AMAZON RESERCH CENTER FOR ORNAMENTAL FISHES

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Letter from the Founders

On January 29, 2024, we proudly opened the Aquarium of the Amazon to an enthusiastic welcome from the community, including local officials, reporters, tour guides and the people of Iquitos. The moment was filled with emotions that are difficult to put into words. This achievement came after overcoming countless challenges, from the disruptions of the pandemic to the long delays in receiving the final 10 large fiberglass tanks from China.

There were moments over the past four years when we found ourselves wondering if our dream would ever come to life. Yet thanks to the unwavering support of our Board of Directors, the incredible dedication of Carlos Chuquipiondo, and the encouragement of all of you, that dream became a reality. We're thrilled to share that in the first 11 months since opening, the Aquarium of the Amazon has welcomed more than 8,000 visitors — an achievement we could not have reached without you.

Every visitor to the Aquarium of the Amazon takes part in a conservation journey, guided by our passionate team through each exhibit. Their experience ends at our Environmental Wall, where we engage them in meaningful conversations about the four greatest threats to the Amazon Rainforest: mining, deforestation, trash, and oil spills. It's here that we hope to inspire not just awareness, but action, helping each person understand their role in protecting this vital ecosystem.

We were especially proud to welcome more than 2,000 school-age children to the Aquarium. Each class took part in a fun and engaging program designed just for them — combining conservation education with teamwork as they competed in friendly challenges, watched an educational video, and explored the aquarium on a guided tour. To cap off their visit, every child received a copy of *The Adventures of Nalda and Eduardo*; an activity book filled with an exciting conservation-themed story, characters to color, and puzzles that reinforce what they've learned. It's our hope that these young visitors leave inspired to become the next generation of rainforest stewards.

As we reflect on this incredible first year, we are filled with gratitude for everyone who has stood beside us on this journey; from our dedicated team and supporters to every visitor who has walked through our doors. Together, we are making a difference for the Amazon and its future. We look forward to building on this success in the years ahead, and we invite you to continue being part of this important work. With your support, the Aquarium of the Amazon will keep inspiring, educating, and protecting for generations to come.

--Anthony and Renee Mazeroll

CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Every action counts; together we are making a difference!

Proof of Concept


Aquaculture ponds

Red Pencil Fish
Nannostomus mortenthaleri

Working with the red pencil fish has presented more challenges than we initially anticipated. Unfortunately, our population experienced a bacterial outbreak, which resulted in the loss of a significant number of individuals. We also discovered that our aquaculture ponds were vulnerable to predatory insects. In response, we temporarily removed the red pencil fish until we could install protective coverings over the ponds. On a more positive note, the male red pencil fish removed from the pond had matured to the point where they are capable of reproducing. Prior to returning the red pencil fish to the aquaculture pond, we added proper leaf litter to the pond, creating conditions similar to those found in the flooded Amazon rainforest. Now, we wait and observe—more updates will follow in 2025.

Apistogramma Project

Our broader goal is to cultivate popular ornamental fish species in aquaculture ponds to reduce the need for wild collection. Many highly sought-after species are harvested at unsustainable rates, putting them at risk of extinction. By developing successful aquaculture techniques, we hope to meet demand while supporting conservation.

Initially we were focused on the *Apistogramma pantalone* but reports from our contacts throughout the Peruvian fishing communities indicated that this species is no longer being observed in the wild. As a result, we shifted our efforts to the *Apistogramma alto tapiche*, one of the most visually striking and rare dwarf cichlids. Males of this species display vivid blue bodies adorned with red, zigzag-patterned scales across their abdomens.


Apistogramma alto tapiche

These fish originate from an extremely remote area of Peru—reaching their habitat requires several days of river travel by boat. The Rio Tapiche, primarily a whitewater river, is tinted by blackwater from tributaries like the Rio Blanco, creating a unique and delicate ecosystem. We're pleased to share that our two pairs of *Apistogramma alto tapiche* have successfully produced hundreds of fry, all of which are developing well. This marks an important milestone in our effort to establish sustainable aquaculture practices for this rare and visually striking species.

Our next step involves reconnecting with a group of fishers we've previously trained to assess their readiness to participate in a community-based aquaculture project. Through recent conversations with fishers from smaller villages, it has become clear that involving not only individual fishers but also their broader organizations will be essential for long-term success. This collaborative approach will enable communities to build a sustainable reserve of "highly sought-after" species through aquaculture, while responsibly supplementing their income with wild-caught fish that are abundant and not at risk.

We plan to share our findings with the Ministry of Fisheries (Ministerio de la Producción) to support the development of similar initiatives across the Peruvian Amazon.

