

## NEWS RELEASE

### Zoological Disaster Response, Rescue, and Recovery (ZDR3)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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## **SUPER TYPHOON MAWAR SMASHED THE ZOO, BUT SPARED THE ANIMALS**

*Guam zoo animals rode out the storm with their caretakers, who need help rebuilding their habitats.*

**TUMON BAY, Guam** - When Super Typhoon Mawar made landfall as a category 4 storm on May 25, the founders of the island's only zoo were riding it out in their home with many of their smaller animals, including Mariana fruit bats, birds, and turtles.

"They were very quiet and very cooperative," says Barbara Cushing, recalling what it was like as they settled their furred and feathered "children" in for a long, frightening night. She chuckles when she talks about their critically endangered, yellow-crested cockatoo, Angel: "He likes to sing, he likes to dance, so I had to turn on the radio for him." She kept a macaque, Makaka, calm with television as the storm roared around their home.

After the storm passed her husband, Jimmy, went out at first daylight to survey the damage. He was grateful to find the carabao (a type of water buffalo), wild boar, sea turtles, and other animals that sheltered in their habitats in good shape. But the zoo's grounds were littered with downed trees, broken fencing, splintered lumber, and other rubble.

Adding to the psychological toll, the super typhoon blew through on the Cushings' 49th anniversary.

The Cushings established their zoo in 1977 to provide a home for wildlife, and to create a botanical garden that includes myriad endangered plant species. The animals they tend include more than 40 species of wildlife, many of which are endemic to the region. Some of these species are endangered, and are specially permitted by federal agencies to be maintained at the zoo. The zoo is regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which most recently inspected the site in January 2023.

Many of the animals in their care are geriatric or have special needs. Many arrived with injuries and were rehabilitated, but cannot be released back to the wild because they would not survive. Some of the zoo's residents were surrendered by owners who could no longer care for them, or had to move off the island; others were placed at the zoo by Guam's government. "We take care of them because they can't take care of themselves," says Barbara.

Until Mawar denuded their trees, the zoo was a colorful sanctuary of tropical foliage in the shadow of high-rise hotels. Thanks to community volunteers who love their zoo, the Cushings know they can rebuild. But when your home and your life's work are in shambles, it is hard to sort out next steps.

## **Unexpected Help**

A representative from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), who was working in a disaster response role, immediately recognized the need for additional support and recommended a resource the Cushings weren't aware of: Zoological Disaster Response, Rescue, and Recovery (ZDR3).

ZDR3 is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping zoological facilities before, during, and after significant disasters. Despite the distance from the mainland, ZDR3's Executive Director, Julia Wagner, opted to answer the call for help. "Guam is a U.S. territory," she explains. "And although we cannot deploy the types of resources we can call upon when a disaster strikes a facility in the contiguous U.S., the next best option was to get on a plane and assess how we could best assist the Guam Zoo."

ZDR3 coordinates a network of zoological facilities in the U.S. that provide peer-to-peer disaster response. In short: zoo people understand the unique needs of other zoo people and their animals. Wagner can't ask another zoo's response team to fly to Guam, so she decided to work alongside the Cushings at their zoo to help them prioritize and communicate their needs.

"Jimmy and Barbara have the greatest love story," Wagner comments. "They've been together since junior high school, created this unique ecosystem together, and tend their animals and plants with the utmost care and devotion. I am going to have a hard time saying goodbye."

## Looking Ahead

Barbara's family has lived on Guam for generations. Jimmy's family arrived in the 1950s. They raised two children who are now adults, living on the mainland. Jimmy and Barbara's roots remain firmly grounded in Guam, where they know they make a difference in the lives of their animals, and the people who come to see them. The Cushings are especially taken by children's reactions: "They are so excited and their eyes are so wide. When it's time to go they don't want to go," says Barbara.

Jimmy is managing and overseeing the reconstruction with volunteer assistance. To avoid stressing their animals, he is careful about how many work at the zoo at one time.

Time is not their friend. The zoo was closed for two years due to Covid, and is now closed again because, although the animals' habitats are structurally sound, the grounds are not yet safe for the public to navigate. That means they have no revenue when their costs have just increased.

The Cushings hope that people who love animals and their zoo will donate via [Donorbox](#), visit their [Amazon wishlist](#) and select an item to help, or send a check to Guam Zoo, PO Box 7474, Tamuning GU 96931 to underwrite some of the expenses while they get back on their feet.

"Because Guam is an island, it has a unique ecosystem," Wagner points out. "The Cushings' zoo provides the opportunity for the community to connect to their own wildlife, and for first-time visitors like me to discover it."

### ***About Zoological Disaster Response, Rescue, and Recovery***

ZDR3 is the largest zoological response organization in the United States. As an industry-led effort, ZDR3 provides support to zoos, aquariums, sanctuaries, and other non-domestic animal businesses before, during, and after significant incidents.

Website: [zdr3.org](http://zdr3.org)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ZDR3.USA>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/zdr3usa/>

### ***About the Guam Zoological Botanical & Marine Garden***

Founded in 1977, the zoo was created to provide a sanctuary for wildlife and native flora. It is home to more than 40 species of endangered and endemic marine and wildlife, as well as other exotic and domestic animals from around the world. It is the only zoo on the island of Guam.

Website: <http://www.guamzoo.com/index.html>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/cushingzoo>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/guamzoo/>



## Have some questions? Here are some answers:

**Are the Cushings available for an interview?** No, they are focused on caring for their animals and rebuilding their zoo. They asked ZDR3 to manage communications for them. For the moment, the Cushings have also asked ZDR3's Executive Director, Julia Wagner, to speak to journalists and the public on their behalf since she spent time working with them and understands what their recovery process will entail. To arrange an interview, please email your request to [communications@zdr3.org](mailto:communications@zdr3.org).

**When will the zoo reopen?** There isn't currently a reopening date. Please visit the [guamzoo.com](http://guamzoo.com) and follow them on Facebook for updates.

**What happens when ZDR3 leaves Guam?** ZDR3 has committed to helping the Cushings with ongoing communication support (such as this press release!). After ZDR3 assists a zoological facility, our entire network of facilities cares about their recovery. And in the unfortunate event that help is needed again, ZDR3 will be honored to provide support to the Guam Zoo. We are stronger together.

**Can I take photos of the zoo?** Not while the Cushings are rebuilding. ZDR3 has all available photos and will share the full-size versions of the photos below via Dropbox or Google Photos with reporters, upon request. Please email your request for photos to [communications@zdr3.org](mailto:communications@zdr3.org)



*Guam Zoo co-founders Jimmy & Barbara Cushing with ZDR3 Executive Director Julia Wagner*



*Guam Zoo storm damage*



*Guam Zoo - goats in their habitat after it had been cleared of storm debris*



*Guam Zoo entrance before the storm*



*Guam Zoo co-founder Jimmy Cushing clearing downed limbs with a chainsaw*



*Guam Zoo botanical garden before the storm*



*Guam Zoo - tortoise in its habitat after it had been cleared of storm debris*



*Guam Zoo - white peacock in its habitat before the storm*