

NEWS RELEASE



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ANIMALS WITH “SOLE” BACK AT THE ZOO

NORFOLK, Va. – Flip-flop animals are back at the Virginia Zoo Gift Shop.

More than 5,700 flip-flop animals from Kenya arrived at the Virginia Zoo Thursday, destined for sale in the Zoo’s gift shop and 22 other zoos and aquariums across the United States and Canada. The animals went on sale in the Virginia Zoo gift shop Saturday.

“My wife and I discovered these while we were travelling in Africa, and I thought, what an amazing way to create artwork and support conservation at the same time,” said Greg Bockheim, the Zoo’s executive director. “So we brought them here, and now we’re helping zoos across North America offer them to their visitors, as well.”

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 Zoo is working with Ocean Sole of Nairobi, Kenya, the flip-flop recycling company, to support marine environment cleanup efforts and sustainable community development by recycling discarded flip-flops. Artisans from Kenya collect and scrub the foamy footwear, which is then carved, sanded and sculpted into colorful patchwork animals.

In addition to animals, the flip-flops are also used to create jewelry, picture frames and other items ranging in price from \$7.50 for pencil toppers to \$750 for jumbo animals at the Virginia Zoo’s gift shop. Proceeds go toward habitat conservation projects and the Zoo’s Animal Wellness Campus.

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ANIMALS WITH “SOLE” ARE BACK, 2 OF 3



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



A box of flip-flop elephants arrives at the Virginia Zoo Thursday, Feb. 6, 2014 (Virginia Zoo photo by Greg Bockheim).

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ANIMALS WITH “SOLE” ARE BACK, 3 OF 3



A flip-flop giraffe surveys the Virginia Zoo gift shop (Virginia Zoo photo by Winfield Danielson).



Greg Bockheim, executive director of the Virginia Zoo, with a selection of flip-flop animals (Virginia Zoo photo by Winfield Danielson).

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