

Global Wildlife Foundation - A Taste of Places Far Away

story and photos by Donna Bush



In this month's story of our continuing coverage series on non-profits, I bring to you a little taste of Africa, Asia, Australia, North America, South America, India and Europe all rolled into one and available in Southeast Louisiana in the form of Global Wildlife Center. This 900-acre wildlife preserve was established in 1991 by Ken Mattherne.

Global Wildlife Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, oversees the Center with a mission "to secure the future of threatened and endangered wildlife through active conservation and interactive education." Their vision: "We seek to be a center of excellence in education; to create a perfect place in which threatened and endangered wildlife from around the world live and flourish in a free-roaming natural environment. We are a place where children, adults, students, and teachers embrace the values of active conservation and wildlife preservation through hands-on education and first-person sensory experience."

Take it from someone who has visited Africa, South America, much of North America and a smattering of Europe, Global gives the patron a taste of the real deal and within an hour's drive of Slidell! The Center is home to approximately 30 species with around 2500 animals, plus fly-in visitors such as ducks, geese and bald eagles. It is a favorite destination among locals and tourists, logging over 250,000 visitors per year.

You have the option of a guided wagon tour with others or book your own private tour in a 4x4 Pinzgauer and enjoy

the real off-road experience like an African safari. Both tours offer open windows, allowing easy animal viewing, up-close photos and, unlike a safari, access to feed and pet many of the free-roaming animals. Also, unlike Africa, the animals at Global don't have any predators to fear.

From South America, they have 3 different species which include alpacas, llamas, and greater rheas. I observed greater rheas when I was in Brazil. They are large, flightless birds very similar to ostriches and emus. As the largest bird in South America, standing approximately 4-feet tall, they use their long, powerful legs to outrun predators. Sadly, these beautiful, graceful birds are considered "near threatened" status as their wild population is decreasing. Many South American residents take their meat and eggs for food and use their skin for leather products.

Species from India include axis deer, blackbuck, miniature zebu, and blue peafowl. All of these species are considered of "least concern". Blackbucks were challenging to photograph as they really did not want to stand still for me. They are one of the smallest antelopes from India with their chief predators being cheetahs, jackals, and wild dogs. Due to their co-evolution with cheetahs, they are able to run about 50mph, not fast enough to outrun a cheetah, but they can maintain this speed longer.

Peafowls are most commonly called peacocks. However, the male is the peacock and the female is the peahen.

From Asia, there are Pere David's deer, sika deer, and Bactrian camel. Pere David's deer, also known as Father David deer, Chinese swamp deer and milu deer are considered "extinct



in the wild". Major threats have included over-hunting and human expansion. Of the few remaining in China, there's a serious lack of genetic diversity, as they are all descended from just 18 animals.

The Chinese named these deer "sze pu shiang", which translates to "none of the four". With a neck like a camel, a tail similar to a donkey, antlers like a deer, and hooves resembling a cow, they seem to be confused on their heritage!

Bactrian camels are not evaluated as they are considered domesticated. Global's Clyde and Chloe are great examples of domesticated camels, as they will eagerly thrust their heads inside the vehicles to get pets and food.

Species from Africa consist of cape eland, red lechwe, reticulated giraffe, scimitar-horned oryx, watusi (ankole) cattle, grant's zebra, and African spurred tortoise. Of these, the red lechwe and zebra are "near threatened", the giraffe and tortoise are "vulnerable", and the oryx are "extinct" in the wild.

The red lechwe is one of the most aquatic of African antelopes, willing to graze in up to 2 feet of water. They tend to inhabit the marshy floodplains of rivers, lakes and swamps. A major threat is poaching for meat, droughts and homemade dams disrupting natural flooding.

Patrons are warned not to feed the zebras by hand as they might bite. But they will eagerly come near the wagon to eat food poured on the ground. Zebras are threatened by hunting and because farmers consider them a nuisance as competition for livestock grazing.

The scimitar-horned oryx is considered "extinct in the wild" due to overhunting for meat, hides and horns, as well as habitat loss and competition with domestic livestock. Thankfully, there are several ongoing conservation attempts to re-establish them in the wild.

