

Dear AAZK Chapter,

National Zoo Keeper Week 2026

It's time to start thinking about National Zoo Keeper Week (NZKW) 2026. To better prepare AAZK Chapters and facilities for the week, the NZKW Program created this planning packet to aid in your success.

National Zookeeper Week connects not only chapters and facilities but keepers around the country. The week creates spaces for all to gather to celebrate staff from all corners of your facility. Every year NZKW looks forward to providing resources so each chapter can have every opportunity to have a successful time engaging with their institutions.

Leading up to NZKW, AAZK's social media will be sharing parts of this packet to help guide zooquaria staff and public into NZKW. During NZKW, we will encourage you to utilize the tools given to showcase you and your facility, and share with the world on social media some of the content you choose to participate in. This informational packet will not only help you prepare for NZKW, but also guide you through the process of sharing your stories, photos, and achievements of your team.

Included are ideas for chapter activities to help with education and recognition, a guide to AAZK's social media campaigns, printable selfie papers and digital cards, the annual postcard exchange, and our photo contest. These elements can be used via social media and beyond to show how you and your chapter are celebrating #NZKW2026. Please look for this packet to be updated annually; it will be sent out via email and available on the AAZK website.

The NZKW Program and AAZK are here to help you make the most of National Zoo Keeper Week. As it is every year, this week is dedicated to sharing the passion and devotion of keepers to the world. AAZK is here to support chapters and keepers, as we are in this together.

Sincerely,

NZKW Program Manager nzkw@aazk.org

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National Zoo Keeper Week 2026 Programming

Social Media Campaigns

#NZKW2026 #AAZKNZKW #ImAKeeper

The NZKW Program team has developed yearly hashtags to engage and connect AAZK's followers on social media with keepers across the country. This year, NZKW has three hashtags specific for NZKW 2026 to continue that trend. By using these tags across social media platforms (Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok etc.), posts will be connected and easier to search for and share. AAZK's social media pages on Facebook and Instagram might share your public, searchable photos and posts about NZKW, and further elevate the impact of the animal care field. While "keeper appreciation week" and similar terms are frequently utilized, the current goal of the NZKW program is to go beyond appreciation and move towards professional **recognition**. As such, AAZK encourages the use of the unified NZKW hashtags and titles.

Share Your Selfie!

Please download the selfie PDFs attached to the NZKW planning packet email with printable "selfie" pages. You are encouraged to print the pages out on recycled paper or other materials and fill them in with words or statements that you think complete the provided text.

Get creative! Take selfies (or regular photos) during your daily duties at work, with the animals you care for, your teams, chapters or facility, or while doing research in the field – and always remember to follow the social media policies of your facility or company. Share your images to the AAZK Facebook page (American Association of Zoo Keepers) or on X or Instagram (@AAZKinc) with any (or all!) of this year's hashtags. AAZK will share selected images in the weeks leading up to NZKW - you may even see a few familiar faces from your favorite committees and the AAZK Board of Directors!

Please note, by sharing a photo with AAZK you're acknowledging the following:

I hereby grant the American Association of Zoo Keepers permission to use my likeness in a photograph in any and all of its publications, including website entries, without payment or any other consideration. My permission indicates that my host institution has granted permission for the release of this photograph. I understand and agree that the image will become property of the American Association of Zoo Keepers. I hereby irrevocably authorize the American Association of Zoo Keepers to edit, alter, copy, exhibit, publish, or distribute this photo for purposes of publicizing the American Association of Zoo Keeper's programs on social media, first and foremost for the promotion and educational value of the zoo keeping profession, but also for any other lawful purpose. In addition, I waive the right to inspect or approve the finished

product, including written or electronic copy, wherein my likeness appears. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising or related to the use of the photograph. I hereby hold harmless and release and forever discharge the American Association of Zoo Keepers from all claims, demands, and causes of action which, I, my heirs, representatives, executors, administrators, or any other persons acting on my behalf of my estate have or may have by reason of this authorization. I am 18 years of age or older and am competent to contract my own name. I have read this release before submitting a photo, and I fully understand the contents, meaning, and impact of this release.

