

ZOO

TIMES

**FLAMINGO
ATTACK**
Support pours in

**THE BOYS
ARE BACK
IN TOWN**
Return of
the lemurs

Pristine
Kimberley
under threat



ADELAIDE ZOO
MONARTO ZOO
MARCH 2009

ZOOS
SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Greater good

A public outpouring of emotion after the flamingo attack has led to a sustained lift in interest in Zoos SA's work

Few recent events have hit a community nerve so acutely as the bashing of a Greater Flamingo at Adelaide Zoo on Wednesday October 29, 2008. Incredulity mingled with outrage as people tried to comprehend a wanton injury to a mostly-blind, elderly and vulnerable bird of great beauty, whose only error lay in offering itself for close viewing at its exhibit.

Alerted by a member of the public, bird-keeper Charlie Romer was first on the spot, finding the flamingo lying on the ground with a bloody gash on its head. He took the bird to the Animal Health Centre, as another Keeper alerted Zoo officials.

Director Communications Belinda Redman recalls the Zoo's senior management immediately running from the Minchin House offices towards the enclosure "because no one could believe that someone would do that".

Four teenagers were accused of bashing the bird; as of writing, the court case continues.

of the very elderly, and every age group in between. Facebook sites sprang up, as even the normally reticent 18-25 year-old age group became involved. Reaction extended overseas and interstate, with a Melbourne artist, who had coincidentally been working on a flamingo picture, donating proceeds from the work to the Zoo (see Pretty flamingo).

"And this would have gone on for three weeks," says Belinda. "It was ongoing for a very long period of time. The whole spectrum of the community was completely engrossed."

By this time the flamingo, which had been nursed in a sling for a few days, had not only survived, but regained some health. It was then returned to its enclosure. Keepers – and the public – were watching on anxiously to see if it would recover its vitality. How much food it was eating became a matter of public interest. A watch of Volunteers was set up beside the exhibit to look over the bird and record its activities, and the question of greater protection has been answered by horticulturalists widening the hedge behind which the bird stands.

Nearly six months later, the flamingo has proved itself to be one tough old bird. He is still

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The first health bulletins were not encouraging, as the Zoo's blog report reveals:

The flamingo was unable to stand or to hold its head up. It was rushed to the Adelaide Zoo's Animal Health Centre, where it was treated by our veterinary team. As its bill and throat were filling with blood, an oxygen tube was inserted down its throat under gaseous anaesthetic to assist in breathing. Anti-inflammatory medication and antibiotics were also administered. For a couple of hours its head was supported by zoo staff as the bird was unable to support itself. Rostered off staff were called and advised it was unlikely to survive the night.

As the vets worked, a wave of emotion hit the Zoo as TV, radio, the web and print media took the news to a disbelieving public. "The phones did run hot," remembers Belinda. "Call after call after call from people being absolutely disgusted and asking what they could do to help."

Emails began to pour in, and when The Advertiser's Adelaide Now homepage put up a blog, hundreds upon hundreds responded. Then came the cards, which turned into an avalanche of mail to the Zoo, ranging from three-year-olds' drawings to the spidery, shaky handwriting

out on display, although he no longer comes as close to its hedge as before. Senior bird-keeper Brett Backhouse says: "He seems okay, maybe a little bit more standoffish."

All of the attention, however, has raised the Zoo's profile to new heights, and led not only to a surge in donations, animal adoptions and attendances, but also Memberships. In nine weeks late last year the Zoo signed on an unprecedented 3000 new Members, compared with about 2000 new Members in a normal year.

Belinda thinks the episode shook the community, and raised it to a new level of appreciation of Zoos SA and conservation in general. "We're taken for granted a little, and I think it takes something like this for people to go, 'Hang on, this really is important to us, we value this.'"

KERRY WAKEFIELD



PRETTY FLAMINGO

The news of the flamingo bashing had a special resonance for Melbourne pen and ink artist Patrick Christie, who had coincidentally been working on a picture of three flamingos (pictured above). The long-term animal lover and former horse trainer was shocked.

"I was just appalled, it was just another one of those senseless things that happened that I can't comprehend. Instead of getting angry about it I needed to do something.

"By chance I was already working on a work of three flamingos. I finished it and put it on ebay. I rang the Zoo and offered to send them the proceeds of the auction. I do a lot of animals and still lifes," he says.

Patrick's meticulous and beautiful pen and ink drawings can be seen on www.patrickchristieink.com.

The number one print of Patrick Christie's hand-embossed, limited-edition giclee print, PINK, featuring three flamingos, fetched \$380, from a buyer who said he was more interested in helping the animals than in art collecting. He got a bargain.