

November, December 2004



Spike

African Pygmy hedgehogs, like many exotic animals, aren't available for sale in California pet shops. But because these little insectivores are sold in adjoining states, the zoo sanctuary has rescued more than a few of them. Hedgehogs are covered with short, tough, sharp spikes and are pretty much predator-proof when they tuck their heads in and roll into a tight prickly ball.

Lore tells us that hedgehogs will chew pungent plants, and

anoint their spines with the ensuing froth. There was great excitement when Spike, outside on a summer day for a photo op, began doing just that. Strangely enough, the plant he chose to chew was the only one available that was native to Africa.

As an Education Animal, Spike was a star. Kids shivered when he hissed and shuddered with delight as he crunched mealworms with gusto.

In recent months, Spike had been ailing and traveled to the Bird & Pet Clinic of Roseville many times for care.

Sadly, his health continued to fail and he was gently euthanized.

Chelsea

For hundreds of years in Europe, large breeds of dogs like Kuvaz, Maremma and Great Pyrenees, have specialized in guarding domestic flocks from wild predators, including bears and wolves. In the 1960's studies at Amhurst College in Massachusetts showed that the Old World



technologies had it right: the presence of livestock guarding dogs pastured with sheep or goats reduced predation from coyotes, mountain lions, and gangs of neighborhood dogs, by nearly 70%. Cheap to keep, easy to maintain and downright appealing, now these breeds can be seen in rural areas of the U.S. taking care of flocks.

At the zoo sanctuary, livestock guarding dogs have several jobs. At night, they roam the zoo as watchdogs. When the idea of zoo guarding dogs was first broached, there was concern that the more traditional guard dogs - German shepherds or Dobermans - could present a problem with youngsters who play near the zoo. The presence of these giant specialized dogs, who bark rather than bite, has been a major factor in keeping would-be intruders outside the zoo perimeter fences.



Visitors commented on the presence of “the big white dogs” - female Great Pyrenees Chelsea and younger Maremma male Harrison, at work in the zoo pasture. Interpretive signs explained how dogs like these could be an effective non-lethal way to control predators on small ranches in this area and in the foothills.

Chelsea helped teach obstreperous puppy Harrison his zoo job. It wasn't easy. He chased chickens (very bad) and dug in flowerbeds (not acceptable). But with Chelsea's dignified behavior and some guidance from keepers, Harrison finally got the Big Picture.

Chelsea turned 9-years-old last March, which for very large breeds of dogs, is old. Several weeks ago Chelsea was limping, favoring her right front leg, and x-rays by zoo veterinarian Dr. Mira Sanchez confirmed an invasive form of bone cancer. Dr. Sanchez, Zoo Superintendent Jocelyn Smeltzer and Supervisor Jill Giel conferred with other specialists

about the various medical options available. And there were long, sad discussions with staff and volunteers. Ultimately, there was a consensus that none of the options offered Chelsea a good quality of life and she was euthanized on December 4. Sad times at the zoo.

The Thanksgiving Feast for the Animals

Nearly 700 people were on hand to watch zoo sanctuary animals receive their Thanksgiving



Feasts. A great color photo on the front page of the Sacramento Bee neighborhood section said it all. There's elderly monkey Claudia checking out her wicker picnic basket decorated with (edible) yellow fall leaves, a small sugar-free pumpkin pie, veggies cooked with whole grains served in a colorful

squash and a teddy bear tucked in a corner.

The meals for all the animals were beautifully prepared by the talented members of the National Charity League and zoostaff.

Docent (bless 'im) Lloyd Strong walked visitors through the zoo, sharing his animal savvy when - no! the microphone failed. Lloyd gets the Grace Under Pressure Award for carrying on splendidly.

Leaning Into His Work

Gray squirrel Bumpy probably fell out of his nest shortly after he was born 'way back in 1992. Apparently he landed hard and every since then has evidenced neurological problems. Simply put, his computer is just a little slow.

During inclement weather - too hot, too cold, too anything, delicate Bumpy resides in the climate controlled clinic. Which is where he was when a keeper Cristina Sullivan noticed him having a snack. Not unusual for the Bumpster. Like all squirrels, he picks up food and holds it his front paws. This time, however, he was lying on his side in exactly the same position he would be in if he were sitting up. Neurologically, it appears that sometimes Bumpy is not necessarily - oriented in up or down positions.



Bones

Give a wolf a bone and he's going to want somebody else's (or even everybody else's) bone. Big beef bones were delivered to the pack and before long, 8-month-old pup Joshua had two bones. His and female Redbud's. Redbud didn't want to give him the bone. But ever since he was a baby, he's begged and wheedled until, even now, Redbud will regurgitate food for him. She hates this.

The Holiday Party for the Animals



This annual event has been held for eons and zoo sanctuary animals who have participated in the past show great excitement as preparations are made. This year visitors spent a lot a time watching tigers Misty and Pouncer tear asunder their wrapped gift boxes. Revved up, Misty spent nearly an hour playing with the big green ball she trapped in the

smaller of the two pools. Pouncer opened gifts, and then opted for a cat nap, occasionally rolling over and manipulating mashed cardboard box pieces with her big paws.

The bears accepted gifts as their due, and exhibited exceptional talent in peeling oranges: grasp orange with claws of left paw and delicately peel with the claws of the right.

Young coyote Wild Iris was able to actually grab her festive boxes almost upon delivery. Last year she apparently considered them to be coyote traps and had nothing to do with them.

Claudia had a little green fir tree decorated with red origami cranes created by students at Independence High School. After opening her gifts, she snacked on breakfast and curled up under her heat lamp for a nap on her soft, gray army blanket.

At mid-day, Santa and his friend Jim Short were delivered by fire engine. There was a little glitch this year: Santa had sustained a badly sprained ankle (possibly in the reindeer barn) and was warned by his doctor elf not to walk on it. Thinking outside the box, zookeeper Carole Garret was able to



borrow a wheelchair from the good folks at Park Folsom Retirement Center near the zoo. Docents decorated the chair with evergreens and poinsettias. Lovely. Santa, possibly buoyed up by legions of small enthusiasts, declined the assisted transport to his throne, although after several hours of hearing whispered Christmas wishes, he hitched a ride in the wheelchair back to the waiting sleigh.

The Color Me Mine tiles were on display for all to see and be encouraged to participate in the next event date of January 15th, 1 - 3pm and February 11th 6 - 9pm. Kudos to the members of Orangevale Rotary Club, who spent hours collecting and wrapping gift boxes for the animals. Animal joy abounded, thanks to them! Kudos too, to The Incredible Docents (bless 'em) who, as usual, stepped in and overcame all the glitches, did what needed to be done with aplomb, and were generally wonderful. No surprises there!

Attendance: Almost 5,500 visitors were at the zoo sanctuary in November. This is a good time to come. The animals have bulked up in beautiful winter furs and can be spotted hanging out in sunny places, just like humans.