WE CELEBRATE NZKW BY...

N a t i o n a l z o o k e e p e r w e e k



#NZKW2026

#IMAKEEPER

#AAZKNZKW

I CELEBRATE NZKW BY...

N a t i o n a l z o o k e e p e r w e e k



#NZKW2026

#IMAKEEPER

#AAZKNZKW

WHAT NZKW MEANS TO ME...

N a t i o n a l z o o k e e p e r w e e k



#NZKW2026

#IMAKEEPER

#AAZKNZKW

Digital Cards

Since 2021, the NZKW programs digital cards have been a popular feature of the week and we are bringing back a new set of digital cards this year! Download these printable cards and share with your co-workers. A great way to be motivated through fun animal puns. Perfect for lockers, lunch boxes, office desks, with even enough space for some extra encouragement to be written. These digital cards aren't just for keepers, use them to inspire other professionals in your facility. Small but sizable way to get everyone involved in NZKW. Make sure to have fun and enjoy these puns.

Lek be friends



Lek be friends



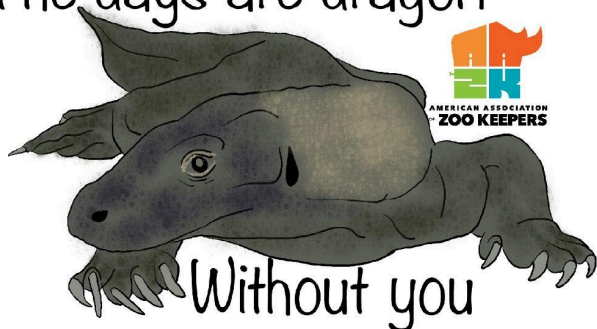
Lek be friends



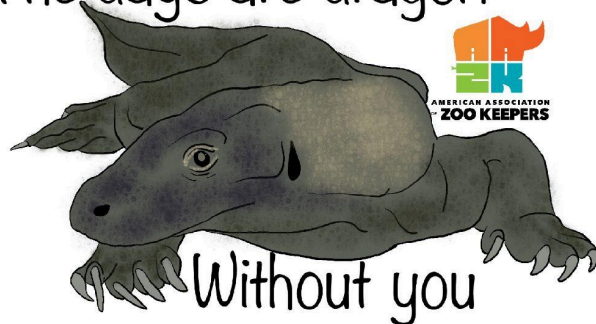
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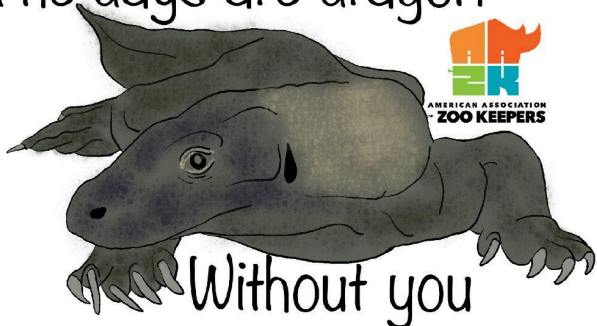
The days are dragon



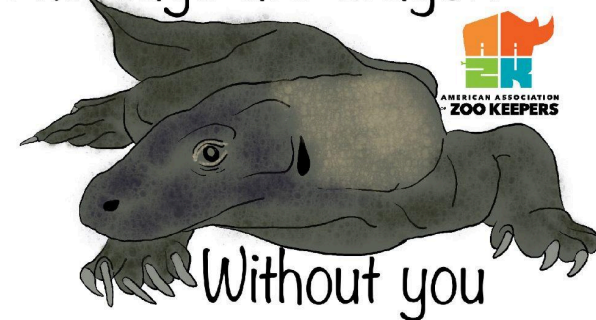
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The days are dragon



