

# Rescue at the Zoo



by Jennifer Keats Curtis and  
Zoological Disaster Response,  
Rescue, and Recovery (ZDR3)

# Rescue at the Zoo

We prepare at home for natural disasters and weather emergencies. If high winds, floods, and snowstorms are heading our way, we can stay (ride it out) or leave (evacuate). But what happens when zoos, aquariums, or sanctuaries are in the storm's path? How do zoo staff plan to protect the animals? Who can come to help them?

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- Thinking it Through
- Animal Matching
- Enrichment Matching
- Zoo Jobs Matching

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**Jennifer Keats Curtis** is an award-winning author that regularly, and delightedly, works with biologists, environmental specialists, and science experts to research and write her books. Some of her books include Children's Choice Book Award Winner *Kali's Story: An Orphaned Polar Bear Rescue*; NSTA Outstanding Science Trade Books for Children: *Pooper Snooper* (also 2023 Children's Book Councils Favorites), *After A While Crocodile: Alexa's Diary*, *Moonlight Crab Count*, and *Maggie: Alaska's Last Elephant*. The realistic fiction, *Creek Critters*, co-authored with scientists at Stroud Water Research Center, was a finalist for the AAAS/Subaru SB&F Prize for Excellence in Hands-on Science Books. Follow her on Twitter and Facebook.

**Zoological Disaster Response, Rescue, and Recovery (ZDR3)** is the country's only zoo response organization. This team is dedicated to saving animals that live in zoos, aquariums, and sanctuaries in the event of natural disasters, like floods and hurricanes. As of this writing, ZDR3 manages and coordinates a growing emergency response network of more than 170 facilities in 36 states and U.S. territories, including Guam. When a zoological facility asks for help, ZDR3 organizes experienced responders before, during, and after natural disasters. The staff of ZDR3 are dedicated personnel who work year-round to monitor hazards, maintain and grow their response network, and support network readiness. Since it began, ZDR3 has responded to more than 20 zoological organizations to help overwhelmed staff, impacting the well-being of thousands of exotic animals and enabling these facilities to reopen their doors as soon as they are safely ready. Visit their website at [www.zdr3.org](http://www.zdr3.org) and follow them on Facebook and Instagram.



