



July 2004

#### Imagination

Most young human primates are masters at creating mental images. "There's a mouse in the paper bag!" Of course there is. Adult humans probably won't go there. And while dogs are pragmatists, they might agree on the rodent issue to make you happy, but in their heart of hearts they know there is not a mouse in the bag. Cats - from kittens on up - Believe. Yes! A mouse! And young tigers may have the best imaginations of all.

The big green ball that belongs to tigers Misty and Pouncer is a case in point. It's huge. Keepers have to stretch their arms wide to pick the BGB up. Theoretically, the ball is indestructible, but increasingly there are deep furrows from tiger claws on the surface.

Recently, tiger Misty swatted the BGB into the small shallow pool. This was a calculated move: the ball floats, so it can be manipulated by a smart tiger, but the edge of the pool is high enough so that the ball can't "get away". Misty started spinning the ball with her oversize paws. Then she practiced pouncing and wrapping her front legs around it. She kicked with her strong back legs. And growled. At this point Misty's claws were out and even though the ball was too big, she was making every effort to bite whatever it was that she was catching. Before long, her eyes slipped out of focus and it was clear that the Big Green Ball had changed into a Formidable Adversary.

#### Bear Adversaries |

Little female Tahoe and male Sequoia moved in to the Folsom Zoo Black Bear Exhibit as youngsters in 2002. You may recall that they worried about big senior bear Brutus, until they learned that they could stay out of his way. When males Woody & Marty came to the zoo, Tahoe was quite snippy through the wire that separated the two exhibits.

But now, all four bears are together. At first, the bears seemed to be considering the possibilities that togetherness entailed and were cautious. Ultimately and predictably, Tahoe managed to maintain her snippy ways by standing up on her hind legs, and displaying claws and teeth as Woody & Marty backed down. Sequoia, wisely, was busy somewhere else.

Now, after several weeks of sorting out rank, Woody & Marty can sometimes back down Tahoe. Sequoia, wisely, is still busy somewhere else. Interestingly enough, when night falls, the bears separate themselves into two exhibit areas: Woody & Marty in one place, Tahoe and Sequoia at the other. Handsome Fisher is not part of the bear pack. He took a long time to accustom himself to the new exhibit. (Possibly because he was afraid of bears.) Now he spends warm days in his den or in the pool and most nights dozing in one of the nests he has excavated in the soft earth of his yard. Peacefully - and possibly gratefully - alone.

#### Slip-Sliding Away

Weighing ferrets is a pleasant job. You get to hold their long, lanky selves and can probably lure them into a game or two. But when you get down to the job of weighing them, life becomes more complex. Zoo Sanctuary veterinary technician Lisa Dowling, with



a little moral support from a helper, positioned the small, square scale, readied her weight charts on the clipboard, and the helper placed Paulie on the scale. Two pounds plus. Then it was Bandit's turn. He was arranged nicely on the scale when the problems began.

Ever try to balance a plastic bag half-full of water on a small surface? It rolls and flows and just won't stay put. Pretty much like a ferret. Plan II was implemented: a deep plastic tub lined with a folded pink towel was

zeroed-out on the scale and Bandit was gently lowered in. Perfect. He rolled over on his side, chin in the air, eyes closed and took a quick nap. After Jingles and Buddy were weighed, all four ferrets piled up in the tub for some play time.

Even though ferrets are illegal pets in California, a sizeable number make their way here from pet shops in adjoining states. Members of the family that includes skunks, wolverines and weasels, domestic ferrets are related to the European polecat.

#### Bonsai

The front area of the zoo sanctuary is nicely shaded by ash trees. In years past, the new spring leaves would tend to shrivel and drop because of a common (but seldom serious) plant disease called anthracnose. At one time ash trees were the shade trees of choice in new home developments in the Sacramento area. Now some neighborhoods have spraying programs to control anthracnose, which help a little. Most people just rake up the leaves and wait for the second growth.

Several years ago, keeper Kaye Banyard fostered a baby gray squirrel who took a header out of his nest. Under her care he grew sleek and fat (actually quite fat) and since there were no records of his home territory, he was released in a wild gray squirrel area at the back of the zoo.

It's likely that this same hefty squirrel has returned and for the last two years has taken on the important job of volunteer ash tree trimmer. In late spring and all summer he spends mornings in the ash trees, neatly clipping off small bunches of new growth. Not infrequently, someone will be below raking up piles of his trimmings.

It's possible that he's engaged in the ancient art of bonsai. Bonsai masters use careful trimming, pruning and other techniques to form a tree that has healthy, but limited growth. The miraculous thing is how good the zoo ash trees look. To be sure the slender, graceful branches typical of ash trees are missing, but they've been replaced by intensely green leaves sprouting from short feathery stems growing directly from the major limbs.

July Attendance! 11,870! (5,127 more than July 2003) In July this year the Docents (bless 'em) provided guided tours for 429 participants. Due to \$\$ shortfalls, school districts have cut tours. (But this figure still tops last year's July figure by 84 souls.)

## Puppy Stuff

Wolf pups Joshua and Yucca are the darlings of their pack, the media, and apparently everybody else. They've appeared on television channels 3, 10, 13, 40 and 31. They've been featured in color on front pages of the Folsom Telegraph, Folsom Life, El Dorado Hills and Folsom regional editions of The Sacramento Bee, in the City of Folsom Newsletter, and have gazillions of wolf fans watching their every move.

Wolves only breed once a year, so these guys were born in late April, 2004. Considering their youth, they are surprisingly big. Lying down they look even - well - regal. In action, however, they still tend to trip over their big feet. (Wolves have proportionately bigger feet than dogs, the better to catch caribou with, no doubt.)

The alpha pair, Granite and Redbud, tend to move away when besieged by loving pups. But three-year-old black wolf River is still taking his job as Puppy Uncle seriously. He brings them chicken necks. He brings them bananas. On camera. Too cute. He'll play tug-of-war with both of them with a bath towel. If the small red ball is in the pool, River will consistently rescue it and present it to the pups. He calls Joshua and Yucca to him with little cries, and then wrestles and plays with them.



During another photo op, dignified senior alpha Granite picked up part of a cardboard box and hightailed in circles around the exhibit with the pups in hot pursuit.

Joshua is the daredevil, skidding through muddy puddles chasing an apple, or -oops- loosing footing on the rock ledge, or - whoa - accidentally running head-on into an adult. Yucca is more reserved, but he has his moments.

Naturally the puppies think they can get away with almost anything. But increasingly, lines are being drawn. River was playing with some long cardboard tubes for a photo op. The pups, feeling entitled, made moves on the tubes and were growled off with a flashy display of teeth. ("Not everything belongs to you. Learn some manners.")

It used to be that senior wolves could spend a quiet afternoon napping on platforms in the holding areas. But now the pups can stand on hind legs and just pop their noses over the edge. More growling.

Joshua is a fan of all things wet. He sits in the pool. He hunts submerged rocks. He sits in the galvanized tub of water (and is occasionally distracted by that wolf tail that always seems to be there.) Keepers will let the hose run full blast across the concrete floor of the holding pen. Yucca plays at the fringes but Joshua digs and skids and has too much fun.

Recently, he laid his cheek on the concrete snapping at the stream of water while his stomach slowly expanded.