



ASZK 50TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE 2026 MELBOURNE INFORMATION PACK

19-22ND MARCH 2026 Theme: “50 years of zoos and zookeepers thriving”

The ASZK Committee is planning an extensive celebratory 50th Anniversary Conference in Melbourne in March 2026.

With planning well underway below is some information both on the conference and our pre and post conference workshops and activities.

As part of the conference, we will be holding a live auction at the gala dinner Friday night and a Silent Auction Saturday night to raise funds to continue to allow the society to operate with low membership prices. We ask all delegates to bring something to contribute such as zoo type books, jewellery, artwork, experiences etc.

Registrations are open via the ASZK website www.aszk.org.au . ASZK members will receive a discounted price, and we are also offering workshop attendees an additional discount on the conference registration price. Registration prices will be available by mid-September.

Note at the conference all breaks and lunches are provided as well as dinner Friday and Saturday night for the price.

ASZK Annual Conference 50th Anniversary Timetable

Date	Time	Presenter/ Exhibitor	Location	NUMBERS MAX
18/3/26	9am-4pm	Jake Meney (<i>Crete Habitats</i>) Day 1	Melbourne Zoo	14-16
		Dr Matthew Shackleton (<i>Behavioural Enrichment</i>)	Melbourne Zoo	35
19/3/26	9am-4pm	Jake Meney (<i>Crete Habitats</i>) Day 2	Melbourne Zoo	14-16
	9am-4:30pm	Optional tour to WORZ	WORZ	30
	2pm-4pm	BTS facility tours	Melbourne Zoo	NO LIMIT
	5:30pm – 9 pm	ASZK Icebreaker – buses then will take participants into the City to the Rydges Hotel	Melbourne Zoo	NO LIMIT
20/3/26	9am-4:30pm	ASZK Conference (Day 1) Rydges Hotel includes workshops pm.	Rydges	No LIMIT
	7pm – 12pm	Gala Dinner “A touch of Gold” Rydges Hotel	Rydges	No LIMIT
21/3/26	9am-2pm	ASZK Conference (Day 2)	Rydges	No LIMIT
	2pm-10pm	Gumbuya World * Tour, dinner, silent auction. Buses will return to the Rydges Hotel	Gumbuya World	No LIMIT
22/3/26	9am-4:30pm	ASZK Conference (Day 3)	Rydges	No LIMIT
	6:30pm - late	Optional Dinner at own cost	Elephant and Wheelbarrow	OPTIONAL
23/3/26	9am – 3pm	Dr Frances Baines (<i>UV lighting and heating workshop</i>)	Melbourne Zoo	30
23/3/26	9am – 2pm	Optional tours - Moonlit Sanctuary and Lilydale High School Reptile facility	Moonlit Sanctuary or LHS	30

Presenting our Keynotes and Conference Workshops

We are excited to have locked in three specialist Keynote speakers who will also be running workshops at the conference. For the first time we will be bringing over two from the UK as well as one from Far North Queensland.

Introducing:

1. **Dr Frances Baines M.A., Vet.M.B., M.R.C.V.S.** a recently retired British veterinarian who has spent the last 21 years researching the use of specialist lighting, including ultraviolet lighting, in the husbandry of reptiles, amphibians and more recently, mammals, birds and invertebrates, She will be speaking on **Indoor sunshine? An introduction to lighting in animal husbandry and running a workshop on Demystifying Lamps and Light.** Francis will also be running a one-day workshop on the 23 March at Melbourne Zoo.



2. **Dr Matthew Shackleton BSc (Hons) MScVetPhys PGCert PTLLS MIRVAP(VP)** from the UK Matthew has a Master's degree in Veterinary Physiotherapy from the University of Nottingham School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, where he has been both a lecturer and clinical educator. Matthew has a background in zoo-keeping and teaching zoo sciences. He provides lameness and physiotherapy consultancy to major UK zoos as part of his veterinary practice. At the conference Matthew will be conducting a workshop on **Lameness** and will cover multiple taxa (mammals, birds and reptiles), aiming to empower Zoo professionals by helping them to develop the skills to identify early gait changes in the animals in their care. Introductory information will be given on how to minimise or delay the development of musculoskeletal pathology such as osteoarthritis, in conjunction with veterinary treatment. Matthew will also be conducting a one-day workshop on **Enrichment** at Melbourne Zoo on the 18th March.



