

KEEPING TRACK . FOLSOM CITY ZOO SANCTUARY

May, 2009

How Big Is A Bear Tooth?

The root of a black bear's tooth is approximately the size of your thumb, from the joint up – both in thickness and width. 12-year-old Fisher's tooth was worn down nearly to the gum but when he was a young guy the tooth was pointy and nearly an inch longer. As it is with humans, it's unwise to let dental issues go. For a wild bear, an abscess like Fisher's could be life threatening.

In early May, zookeeper **Carole Garrett's** tranquilizer dart went straight to it's mark and 12-year-old bear Fisher took a nap so the bad tooth could be pulled and a mass on his cheek could be removed for biopsy. The operating room was one of the off-exhibit bear dens, which are large, until you have a sleeping 600 pound bear sprawled on his back, four humans, and several hundred pounds of technical equipment like heart and blood pressure monitors, crates of medical necessities and lots of things that beep. **Loomis Basin** veterinarian **Dr. Mike Reget** provided the expertise and muscle to remove the big tooth, RVT **Sara Huber** and zookeeper / vet tech **Lynn Dowling** assisted. Fisher's own personal doc **Mira Sanchez** performed an ultrasound and otherwise checked to make sure that all Fisher's parts were in good working condition. By the afternoon Fisher was back on his feet and ready the following day for his post-op diet of soft food.

Octavia

The zoo Daily Journal reported that tarantula **Octavia** was found to have passed away on May 18 "after a long life of educational service to the zoo." Of the more than 800 tarantula species, size can vary between 2 and 6 inches (*whoa!*). Covered in black / brown hair, Octavia was exactly the right size: possibly 4-inches across counting her eight, extended legs. Like most female tarantulas, Octavia spent most of her time meditating in her silk-lined burrow. (Some would say *lurking*, but Zoospeak doesn't permit that word.) On the job, both kids and adults were enthralled as she sat with great composure on an outreach person's hand. Zoo spider handlers learned that a tarantula's fiberglass-like barbed hairs can create splendid rashes. Octavia leaves behind a saddened zoo family. She is buried in the foothills where her wild relatives roam.

Floating Teeth

A horse's front teeth bite off hay and grass. The flat-surfaced top and bottom "cheek teeth" grind the grass in a sideways motion. Grinding breaks down the food into a digestible pulp. Unlike human teeth, a horse's teeth keep growing and, at times, may develop sharp edges, causing pain and making it difficult for the animal to chew food well or hold a bit.

This was a problem for 20 + year-old Shetland pony **Sterling**. Although he looked round and handsome, in reality he needed to gain 50 pounds. Weight gain was first. To cut down competition from other pasture animals, his meals were served in private and after several weeks with two meals a day he gained 25 pounds. The time was right for a house call (zoo call?) and **Dr. Bob Morgan** of **Loomis Basis Veterinary Hospital** filed down – or *floated* – the teeth of a sedated Sterling. The total checkup included West Nile and rabies vaccines and Sterling is now doing very well

The Thrifty Gene

The Shetland pony has the reputation of being *thrifty* - fattening on almost anything. In the early '60's geneticist **James Neel** postulated that horses have evolved a "thrifty gene" that let them survive harsh environments that provided very little nourishment. Horses could fatten up in times of plenty and manage to get by in hard times.

Nare Tear

If you are the **Little Black Hen** and you have an injury to your nare you are not a happy chicken. A *nare* is what medical types call a nostril, and, yes, chickens have nostrils right there on the top of the beak below the eyes where the feather line begins. Since her nare was torn, keepers assume that LBH had an encounter with the The Other Woman, hen **Barb**. The sad truth may be that Barb has always been jealous of handsome rooster **Baby Girl's Baby's** first wife. (Chicken relationships are very complex.) With a little help from her zoo friends, 10 days of antibiotic, and some time to herself, LBH is all better now.

The Bird In The Bush

So why was there a big wad of wolf hair tucked up near the top of a bush near the tiger exhibit? Close examination revealed a very nice blackbird nest containing a soft quilt of hair and a mombird who was probably "double clutching" with hopes of a second family of beautiful children. As humans worry about world-wide disruptions, some important things still work: wild canines shed winter coats and blackbirds keep the kids warm with the fur as they've done with great success for a very long time.

Then Again.....

Zoo visitors were attracted to the frantic screeching of the blackbird family that nests in the honeysuckle near the wolf exhibit. Apparently an unfortunate fledgling had been snatched by wolf **Redbud**. Interestingly, the blackbird family was harassing an innocent bystander – a

peacock – which doubtless was a better life decision than diving at, and pecking, the wolf.