From North America, patrons can observe, pet and feed American Bison, which are "near threatened" and beefalo, which are a cross between a bison and a cow. Beefalo, also called cattalo, are considered domesticated and not evaluated. They were originally bred for meat, offering lower fat and cholesterol counts with higher protein than regular beef. At Global, there are two different beefalo – a black angus/bison and a Texas longhorn/bison.

Since American bison no longer migrate across the Great Plains, they are considered ecologically extinct. However, conservation herds of 1000 + are being re-established. Besides Global, they can be observed in three different National Parks, including Yellowstone in Wyoming.

Animals from Europe include miniature Sicilian donkeys, red deer, Holstein fresian cattle and fallow deer. The cattle and the donkeys are domesticated, while both deer species are rated "least concern". The red deer are found

over most of Europe, as well as existing in Turkey, Iran, Morocco and Tunisia. The Barbary stag, a subspecies of red deer is the only native deer found in Africa. Did you know that the Holstein cow is featured as the Chick-fil-A mascot in their "Eat Mor Chikin" advertising campaign?

Last, but certainly not least, are the red kangaroos from Australia. Also, of "least concern", they live in a separate enclosure and are not free roaming, as they can hop almost thirty feet in one leap, allowing them to easily clear the cattle guards!

I found the tour guides and animal care team to be extremely knowledgeable about the various species, their behaviors and conservation status, making the tours very educational for all.

This is no surprise since the tour guides receive approximately two months of training that includes driver training on the tractors and pinzgauers. Along with this, they ride tours with senior tour guides; view slideshows and presentations about each species; and have tests and evaluations to verify they are prepared to lead their own tours.

Global's full-time animal care team are just as carefully trained and work closely with several local vets and traveling exotic animal zoo vets which visit monthly. Additionally, a staff member lives onsite in the event of a weather-related issue and to provide 24/7 animal care. Global adheres to the American Zoo Association (AZA) standards of animal welfare, safety and guest engagement. Since the Center is an open, free-roaming park, they are unable to be recognized under the AZA.

In 2020, they moved into their newly constructed giraffe barn which currently houses 10 giraffes, ranging in age from 6 months to 28-years old. Attached to the new barn is a nursery to care and bottle feed any abandoned or in-need babies. These have ranged from endangered species to alpaca babies and calves.

The most common comment from visitors is they "feel like they are in a *Jurassic Park* movie" when they pull up to the giraffe stop. A few families have told tour guides that they have been on African safaris, but they would rather take a private tour at Global Wildlife!

The Global logo tells the story of their commitment to wildlife and conservation as it depicts the addax antelope, considered one of the most endangered mammals in the world, with less than 500 existing in the wild. Previously, they could be found throughout most of the Sahara, but sadly they have been overhunted. At one time, Libya's population had sunk from 200 to just 3.

Global Wildlife Center "strives to promote the education of children about wildlife, to ensure the conservation of threatened and endangered species, and to secure the future of wildlife preservation." What a great mission!

History of Global Wildlife Center Land

The ownership was traced back to William & Charles Houlton, two brothers from a prominent Minnesota lumber family who owned the Lake Superior Piling Company, which also owned approximately 100,000 acres of virgin longleaf pine in what is known today as Tangipahoa Parish. Using the pine for lumber presented the problem of how to transport the lumber from the mill. The Houlton brothers built a dummy train line to join the Baton Rouge/Hammond Eastern railroad. They named the dummy-line the Uneedus Railroad. The town that sprung up to support the line & lumber needs became known as Uneedus. The Houlton brothers believed that the people of the town needed their big-city ways & ideas, hence the name U-need-us! The town began to prosper with a fully operational sawmill, homes for employees & a post office. The brothers believed the land could be turned into a profitable livestock & agricultural area. In order to educate the locals, they created a model farm where the Center resides today. The farm included a complete dairy with silos, barns & land growing feed for the animals. They brought in cattle & hogs from up north which had no immunity to the deadly Texas fever tick. While the dairy was successful for a time, producing 100 gallons of milk per day, they were never able to grow grain due to the poor soil condition.

The brothers did more than any other early lumber barons to try to improve general agricultural practices, including establishing the first two-room schoolhouse.

With the construction of roads & implementation of trucking in the 1920's, the Uneedus line was cut. The dairy shutdown, the land was clear-cut and, with no more jobs & no reason for most people to stay, the little town faded away.

