

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 10, 2023

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Brevard Zoo To Begin Manatee Rehabilitation

MELBOURNE, Fla., April 10, 2023 — Brevard Zoo is expanding its efforts to help manatees from rescue and release to rehabilitation. The first manatee rehabilitation center in Brevard County is set to be built at the Zoo this year.

With this rehabilitation facility, the Zoo hopes to provide immediate care to manatees in our County as well as expand “bed space” at other facilities in our State. This rehabilitation center is made possible by a grant from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

The Zoo recently received permitting, grant funding and generous donations to establish manatee rehabilitation facilities. While there are plans to create a rehabilitation center at our future [Aquarium and Conservation Center](#), we’ll begin our efforts by building three tanks in behind-the-scenes areas on Zoo grounds first.

These initial facilities will be able to care for stable, non-critical manatee patients in need of additional monitoring, weight gain or better weather conditions for release. The goal for all our manatee patients will be for eventual release back into their native range.

While construction gets started, our veterinary staff are working with neighboring facilities accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP) to learn more about manatee care. Our two veterinarians, Dr. Trevor Zachariah and Dr. Kyle Donnelly, will also be attending continuing education to learn more about this species. In addition to these education efforts for our current staff, we’ll be adding additional staff with experience working with manatees.

As a high-profile species, decisions on the care of our future patients will be made with the oversight of FWC, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and MRP. A team from the MRP will decide when a manatee is ready for release as well as the release location. Our own staff will continue to be involved with manatee releases.

Brevard County is at the center of a historic wave of manatee deaths in recent years, largely due to environmental issues affecting seagrass in the Indian River Lagoon. Since 2011, this biodiverse estuary has experienced countless algal blooms that have resulted in a significant loss of seagrass habitat, a critical food source for lagoon-dwelling manatees. As a result, manatees in our area are dying of starvation at a record rate, leading FWC to declare an Unusual Mortality Event in March 2021.

Zoo volunteers have helped the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) during manatee rescues, releases and necropsies for the past 6 years. In 2021, the Zoo raised money to establish and equip an expanded group of these volunteers to better help FWC. A manatee rehabilitation facility is the next step to helping manatees.

Visit [this Dropbox link](#) for photos and video of past manatee rescues and releases attended by Brevard Zoo staff.

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Brevard Zoo is home to more than 900 animals representing 195 species from all over the world. As a not-for-profit organization, it is a leader in the fields of animal wellness, education and conservation. More information is available at www.brevardzoo.org.

Treetop Trek features five aerial obstacle courses that whisk guests above parts of the Zoo and through lush Florida landscapes. More information is available at www.treetoptrek.com.