

The AAZK Excellence in Training Award

The American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) is the administering organization of the AAZK Excellence in Training Award presented by the AAZK Awards Committee. The purpose of the award is to recognize keepers who are exceeding the standards of animal training by empowering animals to participate in their own care and enhancing their well-being. It is hoped that recognition of outstanding efforts by keepers to improve animal care and wellbeing through operant conditioning will provide incentive to keepers to continue to be leaders in this important endeavor.

The AAZK Excellence in Training Award was established in 2022 by the AAZK Awards Committee. The award is presented at the annual AAZK National Conference.

Qualifications

- An individual member of AAZK at any membership level from a zoo/aquarium/related facility, a team from a zoo/aquarium/related facility or a chartered AAZK chapter are eligible to be nominated for this award.
- In the case of a team nomination, **all** members of the team must be individual members of AAZK in order for the team to be eligible for the award.
- Nominee(s) must have improved the well-being of an animal or group of animals through outstanding trained behaviors and operant conditioning techniques.
- The trained behavior is to be **above and beyond** typified programs and achievements of current professional and industry standards.
- Nominees must have excelled in one or more of the following categories:

Impact on Animal Wellbeing:

- Behavior meets a physical/medical need, mental stimulation or correction, OR departmental need (i.e. show behavior)
- Training goal or timeline was met

Innovation of the Behavior:

- Behavior has not been trained in this species before.
- Behavior has not been trained at a zoological facility.

Supporting Documentation:

- Progress was documented with shaping plans, training logs, pictures/video, or other

- comparable method
- Behavior can be replicated from the documentation provided.

Sharing Knowledge/Education/Research:

- Information disseminated to the zoo community to advance our knowledge of operant conditioning techniques.
- Presentation or poster at conferences(s), writing paper/article for Training Tales, research, workshop/class at zoo or conference

Nomination Procedure

- The nominee must be nominated by an animal care professional.
- Complete the nomination form which includes the name of keeper(s) who trained the behavior, institution's name, address, phone and Director/Curator.
- List and **document** outstanding achievements in one or more of the categories listed under qualifications.
- Completed nomination packet (nomination form and supporting documents) may be submitted beginning January 1st and no later than the deadline: **MAY 1st** of each year.

Verification of the nomination requires a signature from the Director/CEO or Curator of the facility or their representative.

Selection Procedure

- The AAZK Awards Committee will review each nominee. The Board Oversight for Awards Committee shall cast a deciding vote in the instance of a tie.