The days are dragon



Postcard Exchange

Consider truly making it a *National Zoo Keeper Week* by participating in NZKW's Keeper Connection Postcard exchange! Connect with keepers across the nation and share how you are celebrating the zookeeper profession by signing up to send some snail mail. Those participating will send cards to fellow keepers wishing them a "Happy NZKW!" To enroll in the exchange, **contact nzkw@aazk.org** with your current mailing address by **June 30th**. All enrolled will send a card to a randomly assigned keeper, and then receive a card from another keeper. Cards should be animal-related, and even better if it's from your affiliated institution or AAZK chapter. Gifts of any sort should not be sent; this project is meant to connect keepers rather than be an exchange of goods. The random assignments of receiving keepers will take place upon registration. Participants will receive the name and mailing address of their assigned keeper via e-mail and will be required to have their cards mailed no later than the start of National Zoo Keeper week, which is **July 19th**.

This year we are extending our postcards to AAZK's Latin American membership, please note in your email if you would like to participate in international mail.

Word Clouds

During the past nine years, the NZKW Program has created word clouds to emphasize the diversity of the animal care profession, both in title and in job description. With the previous generations of word clouds, AAZK and NZKW recognized how keepers were (and still are) much more than skilled laborers – they are complex problem solvers in an ever changing profession. This was done by creating dynamic word clouds shaped in varying species, tools and phrases. This year word clouds will be shared via social media leading up to NZKW.

Events & Activities Resource Sheet

The NZKW Program Committee has put together a simple resource sheet on how National Zoo Keeper Week can be celebrated from the individual to the facility. This year we have added some ideas on how to recognize ourselves and peers. This can be found below or on the National Zoo Keeper Week section of aazk.org. We recognize that support for chapters by institutions may be different for all involved and hope that these resources can assist those at any level financially.

- Food donations/ potlucks (individually or institutional support)
- Zoolympics (create fun games for all involved, maybe even prizes to win or just bragging rights)
- Recognition/Shoutouts
- Small gift bags (items you can get in bulk or fun gift shop finds)
- Asking institutions what is possible or if they can donate items/experiences - Tickets for sister organizations, personal days for staff etc.
- Coordination with managers from other departments for animal experiences, training sessions, feedings etc
- Keepers impersonating animals, creates fun memories and team morale

Other Programming

Every year, NZKW strives to bring the best of AAZK and the animal care profession to you, your chapter, and your facility. This year is no different! The NZKW Program has a few other things up their sleeve to educate and promote keepers...check your social media feeds regularly! If you have stories, ideas, or feedback you would like highlighted please reach out to Abbey Elkert at NZKW@aazk.org.

About the American Association of Zoo Keepers and National Zoo Keeper Week

The American Association of Zoo Keepers is a non-profit volunteer organization made up of professional zoo keepers and other interested persons dedicated to professional animal care and conservation. AAZK's mission is to advance excellence in the zoo keeping profession, foster effective communication beneficial to animal care, support deserving conservation projects, and promote the preservation of our natural resources and animal life. For more information, visit www.aazk.org.

National Zoo Keeper Week promotes the dedication and hard work of animal care professionals year round, celebrates animal care professionals' achievements during the third week in July, shares the accomplishments of AAZK Chapters, creates awareness of AAZK Chapters' dedication to conservation and wildlife to the public, and communicates the necessity for zoos and aquariums by way of animal care professionalism, research, and fundraising efforts.

Fact Sheet

What is National Zoo Keeper Week?

An AAZK national program to recognize and promote dedicated zoo and aquarium professionals year round, culminating in an annual week of recognition during the third week in July.

Purpose: The National Zoo Keeper Week Program exists to provide members with the tools and support to recognize their peers and promote the animal care profession during National Zoo Keeper Week and throughout the year.

Vision: The National Zoo Keeper Week Program will connect the public with animal care professionals in the name of raising awareness of what animal care professionals do year-round, recognizing their hard work, conservation efforts, and passion.

Mission: The National Zoo Keeper Week Program will provide tools and resources for the members that promote the animal care profession and educate the general public, each year finding innovative and novel ways of doing so.

When is National Zoo Keeper Week?

