

Jungle Jack Hanna Interview: The Upcoming Film—Zookeeper & the Reality Behind Zoo Animal Husbandry Science

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JORDAN SCHAUL & JACK HANNA

Contributing Editor, and former zoo keeper, Dr. Jordan Schaul, interviews his idol, iconic wildlife expert and Director Emeritus of the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Jungle Jack Hanna. Neither have seen the Adam Sandler film, Zookeeper, but they have both seen the trailer in which an animal keeper (played by Kevin James) finds himself romantically challenged because of his vocation. The movie hits theaters on July 8th.

Jordan Schaul: Jack is possibly the busiest person I know and so I'd like to thank his staff and particularly Rick Prebeg, his manager, for setting up this interview just before the film reaches theaters this Friday, July 8th. Jack Hanna is currently Director Emeritus of the [Columbus Zoo and Aquarium](#) and the star of the Emmy award-winning program [Jack Hanna's Into the Wild](#).

I was inspired to become an animal keeper because of program's like *Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures* and watching him on network television programs introducing some of the wildest members of the animal kingdom to viewers around the world. There is something captivating about the way he showcases the amazing behavioral and physical characteristics of both mega- and mini-fauna and all the fascinating wonders of wildlife. Jack made hissing cockroaches popular and he made zoo keeping cool, among his many accomplishments and contributions to wildlife conservation. Yes he is part entertainer, but he has used his celebrity to further conservation efforts both in zoos and in wild places around the globe and perhaps made more of an impact on global wildlife conservation than anyone else on Earth.



JACK HANNA AND AN ANDEAN BEAR CUB

involved in conservation programs both on zoo grounds and in the field. As someone who has been a proponent of zoos and having influenced much of the global zoo community's education and outreach philosophy over a career spanning forty years, how would you reflect on the evolution of the zoo keeper and zoo educator?

Jack Hanna: Back in the "old days" when I was growing up, "zookeeping" wasn't really a career that many people wanted to get into. In fact, when I started in Columbus, the Zoo was under the City's Sewers and Drains dept! Since then, though, people throughout the US have been enlightened about the plight of wildlife from around the world. They've become inspired, and want to be involved with animals and conservation. To that end, zookeeping is now one of the most sought-after jobs around—zoos have thousands of applicants, and only a few positions to fill. Education? When I started in the zoo field, wildlife education was just emerging. Now, and for the last 20 years or so, it has become an integral part of any successful zoo. Zoo education departments offer a variety of fun and sophisticated programs for all ages.

Jordan Schaul: I don't want to speak for you, but I suspect that you, more than most, realize the power of entertainment in this business of conservation education. I think it is an element that can't be overlooked. Entertainment is part of what gets people through the zoo entrance gates and funds much of the zoo-sponsored conservation programs hosted by these conservation centers. Of course zoos are poised to send a very healthy and eco-friendly message to their patrons. They also reach an amazing number of visitors every year, more than all professional sporting events combined. But you still need to entertain people to some degree if you really hope to educate them, correct?

Jack Hanna: I'm a firm believer in "entertainment" or "Edu-tainment" as many call it these days. I've watched visitors at the zoo for many years, and if an exhibit is lifeless/boring, people will just walk right by without learning anything about the animal on display. In today's modern world, there is so much entertainment available that we, in the zoo world, have to compete. We want to spread the message about wildlife and conservation to as many people as possible, so TV/Internet appearances are a great way to get to the "masses"! There will always be animal-lovers who will visit the Zoo and be involved in conservation, but we need to inspire others to do the same—that's what I mean my reaching the masses.