Neon Tetra Project - *Paracheirodon innesi*

Much like the cardinal tetra, *Paracheirodon axelrodi,* found in Brazil, the neon tetra was once believed to reproduce in such large numbers that wild harvesting posed little risk to the species. Known for its vibrant colors and ease of care, the neon tetra is one of the most popular and widely kept species in the aquarium trade. As a shoaling fish, it thrives in groups of at least six and is even more active and healthy in larger groups.

Historically, Peru has been a major exporter of wild-caught neon tetras, with extremely high collection numbers. Although most neon tetras on the market today are bred on fish farms in Southeast Asia, a significant number are still harvested from the wild. In 1997, Chapman reported that an average of 1.8 million neon tetras—worth an estimated $175,000—were imported into the United States in a single month.

Neon tetra

In recent years, however, fishers in the Peruvian Amazon have reported extended periods where neon tetras could no longer be found in their usual collection areas. As a result, harvesting efforts ceased and only recently have we begun to see signs of repopulation. These reemerging populations are primarily juveniles, with very few adults observed.
In response to this decline, we plan to dedicate one of our aquaculture ponds to neon tetras in 2025. Our goal is to better understand their breeding behaviors in a controlled environment and explore sustainable options for reducing pressure on wild populations while supporting local fishers.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION

"In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught." Baba Dioum

Planting Early Seeds

The Aquarium of the Amazon was designed to be more than just a place to view fish—it was envisioned as a platform for conservation education, engaging visitors of all ages in the importance of protecting the Amazon. Every guest is offered a complimentary guided tour, which concludes with a visit to our "Threats to the Amazon" exhibit. Some tours spark lively discussions and thoughtful questions about how we can all make a difference; others end quietly, with visitors offering a sincere thank you and a nod of understanding. Both outcomes reflect the powerful impact of the experience.


Visiting school

What we did not anticipate was the extraordinary response from schools throughout Iquitos and surrounding communities. In just eleven months since opening, the Aquarium has provided hands-on conservation education to over 2,000 primary and secondary school children and nearly 200 college students.


Completing the challenge

The feedback from teachers and principals has been overwhelmingly positive. Each school visit begins with an age-appropriate conservation activity tailored to the students' developmental level. Younger children might sing songs, participate in team-based games, or answer fun quiz questions after watching a conservation video. Older students engage in more complex discussions and additional educational content designed to deepen their understanding of environmental challenges.


At the feeding tank

School for the Deaf

Receiving Nalda books

Following the activity, students are divided into small groups, each led by a trained guide for a personalized tour of the aquarium. As a final touch, all children aged six and up receive a copy of *The Adventures of Nalda and Eduardo*, an engaging activity book that tells a conservation-themed story and includes coloring pages, puzzles, and interactive games.

Even more touching was the interest we received from schools serving children with special needs. We had the privilege of hosting two special programs, one for a school for the deaf and another for a school supporting children with diverse abilities. No matter what their challenges, the children were fully engaged—curious, attentive, and eager to participate. Their joy, enthusiasm, and openness reminded us that the message of conservation truly speaks to all hearts.

Through these moments, we are reminded why we built the Aquarium of the Amazon—not just to educate, but to inspire. And in the eyes of every child who walks through our doors, we see hope for a future where the rainforest is not only understood—but fiercely protected.

Scout group

THE AQUARIUM OF THE AMAZON

"At first I thought I was fighting to save rubber trees, then I thought I was fighting to save the Amazon rainforest. Now I realize I am fighting for humanity." ***Chico Mendes***

Window to a New World

On January 29, 2024, we opened The Aquarium of the Amazon. Over the next eleven months we would host over 8,000 visitors of all ages to the aquarium.

We were not only surprised by the strong public response to the Aquarium of the Amazon but also challenged by the operational realities that came with opening a facility of this scale. Several elements of the original design that worked well in theory proved more difficult in practice.

One of the most significant issues was the urgent need for a much larger generator. Although our original generator was selected based on plans reviewed by a qualified electrical engineer, it quickly became clear that it could not sustain the aquarium's full electrical load for extended periods. As a result, we were forced to draw from our financial reserves to purchase a more powerful generator at a cost of $30,000.

Compounding these challenges, January 2024 turned out to be one of the hottest months on record in Iquitos—an extreme weather pattern that repeated itself in both September and October. The single air conditioning unit installed in the main aquarium space proved inadequate to cool the air and, more critically, to regulate water temperatures in our larger tanks. We began to lose fish in our large wall tank due to elevated water temperatures. In response, we acted quickly to install a second industrial air conditioner for the main exhibit area, as well as two smaller units: one

Ticket Sales												
	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	October	Nov	Dec	Total
Adult	630	375	201	211	668	696	533	244	309	176	130	4173
Children	77	78	41	54	179	182	138	50	82	23	28	932
Tourists		12	11	19	14	56	19	16	19	12	1	179
Students - primary				130	42	53	471	801	269	456	19	2241
Students - college	80				48	38	4			22	5	197
Scouts				22		30						52
Group 1 - Chaperons				35					33	60		128
Group 2 - Seniors				30			21	34	50	14	16	165
Total	787	465	253	501	951	1055	1186	1145	762	763	215	8083

positioned directly over the large wall tank to cool surface water, and another placed in the nocturnal fish room to maintain temperature stability for sensitive species.


