

Animal Behavior & Conservation Graduate Program Celebration 2026

PROGRAM OF EVENTS

6:00 PM – Welcome and ABC Program Updates - *Dr. Erica Chito Childs, Dr. Joshua Plotnik, Dr. Diana Reiss & Dr. Jennifer Savoie*

6:15 PM – Remembering Dr. Sheila Chase - *Dr. Diana Reiss*

6:20 PM – Keynote Address with Q & A - *Dr. Nurzhafarina Othman*

7:05 PM – ABC Alumni Panel Discussion with Q & A - *Jennifer Abrams, Joshua DiPaola, Elizabeth Jaeger, Jouvay Pantophlet, Dominique Raboin*

7:30 PM – Reception with Food and Drinks

ALUMNI PANELISTS

Joshua DiPaola, MA — Natural Resources Specialist, Rockefeller State Park Preserve, New York State Parks

Joshua DiPaola followed an unusual professional trajectory, working for nearly a decade at an investment bank prior to making a career change into conservation. The ABC program was the catalyst for this transition. Since completing his Master's degree in 2020, he has worked in various conservation capacities and is currently the Natural Resource Specialist for New York State Parks' Rockefeller State Park Preserve (RSPP). Throughout his tenure at RSPP, his work has focused on understanding the relationships between fauna, flora, and the public, as well as the broader ecosystems they inhabit.

Dominique Raboin, MA, MPhil — Development & Outreach Officer, The Battery Conservancy

Dominique Raboin, an ABC Class of 2018 graduate, is the Development & Outreach Officer at The Battery Conservancy, the nonprofit that maintains, operates, and programs the 25-acre public park at the southern tip of Manhattan. Upon completing the ABC program, Dominique pursued a PhD in Evolutionary Anthropology at Rutgers University. After four years in the program, she “mastered out” to begin a career in parks. She now leads all fundraising, communications, and community engagement efforts for The Battery. Dominique leverages her background in science to translate the park's horticultural programs and conservation achievements into a story meriting public investment.

ALUMNI PANELISTS

Jennifer Abrams, LVT, MA, CSA — Associate Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist; PhD Student, CUNY Graduate Center

Jen Abrams graduated from the ABC program in 2019 with a thesis on the use of trazodone to reduce anxiety in dogs during their transition into shelters. While completing her degree, she worked as the Behavior Department Manager at Animal Care Centers of NYC, supervising behavior assessments and environmental enrichment for resident dogs and cats. In 2020, she transitioned to private practice as a behavior consultant for owned dogs and earned her Associate Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (ACAAB) credential through the Animal Behavior Society. In 2023, she returned to school to pursue a PhD in Cognitive and Comparative Psychology through the CUNY Graduate Center. Currently, she conducts research in the Associative Learning Laboratory of Dr. Andrew Delamater at Brooklyn College, focusing on Pavlovian-instrumental transfer and CS-US representation convergence in rats. She continues to work with dogs through her company, Abrams Animal Behavior Consulting, addressing fear, anxiety, and aggression in dogs throughout Brooklyn and Manhattan.

Elizabeth Jaeger, MA — Former Deputy Director, Public Programs & Operations, Natural Areas Conservancy

Elizabeth is a non-profit leader who loves the natural world and big ideas and has 20 years of experience in journalism, education, and nonprofit operations. She most recently led public programming and operations at the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC), building and scaling teams that connect New Yorkers to nature and foster the care of our forests and wetlands while also ensuring they are resourced to do that effectively. She led the development of the Strategic Trails Plan for New York City and the NAC's community engagement efforts for New York City's first-ever Urban Forest Plan. She also scaled the NAC's internship program with CUNY into a year-round, paid opportunity for local students seeking environmental careers. In addition to her Master's Degree from the ABC program (2017), she also went to undergrad at the University of Central Florida and has a certificate in Nonprofit Innovation and Performance from Harvard Business School.

Jouvay Pantophlet, MA, Registered Lab Animal Technician — Animal Behavior Management Specialist, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Jouvay Pantophlet graduated from the ABC program in 2022 with a thesis on improving the biological relevance of captive naked mole-rat enclosures. While completing their Master's work, they served as a Laboratory Animal Technician at the College of Staten Island. In 2024, Jouvay joined the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai as an Animal Behavior Management Specialist, where they oversee the housing, maintenance, and welfare of over 20,000 residents encompassing ten species. Their work integrates behavioral observations with the development of enrichment programs and cooperative care training initiatives.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Dr. Nurzhafarina Othman is an elephant ecologist and Senior Lecturer at the University of Malaysia Sabah, as well as the founder and director of Seratu Aatai, a nonprofit advancing human–elephant coexistence in Malaysian Borneo. A 2025 Whitley Award recipient, she has been internationally recognized for her work to protect one of the last remaining populations of Bornean elephants in Sabah. Her research focuses on habitat fragmentation and the importance of reconnecting elephant landscapes, and her work directly informs conservation strategies that address human–elephant conflict. Through partnerships with local communities and industry stakeholders, she develops solutions that support both wildlife and people. Her keynote will highlight how research can be translated into meaningful conservation action.



HONORING DR. SHEILA CHASE



Dr. Sheila Chase was a pioneering psychology professor and animal behaviorist at Hunter College and the visionary founder of the Animal Behavior and Conservation program. She transformed the initiative from a certificate into a prestigious master's degree, establishing Hunter as a leader in animal welfare and conservation science. Serving as director and benefactor, she personally endowed the program to ensure lasting support for the program, including graduate research and travel.

Her scholarly work, notably the Natural Intelligence Model, significantly advanced the quantitative study of animal learning. A dedicated mentor, she inspired countless students to pursue careers in the field and was honored in 2015 with the Hunter College Presidential Award for Service and Citizenship. Dr. Chase's legacy continues to thrive through the vibrant academic community and program she spent decades building.