heart, being from Australia,” Dr. Julie Barnes, Vice President of Animal Care & Health of the Santa Barbara Zoo. “This unique experience is similar to those offered by zoos both in Australia and around the US, where guests can really get up close and connect with the wildlife. This connection is a key part of our work to engage our guests and the local community in species preservation, and educate about conservation.”

In addition to creating a “closer” guest experience, the Australian Walkabout provides opportunities to learn about wildlife and conservation. The Zoo worked with a representative from the Aboriginal nations to incorporate Aboriginal culture and language into the exhibit. This gives the organization an opportunity to not only be inclusive and respectful but also deepen the story of the exhibit, the country, and the animals for guests.

The Australian Walkabout is a \$3 million improvement project funded entirely from donations. The Zoo would like to thank the many donors that made this project possible, including its lead donors, Thomas & Nancy Crawford & Family, Hind Foundation and Lady Leslie Ridley-Tree.

## **About the Animals**

### **Bennett’s wallabies**

The Bennett’s wallaby is a medium-sized marsupial found along the eastern coast of Australia and on the island of Tasmania. Adults can weigh between 30 and 40 pounds and stand about three feet tall, with males being slightly larger than the females. Their native habitat ranges from eucalyptus forests to open areas adjacent to forests. All four of the Zoo’s wallabies are available to be named, click here for the sponsorship opportunities:

<https://sbzoo.pivvit.com/bennetts-wallaby>

### **Emus**

Standing at around six feet tall, emus are the tallest native bird in Australia and the second tallest living bird in the world (after Africa’s ostrich). These flightless avian speedsters can sprint up to 31 miles per hour, traveling great distances on their long legs to forage for a variety of plants and insects. The Zoo has two emus; one is named Gus (sponsored by Jackson, whose family has been longtime Zoo supporters), and the other is still available to be named! Click here for sponsorship opportunities: <https://sbzoo.pivvit.com/emu>

### **Western grey kangaroos**

Western grey kangaroos are in the family of marsupials called Macropodidae (“big foot”), a family of 50 species that includes kangaroos and wallabies, among others. Adult Western grey males weigh in at around 120 pounds, and the females weigh in at around 60 pounds, making them one of the largest macropods. The Zoo has three male kangaroos: Max the kangaroo was born in May 2020, and came to the Santa Barbara Zoo from the San Diego Zoo; Aspen and Coolibah are brothers that arrived together from the LA Zoo. The older brother Aspen was born in August 2019, and the younger brother Coolibah, which is a type of eucalyptus tree, was born

in August 2020. Max is generously sponsored by Jess & Aaron Goldberg, Coolibah is generously sponsored by Charlotte & Ken Richardson and Aspen is generously sponsored by Alaia, whose family has been longtime Zoo supporters. Help welcome the new kangaroo, click here for sponsorship opportunities: <https://sbzoo.pivvit.com/western-grey-kangaroo>

Two aviaries also adjoin the exhibit, where guests can meet three species of native Australian birds, including the sulphur-crested cockatoo, tawny frogmouth, and laughing kookaburra.

Walkabout capacity is limited, and small groups will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. The kangaroos, wallabies, and emus are visible from outside the Walkabout as well, with the best viewing up on the Verandah deck.

The Australian Walkabout is free with Zoo admission, no additional reservations are required. Online tickets purchased in advance are currently required for ALL guests, including Santa Barbara Zoo Members (member tickets are free of charge). For reservations [click here](#).

### **About the Santa Barbara Zoo**

The Santa Barbara Zoo is open daily from 9 am for members and 9:30 am for general admission until 5 pm; general admission is \$19.95 for adults, \$14.95 for children 2-12, and free for children under 2. Parking is \$11. The Santa Barbara Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). AZA zoos are dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great visitor experience, and a better future for all living things. With its more than 200 accredited members, AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation and is the public's link to helping animals in their native habitats. Visit [www.sbzoo.org](http://www.sbzoo.org).

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