3. **Jean Thomas** is an award-winning conservationist, breathwork practitioner, and Thrive Life Coach with over 25 years' experience helping people overcome burnout and thrive. Drawing on three decades of global conservation and community development work, she blends practical tools with deep emotional insight to restore purpose, clarity, and resilience. Recognised by Sir David Attenborough, Dr Jane Goodall, and Professor Tim Flannery, Jean's journey is featured in the acclaimed film *Into the Jungle*. Her coaching and breathwork practice supports conservationists, changemakers, and purpose-driven individuals to live and lead sustainably. Jean will be providing a workshop - **From Empty to Full: Caring for Yourself to Care for Others** will guide you through a safe, supportive space where you can share openly, be heard, and learn powerful strategies to restore your energy and emotional resilience. She will also be presenting on her work in PNG and providing information on the Tenkile Tree Kangaroo program.



PRE AND POST CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

We are excited to additionally be holding the following workshops to coincide with the ASZK annual conference. This will give delegates an opportunity to take advantage of the one travel cost.

Note all attendees to a workshop will receive a \$50 discount on their conference registration,

Wednesday 18 March – Behavioural Enrichment with Dr Matthew Shackleton from the UK

Held at Melbourne Zoo

Enrichment has long been a vital part of captive animal management. While its importance is somewhat understood regarding behaviour management, we rarely consider the direct impact we have as caregivers on fitness, physiology, disease and behavioural health and diversity.



This one-day workshop sets enrichment in a wider context by considering how it may impact cardiovascular fitness and physiology alongside behaviour. Enrichment devices may support health and promote natural behaviour; however, if not used with care they may also exacerbate health conditions or even predispose animals to musculoskeletal pathologies. Enrichment can help with long-term pain management due the link between stress/lifestyle and inflammation in the body.

Wednesday and Thursday 18 – 19th March Mock Rocking with Jake Meney of Crete Habitats and designs.

Held at Melbourne Zoo. Strictly limited numbers. Wanted to learn Mock Rocking? Well this workshop will include both theory and practical to give you basic skills to transform your enclosures.



Crete Habitats and Designs is a small scale contractor which specialises in the construction of custom sculpted concrete for the provision of practical, naturalistic habitats and habitat features including mock rock walls, stand alone boulders, termite mounds, artificial trees, logs, mud banks, ponds and water features.

Jake Meney has had over 10 years experience working within the zoo industry primarily specialising in reptile husbandry and is now thrilled to be able to share the skills he's developed in the creation of naturalistic habitats, servicing the wider zoo community.

This two day course will cover all the necessary steps and equipment required to create artificial rock features. Participants will learn the basics of steel and foam armature construction, reinforcement, concrete application, sculpting, texturing, carving and painting, walking away with the skills to get creative in their own respective facilities.

The course will be largely hands on with participants learning all the relevant skills whilst creating a small habitat feature of their choice to take home upon completion.

Day 1:

Introductory presentation.

Equipment outline and practical on mixing concrete, mix designs, consistency and application.

Practical session: Armature design and construction.

LUNCH BREAK

Practical session: reinforcement and mesh application.

Practical session: applying the scratch coat.

Day 2:

Practical session: sculpting, texturing and carving the finish coat.

LUNCH BREAK

Practical session: Painting and staining.

Practical session: Sealing for longevity.

Monday 23rd March: Creating Indoor Sunshine: An All-Day Lighting Workshop. Dr Frances Baines from the UK .

Held at Melbourne Zoo

Aimed at all keepers who keep animals indoors for some or part of their times Dr Frances Baines is coming back after a wonderful series of presentations in New Zealand at the Chelonia Workshop in 2025.



This one-day workshop is going to investigate something that is absolutely vital for life on earth, but which is so commonplace that we don't even think about it most of the time; and when we do, more often than not we fear it, even advise people to avoid it and until very recently, have not even considered it to have any great value in animal husbandry. We call it "sunlight". And yet life on earth only exists because of sunlight – life is "solar powered". Living things evolved in sunlight; a free and abundant resource; it should not surprise us that they make use of every part of the solar spectrum, and not simply as a source of energy. The workshop will look at Demystifying Lamps and Light including doing a lighting audit which investigates the suitability of both lighting and heating provisions. A must for all keepers.

Pre and Post Conference Tours - optional

19 March – an optional tour to Werribee Open Range Zoo (WORZ). Leaving and returning to Melbourne zoo cost will include bus and entry to WORZ as well as behind the scenes tours. Lunch at own expense.

