PANZOA

Collect the animals. Protect the animals.

Official Rulebook — Working Draft v2

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1. Overview

Panzoa (formerly Tangaroa) is a two-player animal-themed trading card game. Each player builds a tableau around a Domain Card, places Animal Cards into it, and uses Wildcards to fight for control of the board. A player loses when their Domain Card's HP reaches 0.

Panzoa is built on five brand pillars: Conservation First, Respect for Indigenous Knowledge, Radical Transparency, Community Stewardship, and Eco-innovation. Every card is sourced from real biological and conservation research.

2. The Tableau

Each player has their own tableau: a 3×3 grid with the Domain Card fixed in the center.

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X   X   X
X   D   X
X   X   X
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2.1 Rows

- Front Row — the top three slots
- Middle Row — the two slots directly left and right of the Domain
- Back Row — the bottom three slots

2.2 The Protective Slot

The single slot directly in front of the Domain Card (top-center) is the Protective Slot.

- While occupied, the Domain cannot be targeted directly by normal attacks.
- Overkill damage that would take the Protective Slot's animal below 0 HP is dealt to the Domain instead.
- Piercing damage ignores the Protective Slot entirely.

2.3 Domain HP = Game HP

The Domain Card's HP total is the player's life total. If it reaches 0, that player loses.

Conservation Projects (Section 9.2) provide an accelerating buff system, not an alternate win condition — the only way to win is reducing the opponent's Domain HP to 0.

3. Domain Cards

Most Domain Cards carry two passive effects, plus one activatable effect:

- A Slot Effect, applied to specific tableau slot(s) via arrows (e.g. a buff to both middle-row slots).
- A Biome Buff, granting a bonus to any animal matching the Domain's referenced Biome Tag.

Domain HP is variable: lower-HP Domains grant stronger buffs, higher-HP Domains grant weaker ones — a risk/reward choice between a tankier or a fragile-but-powerful Domain.

3.1 Domain Moves

Domain Cards may also carry an activatable Domain Move, referencing specific Biome Tags. A Domain Move costs 1 action, its effects last until the start of the controller's next turn, and it applies across either tableau.

Example — Great Barrier Reef's "Tidal Shift": Coral Reef animals deal +50 damage; Deep Sea animals draw a card on hit; Desert animals deal −50 damage.

4. Turn Structure

- The player whose Domain references the most distinct Biome Tags goes first. If tied, the player with the lower-HP Domain goes first.
- The starting player takes their first turn with only 1 action; every turn after (for both players) is 2 actions.
- A cycle = one turn for each player.

4.1 "Next Turn" Timing

Unless stated otherwise, "next turn" refers to that card's own controller's next turn (the next cycle) — not the opponent's immediately following turn.

4.2 Actions

- Placing an Animal Card — 1 action
- Using a Move — 1 action
- Playing a Conservation Project — 1 action
- Playing a regular Wildcard — free, gated by its own requirements instead

5. Placing Animal Cards

5.1 The Bootstrap Rule

Any one-star animal, of any star color, may be placed for free, regardless of requirements.

5.2 Star Bar Requirements

Color	Meaning
Yellow	Base
Blue	Aquatic
Red	Venomous
White	Apex

To place an animal, its star bar's exact color/count combination must already be met by stars already in the tableau (from one animal or several). Colors must match exactly. A card's own stars never count toward its own requirement.

5.3 Icon Requirements

Some animals also require a specific icon already present in the tableau, in addition to their star cost.

5.4 The Icon & Star Pool

Once placed, an animal's icons and stars join a persistent, shared resource pool for its owner — never consumed, remaining available indefinitely (until that animal is removed).

6. Variant Cards

Some species have multiple cards representing real biological variation. Each variant type carries its own small marker near the scientific name so players can immediately tell what kind of variation they're looking at.

6.1 Sex Variants

Separate Male/Female cards for species with strong sexual dimorphism (e.g. Golden Orb Weaver), reflecting real differences in size, behavior, and moves. Marker: ♂ / ♀.

6.2 Ecotype Variants

Separate cards for genetically distinct populations of the same species adapted to different environments (e.g. Resident vs. Transient Orca) — not different species, just different forms of the same one. Marker: a small branch/fork icon next to the scientific name.

6.3 Life Stage Variants

Juvenile and Adult cards for species with a dramatic life-cycle change. The Juvenile has a lower Star Bar cost and weaker stats/Moves than the Adult.