Sting ray tank with partition

These infrastructure issues, alongside more routine challenges such as determining appropriate gift shop inventory and resolving limited parking space, were addressed collaboratively by our leadership team. We evaluated staffing needs and established a guiding structure that includes two full-time guides supported by two per diem staff. We hired a full-time gift shop manager and plan to bring on a dedicated aquarium manager by mid-2025.

We also made improvements to several of our exhibits. In the marine exhibit, we added a second tank dedicated to seahorses. In the stingray tank, we installed a partition to ensure that slower-feeding individuals would not be outcompeted by more aggressive tankmates. Our frog exhibit was redesigned into a fully enclosed terrarium, and as our arapaima grew, we relocated it to a larger habitat to better suit its size. In some cases, species we believed to be compatible proved otherwise, requiring us to adjust tank configurations to ensure the safety and health of all animals in our care.

Despite these growing pains, the Aquarium of the Amazon has become everything we hoped it would be—and more. In 2024, the aquarium generated 24% of the income for the Amazon Research Center for Ornamental Fishes. Our long-term goal is to make the aquarium financially self-sustaining. To support this vision, we launched the Adopt a Tank program, which allows supporters to make recurring donations to sponsor specific exhibits.

We remain deeply grateful for the ongoing support of our community, donors, and visitors. With your continued involvement, we look forward to expanding both our reach and our impact—ensuring that the Aquarium of the Amazon remains a place of learning, discovery, and conservation for years to come.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

“Community is much more than belonging to something; it’s about doing something together that makes belonging matter.” Brian Solis

Christmas at ARCOF

On December 21, 2024, we were honored to host our 7th annual Christmas party for the children of the village of Treinta Uno de Mayo, the community that surrounds our research center and the Aquarium of the Amazon. Each year, this event has grown in both size and significance, and this year was no exception. We were thrilled to welcome over 400 children who each received a small gift, a cup of hot chocolate, and a piece of sweet bread, a treat that brings joy and comfort during the holiday season.

Christmas 2024

Christmas 2024

This event would not have been possible without the generosity of those who supported our year-end fundraiser. We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed, and we would like to give special recognition to Skipper’s Aquarium. In a wonderful show of solidarity, they held a fundraiser of their own specifically to support our Christmas celebration. Their efforts, and those of all our supporters, brought smiles to hundreds of children and strengthened the connection between our organization and the local community.

Shoal Partner

Shoal
Working together to conserve freshwater species

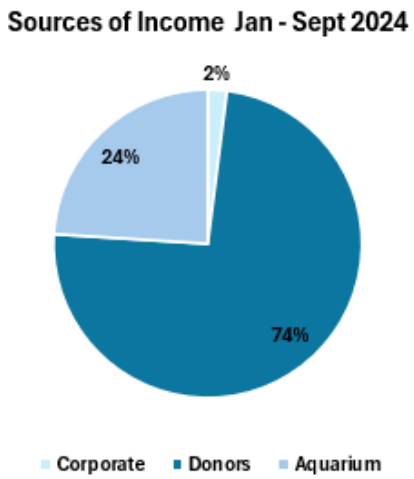
ARCOF is proud to continue its collaboration with Shoal, a global alliance of partners and collaborators dedicated to protecting Earth's freshwater ecosystems and conserving the planet’s most threatened freshwater species. Much like a shoal of fish, the strength of this network lies in its collective effort—organizations around the world working in unison to achieve lasting conservation impact. Through our alignment with Shoal, ARCOF contributes to a shared mission to safeguard these vital ecosystems, raise awareness of their importance, and implement practical conservation strategies where they are needed most.

FINANCIAL INSIGHTS

Conservation is not just about protecting species, it's about sustaining the people, tools, and knowledge needed to make that protection possible. Every donation is an investment in the future of the Amazon and the communities who call it home.

Our Financial Landscape

The financial summary for the year reflects both the excitement and challenges of launching the Aquarium of the Amazon. As a major milestone for our organization, the Aquarium contributed 24% of the research center's total gross income. Of that amount, 75% was generated through ticket sales, while 25% came from gift shop purchases. While the Aquarium has begun to play a vital role in supporting our operations, its opening also brought several unanticipated expenses —common in the first year of a large-scale public project.



