



Toronto Zoo

Where Animal Management Meets Physical Security



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At the Toronto Zoo, every person on site – whether that’s a keeper, security officer, scientist, or volunteer - shares one vision: create a world where people, wildlife, and wild spaces thrive.

Thirty minutes from downtown Toronto lies a 500-acre campus that is home to over 2000 animals across 200 species. Welcoming 1.3 million guests each year, Toronto Zoo is a world-class operation on a mission to connect people, animals, conservation science, and traditional knowledge to fight extinction.

When Toronto Zoo Supervisor of Health & Safety Services, Graham Birtles, set out to modernize the Zoo’s legacy access and alarm infrastructure, he discovered that the partner he already trusted for animal enclosure fencing was the same one now leading the way in physical security and access control.

Guardians of Wild

The Toronto Zoo opened in 1974 with a goal that extended well beyond exhibition. Today, its work spans conservation science, breeding programs for endangered species, community education, and climate advocacy. Its Guardians of Wild program extends that belief outward, inviting staff, guests, and partner organizations to champion wildlife beyond the Zoo’s borders: in policy, community relations, and corporate engagement.

“My everyday is somebody else’s once-in-a-lifetime experience,” says Graham. “We want every person who comes through these gates to leave understanding what the Toronto Zoo is about, and what they can personally do to make a change.”

Delivering that experience safely for guests, staff, and the animals themselves demanded a security platform fit for the job.

A Familiar Orange

Before Gallagher Security, the Zoo’s access control and alarm infrastructure had not kept pace with the scale of operations. Mobile alerting was unavailable to officers in the field, credentialing hundreds of seasonal staff required plastic cards that were slow to issue and difficult to track, and there was no integration with the Zoo’s video management system to support rapid emergency response.

There was also a unique challenge facing the Zoo team: the electric perimeter fencing around animal enclosures - the secondary layer of protection between the animals and the wider Zoo environment - operated as an entirely separate system, disconnected from the broader infrastructure.

Following an animal containment incident that was escalated to security leadership, the need to bridge those two systems became urgent. Graham found the solution at a security trade show, when his integrator walked him toward a familiar orange booth.

“I said, I already know Gallagher. They’re my fence people. They’ve been taking care of our fencing systems for over 50 years at the Toronto Zoo.”

What Graham didn't yet know was that Gallagher also delivered enterprise-grade physical security, making Toronto Zoo's path to world-class operations clear.

A World First

Working together, Gallagher Security and Gallagher Animal Management designed and implemented an integration between Gallagher Command Centre and the Zoo's Animal Management energizer systems, enabling real-time communication between animal fencing infrastructure and the security platform for the first time.

The implementation required calibration for significantly higher voltage requirements than traditional smaller-animal environments, ensuring safe and effective management across large species habitats. The Zoo team worked closely with Gallagher's experts to configure their setup, and the solution is now fully operational within the orangutan habitat.

"Now we can see the voltage of our fences at all times," says Graham. "We can send alerts to our wildlife care team the moment something touches the hot wire so we can make sure the animals are safe."

When an alert is triggered, integrated CCTV allows the wildlife care team to immediately verify the event and assess the situation before responding; a critical functionality for animal safety.

Beyond the Wire

The Zoo's security needs extend well beyond its animal habitats, and the Gallagher platform has delivered.

Mobile Credentials have addressed one of the most persistent administrative challenges on site. With hundreds of contractors and seasonal catering staff requiring access at any given time, the previous reliance on plastic cards was slow and difficult to manage. Now, time-limited mobile credentials are issued on sign-in and revoked automatically on sign-out, removing the risk of residual access.

For officers in the field, Gallagher Mobile Connect removed the need to return to base to manage alarms. Officers maintain full situational awareness from their vehicles around the clock, long after the central control center closes.

Further integration with 27 Axis intercoms in high-risk spaces - housing venomous snakes, spiders, and other dangerous species - ensure staff working alone in those environments are never out of reach.

"We can monitor alarms throughout the Zoo; not just for traditional break-and-enter or door-open scenarios. We are monitoring life-safety systems, fire systems, animal conditions, and more," says Graham.

A House Brand

What has distinguished the Toronto Zoo's deployment is not any single feature, but the broad range of problems the Gallagher platform has been called on to solve.

New challenges from across the organization are allowing Graham and his team to unlock more value from their security system.

Whether it is monitoring environmental conditions within animal habitats, restricting workshop equipment to trained operators, or ensuring staff cannot access sensitive areas until their training is verified, the answer has consistently been found within the same platform.

"I like that I can call on the Gallagher team and they will work with us to find a solution," says Graham.

“ *Gallagher has become a house brand here at the Toronto Zoo. It's integrated with everything we do.* **”**

— **Graham Birtles,**
Supervisor of Health & Safety Services

A Partnership with Purpose

The Zoo's collaboration with Gallagher has not been a conventional vendor relationship. Graham describes it as a convergence of purpose.

"When we partner with organizations such as Gallagher, they become Guardians of Wild," he says. "Because they help me and the Toronto Zoo accomplish our mission."

The Gallagher platform will play a central role in the Zoo's next chapter. A new Community Conservation Centre, developed with a local university, will soon bring classrooms, laboratories, and a new otter river habitat into a shared community space; with Command Centre managing access for students, professors, and visiting groups.

"Gallagher understands our mission," says Graham. "They are very helpful, and everything they have put in place for us has worked. The flexibility has been fantastic."

This installation was deployed in partnership with Met-Scan Canada Ltd.



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