Jordan Schaul: I will go see this film *Zookeeper* because it piques my curiosity. Many of my colleagues, keepers and former keepers included, have mixed feeling about the film. They may be worried about the message that it conveys about zoos and zoo keepers, in particular. From watching the trailer for this film it appears that the movie may not reflect well upon today's zoo animal care professional. The movie may portray something of an 'old school' zoo keeper. The keeper, played by comedian Kevin James, may very well be someone who may not have chosen animal husbandry as a career path or have any interest or formal training in animal care or conservation science. This film, may indeed, be an antiquated portrayal of a zoo employee. But I must add that I learned a lot from some of the old-timers. Do you think you will go see the film? Will it harm the perception of the zoo keeper or be a set back for zoos?

Jack Hanna: I want to see the film, and I hope it doesn't skew opinions about the zoo industry, as you've alluded to. I would definitely say that most people have little knowledge about what a zookeeper does, how involved he/she is (sometimes on a 24-hour basis), how dedicated they are to the animals under their care, and how much they give to the body of knowledge about zoo animals, and those in the wild.

Jordan Schaul: The Columbus Zoo supports more and more field projects every year and even your new program *Into the Wild* focuses predominantly on field initiatives and less so on the captive environment. Can you briefly describe how zoos have evolved since you first became a zoo director and can you provide any insight into what direction they are headed.

Jack Hanna: Wow, that's a good one, Jordan! So much to say, but I'll be concise. Zoos have gone from being unimaginative menageries of animal curiosities to what the AZA-accredited zoos are today—fun, clean, parks filled with amazing animals that are well-cared for and healthy. Zoos are important reproductive facilities for many endangered species and also act as important rehabilitation stations for many types of animals. Animals are housed in interesting "immersion" exhibits that teach people about their environment and the culture that lives nearby. The keepers are on top of the animals' health and psychological conditions 100% of the time and, through "enrichment" programs, enhance their daily lives. Finally, zoos are at the forefront of wildlife education in our world today—in hopes of teaching and inspiring children to become good stewards of the Earth and all its valuable creatures!

Jordan Schaul: Lastly, can we return to the movie(s) for a second? Do you think zoo keepers or curators are romantically challenged? Who would you like to play Jungle Jack Hanna should a film be made about your amazing career?

Jack Hanna: Hmmm, Jordan—another good one! Not sure if they are romantically challenged or not...but as to who would play Jungle Jack in a movie??? It would have to be some real character—not someone famous, or really good-looking! Thanks for the interview!

Contributing Editor and former zoo keeper, Dr. Jordan Schaul, interviews his idol, the iconic wildlife expert and 'world famous zoo keeper,' [Jungle Jack Hanna](#), about the upcoming film [Zookeeper](#). Both have seen the trailer, but neither have seen the film. The movie's portrayal of a romantically-challenged animal keeper places the vocation itself in a fairly precarious position.

