

Explore the Animal Kingdom

By Van Mitchell
Contributing Writer

The Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden, located at 2101 NE 50th Street, is a popular destination stop for individuals and families across the state and country.

And, the zoo is especially busy during the summer season with a slew of educational programs designed to connect students to the natural world, using the zoo as a living classroom to teach science and critical-thinking skills, while growing curiosity about animals and nature.

The programs also incorporate skills in reading, writing, math and observation, said Candice Rennels, zoo spokesperson.

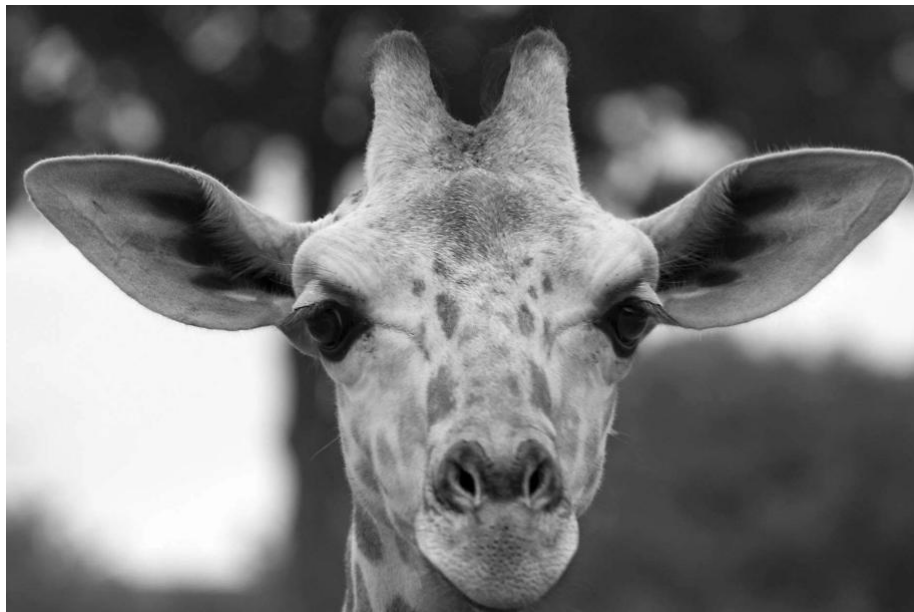
The Zoo's summer camps run June 5 – Aug. 11. Weekly themed camps are available for children ages 3-15. Full-day camps for ages 4-11 run Monday – Friday from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. for \$275 (members) and \$300 (nonmembers). Half-day camps for ages 4-5 (only) meet Monday – Friday from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. for \$145 (members) and \$160 (nonmembers). Other fees apply for 3-year-old camps, teen camps and extended care hours.

During the full-day option, campers will enjoy a variety of activities including Zoo play, exhibit tours, animal visits, keeper chats, water play, and Zoo rides and attractions.

"We are offering half-day and full-day summer camps," Rennels said. "There are several options for families with each camp having a unique theme."

The Zoo is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., only closing on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The Oklahoma City Zoo is one of the oldest zoos in the Southwest with 1904 serving as its first full year of business. It is home to approximately 1,900 of the world's most exotic animals, including 54 endangered or threatened species through cooperation with the AZA's



-Photo by Gillian Lang

The Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden, 2101 NE 50th St., offers a variety of educational programs designed to connect students to the natural world.

Species Survival Plans.

The zoo is also home to more than 500 species of animals, including 87 species of mammals, 117 species of birds, 153 species of reptiles and amphibians; and 155 species of fish, aquatic invertebrates and marine mammals spread across more than 119 acres.

The Zoo hit an attendance record for the 2010-2011 fiscal year totaling 982,721 guests. Three years later, the Zoo surpassed one million guests for the 2013-2014 fiscal year.

"We are adding more visitors annually," Rennels said. "We are having a great year."

Last spring, the Oklahoma City Zoo broke ground on its latest expansion project, Sanctuary Asia. The \$22 million project was outlined as Phase II in the Zoo's master plan in 2010.

Sanctuary Asia will create a vast, multipurpose environment where endangered animals from the Asian continent can thrive while receiving world-class zoological animal care.

Located in the southwest section

Wild Side

WHAT OKC Zoo and Botanical Garden

WHERE 2101 NE 50th St., Oklahoma City

DETAILS The Zoo is home to about 1,900 of the world's most exotic animals including 54 endangered species.

INFO Visit www.okczoo.org or call (405) 425-0218

of the Zoo connecting to the existing elephant habitat, Sanctuary Asia will add 3.5 acres to the elephant herd's existing 4.5-acre habitat. Sanctuary Asia will also be home to red pandas, Asian rhinos, langurs, Komodo dragons, raccoon dogs, cranes and cassowary birds.

Funding for the 6.6-acre expansion was secured through the Zoo's 1/8-of-a-cent sales tax accrual, approved by Oklahoma City citizens in 1990. The project is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2018.

"Animals within Sanctuary Asia, like

all those within the Zoo, will be safe and free to socialize, eat, play and explore," said Dr. Dwight Lawson, Zoo executive director/CEO. "Our guests will be able to see existing and new animals from a new perspective. It will be visually stunning and our goal is to inform guest about the urgent plight of these Asian animals in the wild and be moved to take immediate action to protect them."

Sanctuary Asia will also include a two-story building with vast windows seamlessly uniting animal habitats to create a highly visual and memorable experience. The views will include the elephant, rhino and Komodo dragon habitats. In addition to providing daily food service, the facility is designed for after-hours special events. A water zone will give children a splash area to experience in the summer. The landscape design will include plantings native to Oklahoma, but will resemble lush Asian themes.

The Zoo is home to the only museum of its kind in the country, the Patricia and Byron J. Gambulos ZooZeum, a place where the public can experience the zoological and botanical memories encountered at the Zoo for more than 100 years.

Located near the Elephant Pavilion, the ZooZeum is open daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and is free to visitors within the park.

Rennels said another new entity was the opening of the Joan Kirkpatrick Hospital.

"The Joan Kirkpatrick Hospital is a fully-functional working hospital for animals," Rennels said. "The cool thing for our guests is they will get to see things happening behind the scenes. We are really excited about this."

Residents can check out the Zoo's website at www.okczoo.org for a complete list of summer camps and other activities.

For more information call (405) 425-0218.