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## **Months after fox attack, National Zoo proposes steel netting to protect flamingos from avian-flu infected ducks**

*Feb 16, 2023, 6:49am EST*



National Zoo

The National Zoo's flamingo flock will be protected by a new steel enclosure.

The Smithsonian's National Zoo is proposing to build a permanent stainless-steel enclosure to protect its American flamingos from avian-influenza-infected ducks — a pitch that comes nine months after a wild fox breached the exhibit and killed 25 of the majestic birds.

The flamingo yard is a duck magnet, with its food and heated pool, according to a National Zoo presentation to the National Capital Planning Commission, which is scheduled to review the proposed enclosure at its March meeting. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, or HPAI, is often carried by wild ducks.

In 2016, the zoo earned approval to upgrade its 9,600-square-foot flamingo yard with recirculated heated water to the exterior pool, a new holding building and HPAI-mitigation netting across the entire space, but the netting was not installed “due to higher than anticipated construction costs,” per the zoo. Instead, the zoo installed temporary netting consisting of clear monofilament mounted overhead, but that protection isn't strong enough to resist the elements.

The revised project will cover 3,950 square feet with stainless-steel wire mesh supported by painted steel posts — the birds will be limited to this protected area. A gate will be installed between the covered and uncovered yards, to allow the flamingos to stretch their legs if HPAI conditions improve.

The exact project cost is unclear, but the Smithsonian Institution was budgeted \$251.6 million in 2023 for repair, revitalization and alteration of its various facilities.

Numerous zoos have taken steps in recent months to protect their flamingo flocks from avian flu, including Sacramento, California, and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The flamingo mesh enclosure underwent emergency “predator proofing,” to include hot wire and metal flashing, following the May 2 fox attack, which killed 25 flamingos and one Northern pintail duck. Three other flamingos were injured.

The fox entered through a softball-sized hole in the heavy-duty metal mesh that surrounded the outdoor yard. Zoo officials later trapped and euthanized a wild red fox, though they could not

confirm it was the same animal behind the massacre. No new flamingos have been added to the flock since — the zoo's count stands at 48, a spokeswoman said Wednesday.



**Michael Neibauer**

Managing Editor - *Washington Business Journal*

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