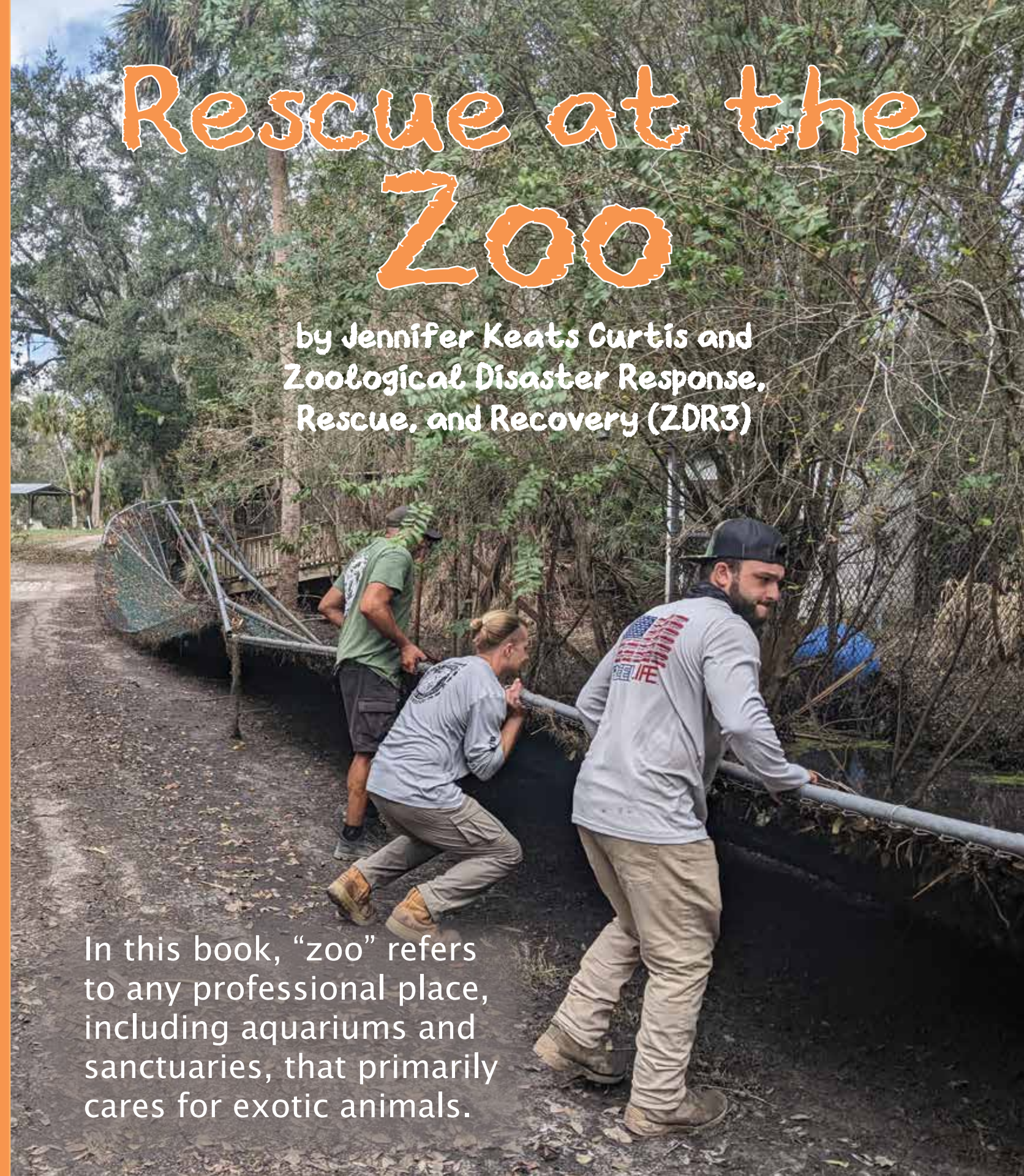
Jennifer Keats Curtis



ZDR3

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In this book, "zoo" refers to any professional place, including aquariums and sanctuaries, that primarily cares for exotic animals.

Earthquakes. Tornadoes.  
Hurricanes. Ice Storms.  
Wildfires. Floods. What  
do all these have in  
common?

They are natural  
disasters. These weather  
events can hurt our  
homes and areas where  
we live.

Big storms can also  
cause problems for  
animals that live in zoos.



When a disaster comes our way, how do we prepare?

First, we stock supplies, like water, food, and medicines. Then, we gather flashlights, batteries, phone chargers, and a first aid kit.

We board up windows and put out sandbags.

We grab our favorite snacks and games to play in case we lose power.

Then, we head for shelter, like a basement. Sometimes, we might have to leave (evacuate) and go to a safe place.

Of course, we take our pets with us.



Just like you prepare for a big storm, zoo staff get ready too. Keepers gather food, water, medicines, and even games. They take anything that may blow away inside or tie it down. Staff also seal doors and windows to stop flooding and damage. They grab crates to move animals.



Even before strong winds blow, staff decide who will stay. This is called riding out the storm. Keepers, vets, electricians, gardeners, and other workers might not leave. They will stay to help keep the zoo and animals safe.



prehensile-tailed porcupine

Animals may be moved inside for better protection.  
Some animals climb into crates to be carried indoors.



sitatunga



okapi

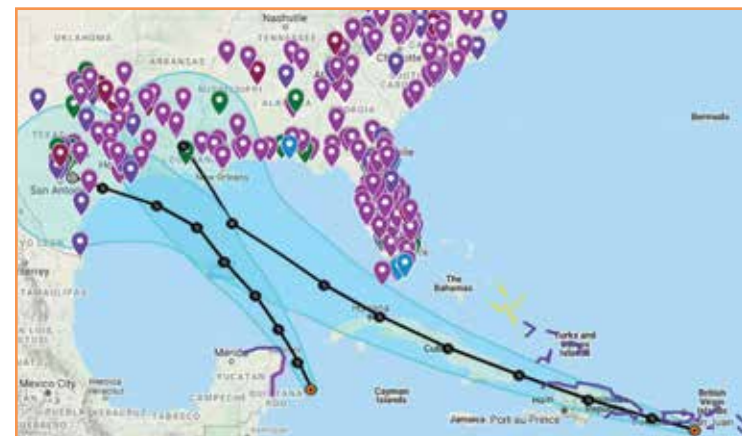
# For Creative Minds

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## Thinking it Through

blizzard or ice storm	earthquake	flood	hurricane
tornado	tsunami	volcanic eruption	wildfire

Which of these natural disasters or severe weather events might affect where you live?  
 Which of these events might happen with little or no warning?  
 For which of these events would you have warning and time to prepare?  
 How will you know if one of the disasters/ severe weather events is coming your way?  
 How would you prepare for a natural disaster or severe weather event?  
 What would you pack or gather to keep a pet safe and secure?  
 Have you ever experienced a natural disaster? If so, describe what happened. Were you prepared or surprised?



What are some ways these natural disasters might affect animals in zoos?  
 Why do you think zoos have people stay there for an event they know is coming?  
 Would you want to stay at a zoo during one of these events? Why or why not?  
 Do you think weather affects zoo animals? If so, explain what and why.  
 Would heat or freezing temperatures affect all animals the same way? Why or why not?