- Metamorphosis: after a Juvenile has survived 3 of its controller's own turns in the tableau, it may be swapped for its Adult card in the same slot, for free, ignoring the Adult's placement requirements.
- If the Juvenile is removed before transforming, this progress is lost.

6.4 Polymorphism (“Morph”) Variants

Cards representing a real alternate color/genetic form within the same population (e.g. a melanistic jaguar), rather than a separate population like an Ecotype. A Morph shares its base card's stats and Star Bar cost, but swaps exactly one Ability or Move to reflect the real trait. Suited to a higher rarity tier, since real polymorphs are often rare in the wild.

7. Icons & Tags

7.1 Regular Icons

Type, behavioral, and ecological icons have no inherent effect on their own — they exist to be referenced by other cards' Moves (e.g. “Deal 20 damage for every Reptile icon in your tableau”).

7.2 Types (15)

Mammal, Marine Mammal, Bird, Reptile, Amphibian, Bony Fish, Shark & Ray, Arachnid, Insect, Crustacean, Mollusc, Cnidarian, Echinoderm, Polychaete, Sponge.

Deliberately broad and consistent: each Type sits at Class or Phylum level, except Insect/Arachnid/Crustacean and Marine Mammal, which are kept distinct because the general public already treats them as fundamentally different categories.

7.3 Continent Icons (6)

Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, Americas, Antarctica.

7.4 Special / Behavioral Icons (17)

Mimic, Arboreal, Territorial, Vocal, Countershading, Burrowing, Migratory, Deep Diver, Evolutionarily Distinct, Intelligence, Aposematism, Social, Amphibious, Pack Hunter, Bioluminescence, Microscopic, Parasite.

Vocal is reserved for animals whose vocalization is a defining ecological behavior (territorial/alarm signaling other species key off, or headline-level mimicry) — not simply “can make sound.”

7.5 Biome Tags (24)

Desert, Savanna, Grassland, Tropical Rainforest, Temperate Forest, Taiga, Tundra, Montane/Alpine, Wetlands, Scrubland/Bushland, Woodland, Coral Reef, Open Ocean, Coastal/Estuary, Freshwater River, Freshwater Lake, Deep Sea, Mangrove, Arctic Tundra, Sea Ice, Antarctic, Subterranean, Urban, Kelp Forest.

Open item: the distinction between “Tundra” and “Arctic Tundra” still needs clarifying.

7.6 Ecological Icons (6, bottom of card)

Denote a genuinely notable role of massive importance to an entire ecosystem — not just an individual feeding strategy. Most animals carry none at all; this is intentional, the same way Abilities are rare rather than default.

Icon	Color	Definition
Scavenger	Yellow	Feeds primarily on carrion/dead matter; removal can trigger ecosystem-wide effects (e.g. disease spread)
Keystone	Purple	Presence/absence measurably reshapes the wider ecosystem
Pollinator	Pink	Transfers pollen between plants as part of feeding behavior
Detritivore	Brown	Breaks down fine organic matter, underpinning nutrient cycling
Seed Disperser	Leaf Green	Spreads seeds, enabling ecosystem regeneration/expansion
Filter Feeder	Teal	Base of major food webs (e.g. krill) or ecosystem-scale water filtration (e.g. oyster reefs)

Predator, Prey, and Ecosystem Engineer were deliberately excluded: Apex Predator is already represented by the White star tier; Ecosystem Engineer is treated as a subset of Keystone. Parasite was moved to Special Icons (Section 7.4), since individual-organism parasitism doesn't reliably meet the ecosystem-scale bar this list requires.

7.7 Abilities (6)

A fixed, shared list of named traits granting a real passive/activatable effect, allocated to any animal genuinely exhibiting that trait. Each Ability has three Tiers, assigned by the animal's Star cost: Tier I = 1-star, Tier II = 2–3 star, Tier III = 4+/Apex.