19 March - Behind the scenes tours at Melbourne Zoo – a range of tours will be available prior to the icebreaker at Melbourne Zoo. Following the icebreaker buses will take delegates into the city to the conference venue.

23 March – an optional tour to Moonlit Sanctuary where you will have tours and lunch followed by a visit to the newly opened and fabulous Reptile House at Lilydale High School. Buses leave and return to Melbourne Zoo. Includes lunch.

Registration Costs

Pre and Post conference Workshops – notes \$50 discount to the full conference registration if attending at least workshop

18/3/26 Behavioural enrichment with Dr Mathew Shackleton (UK)(1 day) \$220 members \$300 non-member – (Max number 35) includes lunch

18/19 / 3 /26 Mock Rocking with Crete Creations (2 days) \$420 members \$500 non-members - (max number 16) includes lunches

UV lighting and heating with Dr Frances Baines (UK) \$220 members \$300 non- (max number 35) includes lunch

Pre and Post Conference trips

19/3/26 Preconference tour Werribee Open Range Zoo – leaves and returns to Melbourne Zoo \$45 max 35 (min 20)

23/3/26 Moonlit Sanctuary and Lilydale high school reptile house. Leaves and returns to Rydges city. Includes lunch \$85 max 24 (min 15)

Conference Registrations – From 15 December full registration fees apply.

includes

- Icebreaker Melbourne Zoo Thursday night and buses to Rydges Melbourne after event
- Friday morning, afternoon teas and lunch
- Friday night gala dinner including standard drinks
- Saturday morning tea and lunch, buses to Gumbuya World return including evening meal and standard drinks and silent auction
- Sunday morning, afternoon teas and lunch

ASZK Members:

Registration with workshop attendee discount \$590

Registration member \$640

Non-Members (includes 12-month optional ASZK membership)

Registration with workshop attendee discount \$670

Registration non-member \$720

Single events – non-member includes 12 month membership (optional)

Thursday Icebreaker \$50 (non-member fees do not apply and does not include membership)

Friday day only \$135-member \$215 non-member

Friday dinner \$175 (non-member fees do not apply and does not include membership)

Friday day and dinner \$290-member \$370 non-member

Saturday (till 2pm) \$130-member \$210 non-member

Saturday dinner/Gumbuya event \$130 (non-member fees do not apply and does not include membership)

Saturday including dinner \$250-member \$330 non-member

Sunday \$135-member \$215 non-member

Merchandise

T-shirts S – XXXL \$35 – Charcoal Grey



Sweatshirts S – XXXL \$50 – Black



Hoodies S – XXXL \$50 - Black



Cancellation Policy / fees

You can cancel your registration by sending an email to eo@aszk.org.au Your cancellation is only valid after confirmation by the ASZK. It is your responsibility to ensure that your cancellation is confirmed.

If you cancel before 1 January 2026 you will be charged a \$20 administration fee.

If you cancel between 1 January and 28 February 2026 you will be charged a \$50 administration fee.

Cancellations after 28 February 2026 will not be able to be refunded

Entry to other facilities

Ballarat Wildlife Park

All zookeepers that visit Ballarat Wildlife Park around the ASZK Conference will receive both free entry to the park and a tour from one of our keeping team to share ideas. We'd love to see as many of you as possible visit our park just 1.5 hours from Melbourne. To arrange this please contact Dan Kemp, Curator, on dankemp@wildlifepark.com.au

Accommodation Bookings

Conference

Rydges – Price \$260 / room only (no breakfast included)

1. Visit www.rydges.com
2. Select **Rydges Melbourne** , enter your required dates* and number of guests staying and click 'GO'
3. Click '**I have a code**'
4. In the '**Promo Code**' field enter your booking code: **ASZK26**
5. Click '**UPDATE**'
6. Your special rates will appear on the rates screen

These rates are available for stays between **19/03/26 - 23/03/26** .

Citadines on Bourke - \$215 room only

Visit Ascott's website: www.discoverasr.com

Click on:

'Please select a code'

Select '**Corporate**'

Enter your code: **P5AUST022**

You will receive an instant confirmation letter and can manage changes within the website.

Workshops Accommodation

The Park Inn by Radisson Carlton is a short walk to Melbourne Zoo

There standard room rate is **AUD 190 per night**. However, they are offering a **10% discount**. To take advantage of this rate when booking directly with us, delegates can use the code **ASZKZOO26**.

Email reservation.carlton@parkinn.com to book or Phone: [\(03\) 9380 9222](tel:(03)93809222)