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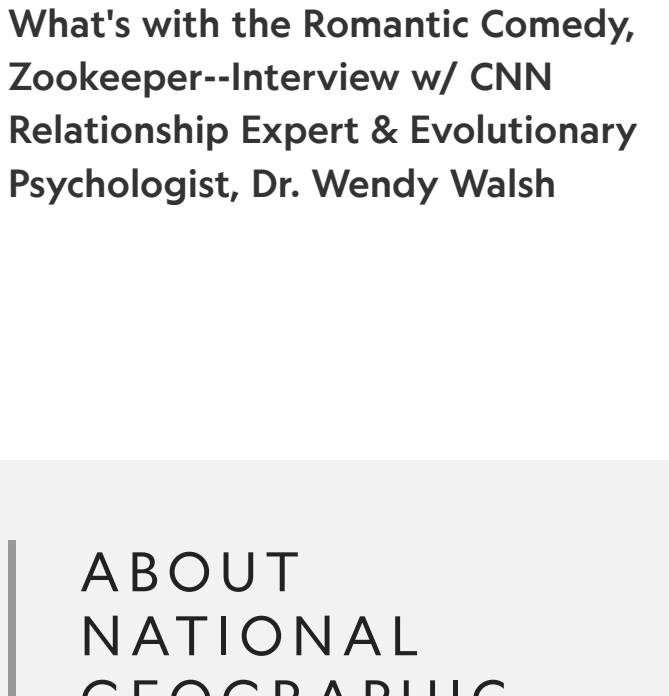
With training in wildlife ecology, conservation medicine and comparative psychology, Dr. Schaul's contributions to Nat Geo Voices have covered a range of environmental and social topics. He draws particular attention to the plight of imperiled species highlighting issues at the juncture or nexus of sorta situ wildlife conservation and animal welfare. The juncture or nexus of sorta situ wildlife conservation are comprised of scientific management and stewardship of animal populations ex situ (in captivity / 'in human care') and in situ (free-ranging / 'in nature'). He also has a background in behavior management and training of companion animals and captive wildlife, as well as conservation marketing and digital publicity. Jordan has shared interviews with colleagues and public figures, as well as editorial news content. In addition, he has posted narratives describing his own work, which include the following examples: • Restoration of wood bison to the Interior of Alaska while (While Animal Curator at Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center and courtesy professor at the University of Alaska) • Rehabilitation of orphaned sloth bears exploited for tourists in South Asia (While executive consultant 'in-residence' at the Agra Bear Rescue and managed by Wildlife SOS) • Censusing small wild cat (e.g. ocelot and margay) populations in the montane cloud forests of Costa Rica for popular publications with 'The Cat Whisperer' Mieshelle Nagelschneider • Evaluating the impact of ecotourism on marine mammal population stability and welfare off the coast of Mexico's Sea of Cortez (With Boston University's marine science program) Jordan was a director on boards of non-profit wildlife conservation organizations serving nations in Africa, North and South America and Southeast Asia. He is also a consultant to a human-wildlife conflict mitigation organization in the Pacific Northwest. Following animal curatorships in Alaska and California, he served as a charter board member of a zoo advocacy and outreach organization and later as its executive director. Jordan was a member of the Communication and Education Commission of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (CEC-IUCN) and the Bear Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (BSG-SSC-IUCN). He has served on the advisory council of the National Wildlife Humane Society and in service to the Bear Taxon Advisory Group of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA Bear TAG). In addition he was an ex officio member of council of the International Association for Bear Research and Management. Contact Email: jordan@jordanschaul.com <http://www.facebook.com/jordan.schaul> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jordanschaul/> www.jordanschaul.com www.bicoastalreputationmanagement.com


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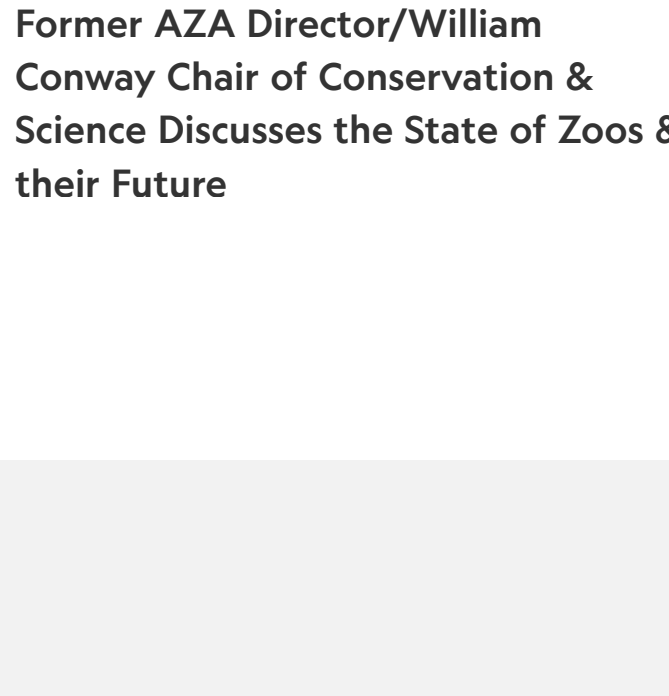

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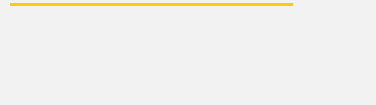


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