National Zoo Keeper Week begins *annually* on the third Sunday of July. Remember – it's never too early (or too late) to start planning for NZKW; check out the dates for upcoming years:

July 18th - 24th 2027, July 16th - 22nd 2028, July 15th - 21st 2029

What is the theme of NZKW this year?

There will be no direct theme for NZKW this year, we are focusing on creating and providing quality information, activities, and support for chapters. After years of themes we felt that NZKW lacked the attention on the actual week itself and the celebration that is keepers. That being said there is no reason that individual chapters themselves could not create their own theme that is the focal point of the week for them or personalize any way they see fit and we encourage you to do so. NZKW and AAZK are here to support chapters in any way they may.

Who should you contact with questions?

Abbey Elkert

NZKW Program Vice Manager

nzkw@aazk.org

What has NZKW done in the past?

National Zoo Keeper Week has focused on the diversity of zooquaria professionals – in what they do on a daily basis to what they do with their whole careers. These have been highlighted by posting daily keeping facts, chapter spotlights and inviting chapters across the country to share their stories. Chapters have shared their photos, activities, and events with AAZK National in order to bring zoo and aquarium staff together. NZKW has grown over the past couple years as more and more chapters get involved! Past themes of ‘Keepers Care’ and ‘Golden Keepers’ kept the focus on the above and beyond work keepers do for conservation both inside and outside their facilities. In 2019 NZKW worked on ‘Keepin’ it Real’ by focusing on the little known sides of the animal care profession. During 2020 the focus was on how it takes collaboration between individuals, institutions and organizations to save species. Through infographics, testimonials and outreach we worked to dispel misconceptions about the profession and share what keepers are really up to. While 2021 focused on improvising, adapting and persisting: Keeping on Zookeeping on. 2022’s theme was 2022 is for You, focusing on wellness to help combat compassion fatigue in the animal care field. NZKW is committed to education more than ever before and provides sharable content throughout NZKW and beyond. This year we are going back to the basics to focus more on you!

Why is there a National Zoo Keeper Week?

As the need to protect and preserve wildlife and their vanishing habitats continues to increase, the animal care professional’s role as educators and conservation ambassadors has become essential. Zoo and aquarium professionals care for hundreds of species, including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates.

Three hundred and sixty-five days a year, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, in all weather (from hurricanes to blizzards, to heat waves, and everything in between), keepers have to be ready for anything. They are involved in the welfare and lives of animals under human care from birth to death and every moment in between, and often create lifelong bonds. A keeper's day can include an array of tasks including cleaning, food preparation and feed out, medical treatment, training, enrichment, landscaping, exhibit design, animal introductions, public outreach and education, and much, MUCH more.

Most animal care professionals have bachelor degrees or higher, many with advanced degrees, and continue to advance their education by attending workshops, conferences, and certificate programs annually. They are not just skilled laborers, but professionals who continue to expand their knowledge of an ever-advancing field. Working with animals requires constant complex problem solving and progressive learning. Beyond their daily duties, keepers are involved in research projects, field work, and conservation organizations.

But, in the end, being a zoo keeper, aquarist, aviculturist – whatever you call it, they're all animal care professionals, and it is more than just a job. It's a career; it's a passion, it's a calling. THAT'S why we recognize zoo keepers year round, and THAT'S why we have a week dedicated to promoting their skills, dedication, and enthusiasm for wildlife to the world.

Join AAZK every third week in July to celebrate National Zoo Keeper Week!

Representative Susan A. Davis introduced House Resolution 509 on June 21, 2007:

This resolution was proposed to encourage individuals on a national level to engage in programs, activities, and ceremonies during National Zoo Keeper Week which encourage species conservation and public awareness of the important role of zoos in wildlife conservation.

“Expresses support for the goals and ideals of National Zookeeper Week. Recognizes the contributions zookeepers make to the care and conservation of captive exotic animals and to research, public education, and recreation. Expresses a renewed dedication to the appreciation and preservation of animal wildlife and nature and an invigorated effort to foster conservation projects and increase awareness of the need for preservation.”