## Animal Matching

Most facilities have block enclosures, hardened structures, or an off-exhibit place for animals to shelter in place in the event of a natural disaster. Animals may be placed in crates or cages and carried into these safe places for the duration of the storm. Match the picture to the off-exhibit animals that are sheltering in place.



- A. Heat lamps help keep these birds warm.
- B. This big cat beds down in pine shavings.
- C. This large reptile is being kept in an indoor area normally used for visitors.
- D. This large bird is crated with straw to keep it comfortable.
- E. These reptiles are being temporarily housed in the basement for safety.
- F. This big cat enjoys some special meat.
- G. These tropical birds flock in an indoor area normally used for visitors.
- H. This reptile snoozes in a big bucket.

Answers: 1-C, 2-B, 3-G, 4-F, 5-A, 6-D, 7-H, 8-E

## Enrichment Matching



In the wild, animals never have time to be bored. Zookeepers offer the animals in their care enrichment activities that give them the opportunity to use their natural behaviors.

Enrichment, such as “hunting” for food in their habitats, and playing games, is especially important when animals’ routines change for any reason, including weather or natural disaster events.

Which photos best match the enrichment activities below?



**Hunting for food.** Finding and getting food in the wild takes work. While zoo animals are fed regularly, it’s important to sometimes make them work to find food. Zookeepers often hide food around the habitat, or in interesting seasonal items. Sometimes they freeze food, especially in hot weather.

**Enjoying new scents.** Many animals are stimulated by different scents, including herbs, spices, perfume, and nontoxic plants (which can also provide an interesting texture to rub against). Zookeepers often offer scented objects or add scent to items the animals can chew on or destroy to encourage them to move and explore.



**Playing with toys.** Playing with toys gives animals the chance to explore and learn. Some “toys” may be platforms or places to hide. Sometimes the toys are pretend prey the animals might hunt in the wild.

**Rest and snuggle time.** Some animals enjoy a good blanket or stuffie to snuggle when they nap.



Next time you visit a zoo or aquarium, look for enrichment activities the animals are doing!

Answers: 1. Hunting for food (arctic foxes & pumpkin); 2. Rest and snuggle time (kinkajou in a blanket); 3. Playing with toys (tiger with pretend zebra), 4: Enjoying new scents (serval enjoying Christmas tree scents).

## Zoo Jobs Matching

Many people think of zookeepers and veterinarians when they think of jobs at the zoo; but there are also important jobs outside of animal care. Match the photo to the job description.



administrator



curator



educator



electrician



gardener



veterinarian



volunteer



zookeeper

- A. I am an animal doctor. I give the animals physical examinations and vaccinations when needed.
- B. I maintain, repair, and figure out any problems with electrical systems, including phones, data, lighting, service panels, and generators.
- C. I manage and am responsible for all animals or specific animal groups at the zoo.
- D. I help zoo educators or zookeepers but don’t get paid.
- E. I teach children and adults about the animals, habitats, feeding, and conservation issues. During camps and special programs, I lead activities, games, and crafts.
- F. I am responsible for feeding, caring for, and maintaining the health of specific animals.
- G. I take care of the landscaping and soil, including designing areas and caring for plants, flowers, and trees.
- H. I am responsible for essential behind-the-scenes work for the whole zoo such as tracking budgets, issuing reports, and ensuring rules are in place to keep everyone safe.

Answers: 1-H; 2-C; 3-E; 4-B; 5-G; 6-A; 7-D or F; 8-D or F



Thanks to Zoological Disaster Response, Rescue, and Recovery (ZDR3) for sharing the story of how they help zoos, aquariums, and sanctuaries. You can follow them at [www.zdr3.org](http://www.zdr3.org), [www.facebook.com/ZDR3.USA](https://www.facebook.com/ZDR3.USA), and [www.instagram.com/zdr3usa/](https://www.instagram.com/zdr3usa/).

Human and animal safety are priorities at every zoo. This is why ZDR3 Network disaster responders are people with experience working at zoos. Responders usually don't enter animal habitats while they are using chainsaws and other heavy equipment, but sometimes (depending on the zoo's rules) they may share space with animals that are comfortable with people. Similarly, some zoos have staff and volunteers who share space with gentle animals. Others have areas that animals are moved to (known as shift spaces) while people are cleaning their habitats.

Thanks to the following organizations and their photographers for sharing their photos. All other photos are licensed through Adobe Stock Photos:

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- Animal Park at the Conservators Center
- Austin Zoo
- Big Cat Habitat
- Dallas Zoo
- Duke Lemur Center
- Fort Worth Zoo
- Frank Buck Zoo
- International Animal Exchange, Inc.
- Lemur Conservation Foundation
- Merced's Applegate Park Zoo
- Monterey Zoo
- San Antonio Zoo
- The Florida Aquarium
- ZDR3 Communications

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