Ability	Tier I	Tier II	Tier III
Camouflage	Flip 2 coins, both heads negates (~25%)	Flip 1 coin, heads negates (~50%)	Flip 2 coins, either heads negates (~75%)
Armour	−10 flat damage	−20 flat damage	−35 flat damage
Regeneration	Heal 10 HP/turn	Heal 20 HP/turn	Heal 35 HP/turn
Night Vision	Discard a card for a bonus action (1/turn)	Same, usable twice/turn	Free bonus action, no discard
Precision	Ignore up to 20 dmg-reduction	Ignore up to 40 dmg-reduction	Ignore ALL dmg-reduction on target
Venom Resistance	Reduce incoming Venom by 1 tier	Immune to Venom I & II	Fully immune to all Venom

Camouflage's coin-flip design is confirmed. Exact numeric values for Armour, Precision, Venom Resistance, and Regeneration are a first-draft baseline pending playtesting (see Section 17).

8. Moves

Moves cost 1 action. The number in brackets before a move's text (e.g. “NEUROTOXIN (100)”) is that move's base damage.

9. Wildcards & Conservation Projects

9.1 Wildcards

Wildcards function like spell/trap cards — played from hand, gated by requirements (e.g. a specific icon in the tableau) rather than an action cost.

- Timing: Standard Wildcards play only on the controller's own turn; Instant/Reaction Wildcards may be played at any time, including during the opponent's turn.
- Duration: most Wildcards are one-shot (resolve once, then discard). Continuous Wildcards remain in play providing an ongoing effect — Conservation Projects are the primary example.
- Some Wildcards specifically trigger only in response to an opponent's action (a move, a placement, another Wildcard) — a dedicated Counter/Response subtype.

9.2 Conservation Projects

A special Continuous Wildcard subtype, included in a player's own deck. NOT an instant-win condition — Projects grant buffs intended to help games conclude faster, never to make a player safer.

- A player may have at most 2 active Conservation Projects.
- Playing a 3rd costs 1 action and forces the 1st (oldest) Project played to the Discard Pile — strict FIFO, not the player's choice.
- Each Project card has multiple built-in icon-count thresholds (e.g. a stronger buff for 5 matching icons, a lesser buff for 4, a smaller one for 2), so two players can run the same named Project at different effective strength.
- A Project's tier is locked in at the moment it's played and does not later update, even if the tableau changes.

Design rule for all Project buffs: escalate combat, never stabilize it (e.g. ignore the Protective Slot, gain Piercing, gain an extra action) — never flat HP, healing, or damage reduction.

10. Targeting

- Players may freely target any slot in the opponent's tableau by default.
- Some cards restrict this (e.g. an untargetable animal, or an attacker restricted to only the Protective Slot).
- The Staging Slot cannot be targeted by regular attacks/abilities — only cards that specifically reference it.

11. Movement

- No diagonal movement anywhere in the tableau, ever, unless a card explicitly grants it.
- "Any adjacent slot" means one slot away, orthogonally only.
- Cards may specify moving an animal directly to the Front, Middle, or Back Row.

12. Staging Slot

- Each player has one Staging Slot by default; some Animal Cards grant an additional one.
- Animals there have moves/abilities neutralized and cannot be targeted by regular attacks/abilities.
- Only cards specifically referencing the Staging Slot can affect animals there.

12.1 Out-of-Tableau Zones

Some cards move an animal to a secondary, card-specific zone instead of the Discard Pile or base Staging Slot, following whatever rules that card specifies.

13. Discard Pile

- Wildcards (including Conservation Projects) go to the Discard Pile once used/replaced.
- Animal Cards go to the Discard Pile when knocked out (HP reaches 0).
- Cards leave the Discard Pile only if another card specifically permits it.

14. Damage Types

Type	Effect
Normal	Resolves as normal; subject to the Protective Slot rule against the Domain.
Piercing	Ignores the Protective Slot entirely — always hits the Domain directly.
Spatial	Also deals the same damage to all orthogonally-adjacent animals (excluding the Domain), unless diagonal is specified.

15. Status Effects

15.1 Venom

“Inflict Venom X for N turns” forces the affected player to discard X cards per turn, for N turns. Injected via bite/sting — active/offensive.

- Stacking: being hit again by the same tier while active upgrades it to the next tier with the new duration (Venom I + Venom I → Venom II; Venom II + Venom II → Venom III).

15.2 Poison

Absorbed via contact/ingestion — a passive defense. Deals a flat, repeating retaliatory DOT to whoever attacks this card (not to whoever this card attacks), distinct from Venom's discard-based, offensive design.

