



# The Conservation Legacy Effect

Featuring Robert Trejo

Article by LORIE A. WOODWARD  
Photos courtesy of CONSERVATION LEGACY

Robert Trejo, through his non-profit, mobile outreach Zoomagination, was an advocate for wild animals and wild places before he got the call from Conservation Legacy staff inviting him to be a videoconference presenter.

“At Zoomagination, I’m privileged and blessed to bring these wild animals to classrooms, studios and events, so people can learn about them and their place in the world—and hopefully learn to care about them enough to conserve them,” said Trejo, a native of El Paso who now lives and works at Zoomagination’s headquarters in Atascosa. “Conservation Legacy is in it for the animals and their future on the planet, too.”

After his first presentation as part of Conservation Legacy in 2014, Trejo was onboard.

“When I finished the first one, I was ready to do it again—and again,” Trejo said. “Conservation Legacy does good work with a good team on a great platform that allows us to reach more people with valuable information. It’s a partnership that elevates both our projects and our passions.”

As a child in far West Texas, Trejo got interested in nature through his unlikely passion for fish.

“I was a self-taught ichthyologist,” said Trejo, noting his interest began with a single goldfish and expanded to include seven aquariums of all types in his childhood home.

His interest grew to include all marine life, which led to a prolonged stint with SeaWorld. He worked first as a marine animal trainer and then became a terrestrial animal ambassador, traveling across the country with live animals promoting conservation and the parks.

As he crisscrossed the country, Trejo met people who acquired, rehabbed,

trained and conditioned animals for public encounters. He began taking in and caring for unwanted exotic pets and sharing them with the public. Demand for his private presentations combined with his full-time job soon outstripped the amount of time available in a day.

He left SeaWorld in 2007 to start Zoomagination. There was no one else in San Antonio, which has large school districts as well as a thriving convention and tourist trade, offering mobile animal outreach.

“I made animal advocacy my life,” Trejo said. “I wake up to it and go to sleep to it.”

While Zoomagination is home to animals from around the world including warthogs, kinkajoes and a herd of reindeer acclimatized to South Texas, Trejo uses Texas native species in his Conservation Legacy videoconferences.

“We focus on animals that Texas kids might see in their backyard or while they’re driving down the road,” said Trejo whose current lineup of natives includes a raccoon, an opossum, a screech owl and more. “We want to introduce the animal in the studio, so they’ll recognize it in its habitat—and know it’s something that lives in Texas just like we do...something to be cared for and not feared.”

## A Q&A WITH ROBERT TREJO

**How does the partnership make both Conservation Legacy and Zoomagination stronger?**

RT: “In my opinion, Zoomagination’s live animals add credibility to the broadcasts. The animals help touch people on a deeper level, really engage them and hopefully engender more interest in wild animals and their habitat.

Conservation Legacy expands what I do by making the information available to a lot more people on a broader, more powerful platform.

I think working together inspires us both to do what we do even better. With every presentation, I try to know more and condition and position the animals better so I can reach and teach more people more effectively. We raise one another’s bar.”

**As a fellow conservation educator and wild animal advocate, what are Conservation Legacy’s strong points?**

RT: “To me Conservation Legacy’s strongest point is its powerful education message successfully delivered to many young Texans through its innovative programs like interactive distance learning. To my knowledge, nobody else is offering programming where students can actually communicate in real time with the trainer and influence the direction of the program and conversation with their questions and observations.

Conservation Legacy leads by message and example especially when it comes to showcasing the value of private land stewardship to both students—and landowners.”

**How does it make you feel to help open the door to the natural world for students?**

RT: “It’s hard for kids to get dirty and engaged in nature these days, but it’s important that we open their eyes to what exists around them. Kids won’t care if they don’t see it.

I don’t have the right words to express how it makes me feel to open the door for them. I was called to be an ambassador for the natural world, and when the door—and their eyes—open, I feel like I’ve done my job for the kids, for the wild animals and the planet.” ☺