Income and Expenses

- Total income: $169,115.52
- Total expense: $143,496.73
- Net ordinary income: $25, 618.79

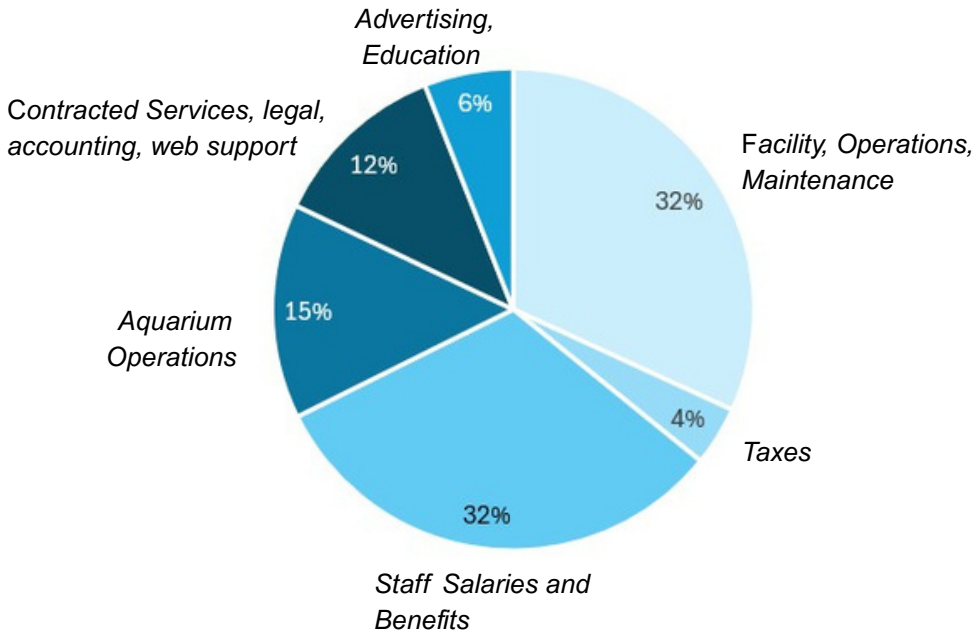
Operational Spending

As we shifted from construction to full operations in 2024, our spending priorities evolved to support staffing, infrastructure, and outreach. Key changes in expenditures include:

- **Staff Salaries** increased from 24% to 32%
  Reflecting the addition of two per diem guides and a gift shop manager, along with higher benefit costs, particularly for health insurance.
- **Aquarium Operations** remained steady at 15%
  Operational costs were consistent year-over-year as the aquarium settled into its first full year of activity.
- **Facility Operations** increased from 16% to 32%
  Driven by the addition of tanks in the fish lab to support aquarium livestock, purchase of tables and chairs for the outdoor auditorium, and new cement laid between the fish lab and office to improve access and parking.

Operational Spending

- Advertising increased from 2% to 6%
  Due to promotional campaigns tied to the grand opening and ongoing social media outreach.
- Contracted Services totaled 12%
  This includes legal, accounting, and web support. Accounting costs rose in both Peru and the U.S., and a portion of this category supported the update and redesign of our website.



These shifts in spending reflect the realities of transitioning into a fully operational facility and our ongoing commitment to providing high-quality educational programming, maintaining critical infrastructure, and engaging the public in meaningful conservation efforts. As we continue to grow, we remain focused on managing resources responsibly while investing in the long-term success of both the Aquarium and the research center.


A view of the research center from behind the reservoir

DONOR LIST 2024

“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”
– Winston Churchill

$2500+

Reptilian Nation Expo
Benevity Fund
Teressa Polinski & Shelley Brukman
Erik Thomas
Anthony and Renee Mazeroll

$1000 - $2499

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Skipper’s Aquarium
Coast Fish Club

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Jonathan Wardrip

$250 - $499

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Terry Mullins
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Anoop Sharma
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With deep gratitude, we thank each and every one of you. Your generosity has helped us grow, educate, and protect what matters most. We are honored to have you as part of our community.

WAYS TO GIVE

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Donate via Check: Made payable to: "Amazon Research Center for Ornamental Fishes" Mail to: 910 NE 47th Ave., Hillsboro, OR 97124

Securities/Stock: Please notify us in advance of the transfer by contacting 760-415-5515 or info@amazonresearchcenter.org.

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Corporate Matching Gifts: Many companies match donations made by their employees to registered nonprofit organizations. We encourage you to inquire from your company to ascertain if they might be able to match your donation this year. The impact of your gift to Amazon Research Center could potentially be doubled and sometimes even tripled