

August 2004

Some Pig!

Recently the gate separating beautiful black and gold female feral pig Charlotte, and young males Wilbur and Templeton was opening providing access for the piggy crew into the pasture with goats George and Tammy, Barbados sheep Dodge, Princess and Maggie, and giant golden Premarin horse Gus. This was a trial run with the hopes of granting the pigs periodic access to the pasture. A contingent of keepers was standing by in case of trouble. The pigs were thrilled, and headed straight for the gentle creek that meanders through the pasture. The grasses and small green plants that grace the banks of the creek are browsed by animal residents.

It wasn't long before Charlotte and the boys were euphorically dredging, snout deep, down the creek bed. Cobblestones and plants were uprooted and the once pristine waters were muddy. As were the pigs. The phrase "happy as a pig in mud" took on new meaning. The other animals watched thoughtfully.

Having re-designed the creek, the pigs started looking for other things to do. Wilbur and Templeton trotted the perimeter fence checking rocks and pinecones and barns and peafowl. But Charlotte had zeroed in on gentle Gus. She reconnoitered behind him and suddenly launched herself at a rear foot. Startled, Gus kicked, catching Charlotte up and backing her down. Watching keepers didn't intervene, logically thinking that Charlotte had learned that a 1,500 pound draft horse was to be avoided.



It seemed at first that she had learned the lesson. Charlotte moved fifteen feet away and turned head-on to Gus. Neither animal moved. Gus swished his tail and maintained eye-contact. But suddenly you could see Charlotte laying back her ears and gathering her shoulders for a running attack! She's under Gus going for a rear hock (lower leg). This time she really did get kicked and Charlotte backed away and stayed away.

Later in the day, the pigs returned to the big pig yard and keepers checked the bump on Charlotte's head. One of her eyes looked runny and staff immediately began flushing the eye several times daily on the somewhat irregular basis Charlotte permitted. On the next day Templeton and Wilbur were waiting impatiently at the gate for another playtime in the pasture. Charlotte declined. On the third day all three responded. Once again a keeper supervised as Charlotte moved south, head down, grazing as she went. Gus was heading north, head down, grazing as he went. They passed without the flicker of an eyelash. No whispered threats. Peace among the animals!

Photo courtesy of Lynn Dowling

Pig Roll Down

In zoospeak, when you "knock down" an animal it means that the animal has been tranquilized, often from afar, with a hypodermic dart. In the case of pig Charlotte, the knock down was rather different. Dr Jyl Rubin was called to examine Charlotte's eye and

she, a vet assistant and keeper Lynn Dowling moved the pig (with food) into a small holding pen. Then came the "knock down." Dr Jyl leaned up against Charlotte's shoulder and reached under her ample belly, grasping the off-side front leg. Lynn was in charge of pulling the off-side hind leg. And over Charlotte rolled. All this sounds pretty straightforward and simple, which it wasn't. But once you get a top-heavy short-legged pig out of balance, it will eventually roll over. Hopefully not on top of you! Pig down, Lynn lay on her long enough for Dr Jyl to put an anesthesia mask over the snout - and in seconds Charlotte was tranquil enough for a close exam of the eye.

When you vet needs to knock down your dog or cat there's usually a request that the animal have nothing to eat or drink for 12 hours or so. (This is true of humans who need anesthesia too.) The reason is that food or water + anesthesia can lead to nausea. And following anesthesia the recommendation usually is to go easy on food and water for a while. Except where pigs are concerned. The exam over, Dr Jyl recommended food, immediately. Since pigs are strong willed and have splendid constitutions, the minute the anesthesia stopped Charlotte took a breath of fresh air and was on her feet ready to go. The only food immediately on hand was zoo grapes and some macaroon cookies and a granola bar that were donated by Dr Jyl!

Skinny Goats?

The years of remarks have not been purposely unkind: "those black goats are sure overweight." While goats clearly don't care what people think, these comments made



keepers feel defensive on behalf of the goats. It's true, however, that black pygmy goats George and Tammy have big guts! Now comes word from The Goat Experts. Zoo supervisor Terry Jenkins and Lead-worker Jill Giel spent several days at the California Browsing Academy in Brown's Valley. The mission of the Academy is to teach and demonstrate how goats can be used to reduce fuel loads and remove invasive plants. Goats are the answer to dry grass and brush removal almost anywhere. They're exceptionally efficient and non-polluting. Good looking, hard working, and they bring along sheep dog supervisors so the

whole process is fun to watch.

Terry and Jill learned that goats should not have obvious *spinus processes* - bumpy, protruding backbones. This means that the animal is too thin, regardless of whether the midsection is great and round and bulgy. Goats have four stomachs that tend to fill with air. On the advice of the Academy, George and Tammy and all the field animals are receiving browse - daily piles of leafy limbs in addition to their regular good. Research is going on to alter their current diet, which should improve muscle tone and reduce girth. It has also been suggested that George will be a kinder, gentler animal when he isn't hungry. All things are possible!

Photo courtesy of Lynn Dowling

Attendance for August was 10,435 despite some hot, scorching days. Zoo Sanctuary staff frequently hears from the public that they appreciate the shaded grounds - something the resident animals like too!

Bear Games

Black bears Woody and Marty are buddies and as young male bears will, they wrestle a lot. While observers cringe at the sight, it's common for bears at play to grab each other's ears with their teeth. Recently, keepers noticed a gash on Woody's ear which seems to be healing nicely. Several months ago Woody was missing a little half-moon piece of ear, apparently due to bear games. It too healed well. At the time there was some speculation by staffers about what happened to that little piece of ear. We won't go there!



Calendar Watchers

Everyone has a built-in calendar that tells them summer begins to move toward winter. The light is a little different in the morning and the sun sets earlier. It's clear that members of the zoo sanctuary wolf pack are in tune with this seasonal change. Late fall and early winter are times of increased social activity for wolves, as they define the alpha positions. (Wolves breed late in the year and only alpha animals breed. At the zoo, Redbud is spayed. Puppies come from afar.)

It's very important for wolves to know who's in charge. For Redbud, the only female in the pack, her position is a slam dunk. But for adult males 10 year old Granite and nearly 4 year old River, the alpha struggle is starting up again after a relatively quiet summer. Granite has always been the alpha of the current pack. In the last two weeks visitors can hear impressive growling and see lots of posturing in the wolf exhibit, as Granite scrutinizes every single thing River does. So far River is doing what he's done in the past - being submissively aggressive - which appears to annoy Granite no end.

This year, new players in the wolf pack are 6-month old male puppies Yucca and Joshua. You may recall that "puppy" uncle River took over the job of teaching the kids wolf lore and spoiling them, as wolves tend to do with young ones. Now the pups are nearly as big as the adults, although their big feet still seem mostly out of control. There are new lessons to be learned. When Granite and River are engaging in alpha squabbles, the pups are learning to back off. Tempers are short, and a puppy sticking his nose into alpha business is likely to encounter a snap and a snarl which means "mind your own business." Good advice for humans too.