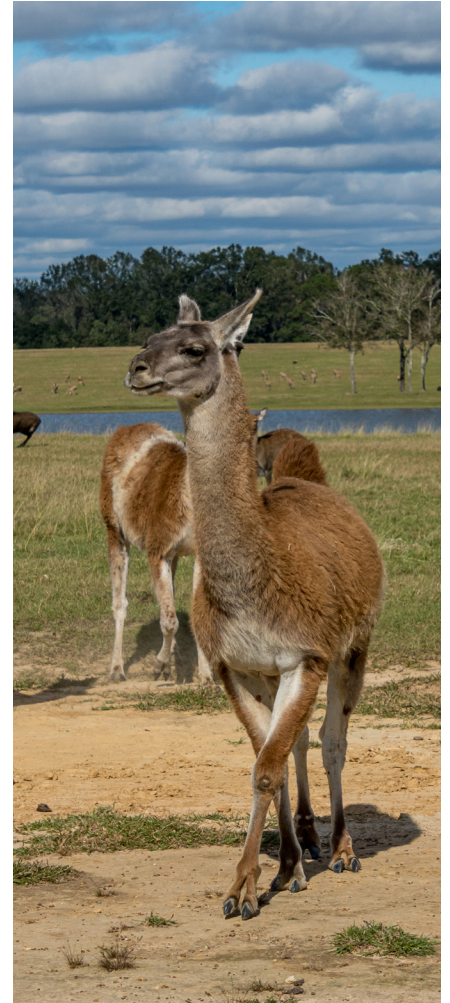
The Zemurray family acquired 16,000 acres from the Houltons & planted 5,000 of it with tung oil trees, which soon became a busy tung oil plantation. There were thoughts that this could become the industry that would pull the South from the Great Depression, as tung trees were a fast-growing crop. While the young trees grew, the Zemurray family also raised 500 head of cattle, fertilizing the trees & keeping down weeds underneath. At harvest, nuts were hand-picked by workers paid 10-20¢ per bushel, then trucked to Franklinton or Bogalusa for processing where the mills compressed the oil while pushing out pulp. The oil was used in paints because of its protective quality & the pulp was used as fertilizer.

From there, it is not known how the land came into Mr. Mattherne's possession other than he opened Global Wildlife Center in 1991 and it is now considered the largest center of its kind in the U.S. If our readers have any information about this, please email me at donna.bush@yahoo.com.



What is a PINZGAUER?

The Pinzgauer is part of a family of high-mobility, all-terrain (4x4) 4-wheel drive and (6x6) 6-wheel drive military utility vehicles. The vehicle was originally developed in the late 1960s and manufactured in Austria. It was named after the Pinzgauer, a rugged breed of Austrian horse. The 6x6 version is primarily a military-use vehicle, but Pinzgauers have been used as tourist transports in Africa, Australia, South America, Hawaii, and other exotic locales.



IUCN Red List Threat Categories

In descending order of threat, the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List threat categories are as follows:

Extinct or Extinct in the Wild

Critically Endangered, Endangered & Vulnerable: species threatened with global extinction

Near Threatened: species close to the threatened thresholds or that would be threatened without ongoing conservation measures

Least Concern: species evaluated with a lower risk of extinction

Data Deficient: no assessment because of insufficient data

How to help Global Foundation with their mission

Every tour ticket is a contribution to their cause. Other ways to support are purchases in the gift shop, adopting an animal or tree, and yearly memberships.

Adopt a Tree: For \$25 you can adopt a tree – white oak, poplar, red maple or sycamore and help replace trees lost during recent hurricanes. In return, you'll receive a t-shirt, fact sheet and a certificate.

Adopt an Animal: There are three different levels of adoption. The gold level is \$500 and includes a fact sheet and photo of chosen species, plus 2 adult and 2 child safari wagon passes. The silver level at \$100 includes a fact sheet and photo, along with 2 child safari wagon passes. The \$50 Bronze level includes a fact sheet and photo.

Memberships: They range in cost from \$55 to \$275, depending on how many adults or children are included. Members receive free tours, a membership decal and card, plus invitations to a Members-Only Appreciation Party.

