

Member View

Fund Raising

Get a Tattoo, Help Save a Species

By Dr. James Danoff-Burg, Chris Corpus, Angelina Komatovich, and David Bader

When we are creative and open-minded, often remarkable ideas result. An aquarist who is passionate about conservation recently came up with the idea of getting people to get tattoos to raise money for vaquita conservation.

As program lead of Vaquita SAFE, I had never heard of such a novel connection: tattoos, fundraising, and conservation. In addition to the fundraising benefits, this outreach to an untapped community could also yield some new and possibly very influential supporters.

Angelina Komatovich first came up with the idea as part of the culmination project for her Master of Arts degree. She connected with the oldest tattoo shop in the nation, Outer Limits Tattoo in Long Beach, Calif., and the owner quickly expressed her interest.

Association of Zoos and Aquariums members, Angelina and her lead collaborator Chris Corpus, wanted to prioritize ten AZA SAFE species. Presented with the idea, the artists at Outer Limits enthusiastically created novel designs for those species.

When the event happened earlier this year, all spots sold out in advance. In total, almost 20 tattoos were created, and there was engagement with over 40 others. The seven artists had agreed in advance to donate half of their proceeds. However, inspired by the clear commitment on the part of Angelina, Chris, and the rest of us conservationists, they ended up donating all their proceeds totaling over



\$6,500 to Vaquita SAFE.

Inspired by this event, the California Desert chapter of the American Association of Zoo Keepers in Palm Desert, Calif., recently hosted the second Tattoos for Conservation event—Tats for Cats. These desert zookeepers were similarly successful in raising money for the Cheetah SAFE snare abatement program and connected with almost 50 people.

Almost 50 percent of Millennials aged 18-29 have tattoos (47 percent, according to a Pew Research Center study from 2017). These people are an audience that conservation organizations like zoos and aquariums could do a better job of engaging—including both the tattoo artists and those getting tattooed.

Tattoos are signposts of beliefs and interests for current generations. Conservation-themed tattoos are a clear and obvious brand to the world of a person's interest and commitment to endangered species. They are also an easy to open door and engage people outside of the zoo and aquarium community in conversations about conservation.

Maybe conservation tattoo fundraisers could be an effective way to empower an untapped community to become conservation advocates? Similarly, and of great interest to conservation organizations, these events can also raise a significant amount of financial support for conservation.

We are excited to see what may happen in the future. If you or your AAZK chapter are interested in hosting a similar event, please contact us.

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