Skinny Monkey

Tiny squirrel monkey **Monita** has always been a little frail. Born and abandoned by her mother at the **UC Davis Primate Center** in 1998, she and two little females moved to join two rescued males at the zoo sanctuary. Needing new-born, care they were kept safe and warm in a small crate and went everywhere - with keeper **Jill Lute** so she could bottle feed them hourly 24 /7 for more than a month. Three of the original squirrel monkey troop have passed away. **Monita** and handsome male **Orinoco** remain. In response to concerns about her health, **Monita** spent some time with Dr. Sanchez for a complete physical. Cytology results indicated that **Monita** may have issues with *tularemia* or *toxoplasmosis*. She is being treated for both. (*Tularemia* – aka rabbit fever – was identified in 1911 during an outbreak of the disease in ground squirrels near **Tulare Lake** in California. Who Knew?)

Attendance. Every May, hoards of kids and adults tour the zoo sanctuary before summer break begins. Docents (bless'em) impart the Mission – Teaching Responsible Behavior Toward All Animals – to a gazillion folks. Docents do not falter, they do not fade. They are Bring It On kind of people. Visitor numbers this May are 11,649, down a bit from last year, but given the economy, the good news is that *revenue is up*.

Skinny Eagle

Golden eagle females are bigger than males, and **Sierra** is substantially larger than **Nimbus**; she's taller, bulkier, and has bigger feet. Given this, there was some concern when she moved in with **Nimbus**, but Watchers were called in numerous times to observe eagle behavior and reported no problems. When you add another diner at the table, you review the amount of food provided. "Rat days" changed from 1 medium rat apiece to 2 and upped quail to 4 each. With two eaters, rat placement is strategic. Feeding platforms are being considered to make every diner happy.

Scrapping Rabbits

Real life is different than **Beatrix Potter's** stories about rabbits. Zoo rabbits **Bella** and hutchmate **Pepper** lived in peace and spent a lot of time cuddled together. With **Pepper's** passing, the zoo was seeking another rabbit friend. It seemed providential when a family called the zoo about a male Flemish Giant rabbit in need of a home. With soft fur like gray rain clouds, he was named **Stormy** and the plan was that he and lovely **Bella** would live happily ever after.

They spent weeks of introduction, one in a crate, the other roaming free in an off-exhibit enclosure. All seemed well, until their first nose-to-nose encounter ended in an alarming squabble, with bites all around. The rabbits were separated again and humans re-grouped to

Think About It. At first, **Stormy** and **Bella** traded days-on-days off in the new rabbit exhibit.* Then for several weeks both shared the exhibit, but they traded days-on / off with one rabbit in a big crate. Finally, togetherness day arrived. Watchers committed to – *um* – watching while the rabbits spent daytime together / nights separated. Ultimately, with yet more watching, **Stormy** and **Bella** are living together and seem to have a stable relationship. While rabbits might seem to be "common" animals, **Bella** and **Stormy** receive a lot of attention from visitors.

* The extremely good-looking rabbit exhibit is a gift of long-time volunteer **Linda Mueller**. Linda, despite a full-time job, was able to design the exhibit, purchase and haul materials, construct forms & pour concrete for the foundation, wrangle and paint cage wire, construct gates that close/open perfectly, and landscape with healthy growing grass inside the enclosure and plants outside. The zoo, and more importantly, the rabbits, are very grateful for her dedication and hard work.

What's A Watcher?

Does hawk **Phoenix** have mobility and stability issues? What behaviors are wolves **Yucca** and **Joshua** engaging in? Are certain bears exhibiting stereotypic behavior? How are rabbits **Stormy** and **Bella** getting along? Can you spot behavioral warning signs before macaque **Wallace** has a seizure? These and questions like them are vital to the health and well-being of zoo sanctuary animals. Any one of these behaviors might occur in the space of a second. Which is why Watchers are so important.

The patient "watching" that members of the **Behavior Observation Team** (aka Watchers) provide is vital to the health and well-being of zoo sanctuary animals. These well trained Docents and other volunteers know how to complete complex *ethograms*, or observations of animal behaviors, on a timed basis with a lexicon of technical terms. This information is of great value when zoo staff or veterinarians have questions or concerns about the behavior of an animal.

Intel!

A mob of volunteers from **Intel** spent a recent hot morning pulling foxtails, cutting back jungles of blackberries and overgrown wild grapes, removing stubborn nutgrass, and pruning big wild stuff – and filling up several Dumpsters with the resulting wild stuff. These folks are tough! We are grateful!

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