15.3 Other Status Effects

Effect	What it does	Real basis
Paralysis	Cannot move AND cannot use a Move	Certain neurotoxins; electric discharge
Immobilize	Cannot move; CAN still use Moves (weaker than Paralysis)	Existing effect, formalized here
Blindness	Cannot use a Move requiring a chosen target	Spitting cobras aim venom at the eyes
Intimidation	Target skips its next Move	Threat displays (frilled lizard, deimatic eyespots)
Entanglement	Like Immobilize, but escaping costs discarding a card rather than expiring	Spider silk, jellyfish tentacles
Infection	Small DOT that spreads to an adjacent slot each turn if uncured	Real wildlife disease crises (e.g. devil facial tumour disease)
Exhaustion	Next Move costs 2 actions instead of 1	Post-sprint overheating; migratory depletion
Exposure	Negates a target's Camouflage for a set duration	Camouflage failing during molting or wrong backdrop
Bleed	Blocks healing/Regeneration for a set duration	Anticoagulant compounds preventing clotting

16. Physical Components

16.1 Flip Coins

Standard heads/tails coins resolve all chance effects (e.g. Camouflage, Hunt-style Moves). Multiple collectible art variants (a Shark coin, a Shell coin, etc.) are all functionally identical — only the art differs. Difficulty is tuned by varying flip count and win condition, not by different physical dice:

- Standard (~50%): flip 1 coin, heads succeeds.
- High success (~75%): flip 2 coins, either heads succeeds.
- Low success (~25%): flip 2 coins, both must be heads.

16.2 HP Tokens

A shell-shaped token family (visually distinct from the varied-art coins) tracks HP without mental math:

- 10 HP token (smallest)
- 50 HP token (medium)
- 100 HP token (largest, for high-HP cards like Domains)

When a card takes damage, place tokens totaling that amount; current HP = printed HP minus total token value on the card.

17. Card Balance & Rarity

17.1 The Power Budget System

Every card at a given Star cost is built to the same total "Power Budget," spent differently depending on its Role (see 17.2) — a first-draft point scale to check new cards against, refined through playtesting:

Element	Point cost
HP	1 point per 10 HP
Move base damage	1 point per 10 damage
Ability (Tier I / II / III)	3 / 5 / 8 points
Inflict Venom or Poison (I / II / III)	3 / 5 / 8 points
Draw a card (unconditional)	4 points
Heal	1 point per 10 HP
Force-move an opponent's animal	3 points
Immobilize (per target, per turn)	3–4 points
Discard from opponent's hand	4 points

A card's 2nd Move counts at a discount (~60% value), since only one Move can be used per turn. Suggested budget targets: 1-star ≈ 12–15 points, 2–3 star ≈ 20–25, 4+/Apex ≈ 35–40+.

17.2 Roles

Cards of the same Star cost spend their budget differently depending on Role, so "balanced" never means "identical": Bruiser (high HP, weak effects), Striker (high damage, low HP), Support (weak stats, strong draw/buffs), Disruptor (weak stats, strong status/hand-attack effects), Defender (weak stats, strong Ability access).

17.3 Rarity

Rarity is tied to complexity/specialization, not raw power — a rare card has steeper requirements, a narrower use case, or a genuinely novel mechanic (e.g. headline cards like Tardigrade or Immortal Jellyfish), never simply higher stats. This keeps a common-only deck competitively viable against a rare-heavy one, avoiding a pay-to-win dynamic that would sit awkwardly against the Community Stewardship pillar.

18. Card Anatomy

Every Animal Card includes:

- Common Name & Scientific Name (plus a Variant marker where applicable — Section 6)
- Continent Icon(s) and Type
- Health Points (HP) and Star Bar
- Icons (behavioral/ecological) and Ability (if applicable)
- Moves
- Conservation Status (IUCN)
- A short, sourced fun fact

Under consideration: a QR code on each physical card linking to a full online overview of that animal.

19. Open Design Questions

- Starting/maximum hand size, and deck-out rules
- Exact numeric values for the Armour, Precision, Venom Resistance, and Regeneration Ability tiers
- Whether Abilities can trigger off an opponent's move, or only the card's own move
- Whether non-Project Wildcards can also be Continuous, or if that stays Project-exclusive
- The distinction between “Tundra” and “Arctic Tundra” as separate Biome Tags
- Whether “Polychaete” should be renamed “Annelid” if earthworm/leech cards are added
- Whether to pursue formal licensing for a real naturalist figure, or use an original fictional character instead

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Draft compiled from design discussion — subject to change as Panzoa's ruleset develops.