



JAMIE PHAM

Interns Making a Difference

by ANNA BECKER, Coordinator of Community Conservation

THROUGH A NEW PARTNERSHIP with the Office of Mayor Garcetti’s Los Angeles College Promise Works Program, the L.A. Zoo began hosting our first-ever paid Conservation Internship. Anchoring our focus in local conservation to include community members, improve native biodiversity, and increase access to those who should be better represented in the field, is key to our conservation mission. We can work toward increasing access to conservation by creating space for individuals to gain paid experience and further equitable opportunities, representation, and our impact within those communities.

We welcomed our inaugural interns—Hored Martinez and Rachel Ortega—in January. Hored and Rachel are both residents and community college students of Los Angeles, interested in amplifying community voices in

conservation. “When I first came into the project, I didn’t know much about conservation,” says Hored. “I had heard a general definition, but I didn’t realize it went beyond animals.”

Throughout their internship, Hored and Rachel engaged deeply with topics such as biodiversity conservation, community engagement, relationships with nature, and their intersection with justice, equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion. “When we have connections with our own communities, it not only benefits us by the support, but everyone’s goals all around,” says Rachel.

Hored and Rachel are working to develop engagement opportunities in the Zoo and for communities at home, including the development of a virtual wildlife guide to build observational skills and find belonging in nature. “This internship has expanded my thinking and living in many ways that have allowed me

to grow and become who I am at this point. My relationship with nature has rekindled,” Hored shares.

“Nature is everywhere and for anyone who truly wants to create connections and memories, we can help them,” adds Rachel. “I believe that is our goal.”

Everyone deserves a place in conservation, and this internship is just the beginning of our efforts to co-create opportunities to make a greater impact where humans and wildlife thrive together. “This internship has not only helped me define conservation, but also taught me how to define it in my own way,” says Rachel. “Everyone will always have different meanings and definitions, but we have the same goals. What I want for whoever reads or hears about this internship is to know that it is not only a career path, but a path to make a difference in the world.”



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■ REGISTER AT www.lazoo.org/walkforthewild