the RTC developed a white paper on AZA Research Priorities (available on the AZA website at www.aza.org). This white paper identified and outlined component needs of four key areas of research focus: Sustainable Animal Collections; Animal Care and Welfare; Species and Habitat Conservation; and Conservation Education and Public Engagement.

In this research-focused issue of Connect, we aim to demonstrate how science has become business as usual for zoos and aquariums. The issue includes four overview articles, one for each of the four research priorities identified in the 2012 white paper. Each article highlights a number of specific examples of how the practical application of science has both solved problems and informed best practices of our industry. We hope you enjoy the overview of scientific work provided in these pieces and that you are able to take a moment to reflect on how far we as an Association have come and the great strides we are making toward accomplishing our mission.

Dr. Katie Leighty is the Chair of AZA’s Research and Technology Committee.
Lisa Faust is Vice Chair of AZA’s Research and Technology Committee.
Dr. Steven Thompson is Vice Chair of AZA’s Research and Technology Committee.

Conservation Grants Fund

Mongolia Up
Uniting People Globally for Wildlife Conservation

By Erin Stotz

Denver Zoo in Denver, Colo., and Nomadic Nature Conservation are grateful for the financial support from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums’ Conservation Grant Fund (CGF), which provided critically needed conservation education to communities in Mongolia though the Mongolia Up: Uniting People Globally for Wildlife Conservation program.

Denver Zoo has been working to preserve and conserve the important habitats and wildlife found in Mongolia since 1996, with a particular focus in Ikh Nart Nature Reserve. Mongolia Up complements ecological research in the reserve. The program works to connect local people to conservation, promote positive attitudes and behaviors toward wildlife, and cultivate wildlife ambassadors.

Funding from CGF provided education materials, critical training for Mongolian teachers and participation of Mongolians in an educational exchange program.

Accomplishments include:

- Two conservation clubs established in both Mongolia and Colorado, involving more than 45 middle school students.
- 20 Mongolian primary school teachers received Nomadic Nature Trunk curriculum training and received one Nomadic Nature Trunk for their school.
- Two conservation exchanges resulted in four Mongolians traveling to Denver and 10 Colorado participants traveling to Mongolia; together, they participated in hands-on wildlife research and cultural immersion.
- One Community Celebration Day in Mongolia that brought together Mongolian wildlife researchers, middle school students and more than 100 local Mongolians living near Ikh Nart Nature Reserve.
- Evaluation results demonstrated an increase in participants’ empathy toward animals in the wild, a greater understanding of wildlife species and wildlife diversity, and an increase in recognition of the breadth of conservation actions that one can pursue to conserve wildlife.

Denver Zoo works with local Mongolian non-governmental organizations to improve their capacity. One of our strongest partners, Nomadic Nature Conservation’s Program Director, Tungalagtuya Khunkhenduu (Tunga) was awarded the 2015 Disney Conservation Fund Conservation Hero Award. Tunga inspires, empowers and ultimately impacts positive community behavior change in favor of Mongolia’s wildlife.

Erin Stotz is the Community Conservation Coordinator for Denver Zoo.