

NEWS RELEASE



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ANIMAL SCULPTURES WITH “SOLE” NOW AT THE ZOO

NORFOLK, Va. – Flip flop animals debut in the Virginia Zoo Gift Shop 10 a.m. Saturday.

Flip flops are one of the largest marine pollutants in the Indian Ocean and thousands of them wash up on the world’s shorelines, creating an environmental disaster for the marine ecosystem. Not only do they spoil the natural beauty of the beaches and oceans, but they are also swallowed by animals, which can cause a slow and painful death.

As part of its conservation mission, the Virginia Zoo is working with Ocean Sole, the flip flop recycling company, to support marine environment cleanup efforts and sustainable community development by recycling discarded flip flops. Artisans from Kenyan communities collect and scrub the foamy footwear, which is then carved, sanded and sculpted into colorful patchwork animals. The resulting sculptures are then offered for sale through the Zoo’s gift shop.

“My wife and I were travelling in Africa and we saw a little flip flop elephant at an elephant sanctuary and I thought, what a fun way to recycle something and create art,” said Greg Bockheim, the Zoo’s executive director. “We contacted the studio that makes the flip flop animals when we got home and partnered with the San Diego Zoo to bring them here. We’re the first Zoo in the U.S. to sell this spectacular art.”

The project started with two Kenyan women, Julie Church and Tahreni Bwanaali, who encouraged local women to collect discarded flip flops from beaches and recycle them into fun, colorful merchandise. Today, Ocean Sole drives sustainable community development while helping to restore the marine ecosystem across Kenya and East Africa. All of Ocean Sole’s products are handmade from recycled flip flops by local artisans, who earn a sustainable income, improving their quality of life.

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ANIMALS WITH “SOLE”, 2 OF 2



Discarded flip flops on a beach in East Africa (Ocean Sole courtesy photo).



Flip flop animals outside the Virginia Zoo (Virginia Zoo photo by Winfield Danielson).

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