

Notes&News



All photos this page: Jesse Cohen/NZP

On your next visit, keep an eye out for free-ranging golden lion tamarins like this one. The little monkeys like to explore the trees and walkways near their nest box.

Animal News

If you see a streak of orange moving through the trees at the Smithsonian's National Zoo this summer, you've spotted one of two free-ranging **golden lion tamarins** (*Leontopithecus rosalia*)—small, Brazilian monkeys—exploring the outdoors. This year's charismatic tamarin pair nests in a modified cooler affixed to a tree in Beaver Valley. Eduardo, the male, has nested alfresco before, but it's the first time for his new partner, Laranja, a female from the Philadelphia Zoo. They spend the day scampering along ropes and branches, sleeping, and searching for hidden food as part of an enrichment activity that simulates their foraging behavior in the wild. They will remain outside until October, when the weather gets chilly and they return to their exhibit inside the Small Mammal House.

This is the 20th summer the Zoo has allowed golden lion tamarins to range freely in the park and studied their outdoor behavior. The little monkeys usually stay within a few hundred feet of their nest box, but also wear radiocollars so Zoo staff can keep track of their location. Volunteer FONZ behavior watchers tail the tamarins for 12 hours each day and record their every move. You can read some of the watchers' observations at www.fonz.org/monkeymessages.htm.

For the Zoo's female **cheetahs** (*Acinonyx jubatus*), the race to motherhood is on. First-time mother Tumai gave birth to two male and two female cubs in November; hers was the first cheetah litter ever born at the National Zoo. In April, Zazi, also a first-time mother, upped the ante by giving birth to five healthy cubs—two males and three females. Zazi was bred with male Ume under the auspices of the American Zoo

and Aquarium Association's Species Survival Plan for cheetahs, which manages genetic diversity in endangered species. For the latest updates on the Zoo's nine cubs, to find out when they'll be on exhibit, or to watch them on the Cheetah Cams, go to www.fonz.org/africansavanna.htm.

She's cuddly now, but just wait 'til she grows up! A **prehensile-tailed porcupine** (*Coendou prehensilis*), arguably the cutest baby at the Zoo, was born at the Small Mammal House in April. At birth, her quills were only ¼ inch long and were wet and soft, but they hardened a few hours later and will lengthen as she matures. Prehensile-tailed porcupines are nocturnal rodents native to Latin American forests. When threatened, they roll into a ball to protect their soft underbellies and flex their muscles to make their sharp quills stand on end.

Which animal has the face of an agouti, the legs of a tiny deer, and weighs less than a fat house cat? This strange amalgam of animal parts belongs to none other than the **greater Malay mouse deer** (*Tragulus napu*), one of the smallest even-toed ungulates in the world. Check out the Zoo's two new females, which came from the Bronx Zoo in April, at the Small Mammal House. They are native to the Malayan peninsula and nearby islands, but are

seldom seen in the wild because they are nocturnal and quite shy. You might catch them stamping the ground with their hind feet if they sense danger. Mouse deer, also called chevrotains, are not closely related to rodents such as mice or agoutis, but they do belong to the same order as deer, pronghorns, giraffes, and cattle.



Prehensile-tailed porcupine.

Events

For more information on celebrations at the Zoo, or to purchase tickets to Brew at the Zoo, please visit www.fonz.org/celebrations.htm.

Sunset Serenades

Thursdays, June 30 to August 4—6:30 to 8 p.m.

Enjoy six evenings of free musical entertainment on the lawn of the Zoo's Lion/Tiger Hill. With a range of musical styles including oldies, jazz, reggae, pop/rock, blues, and classical, these concerts are sure to please all ages.

Brew at the Zoo

August 25—6 to 9 p.m.

Sample handcrafted beer from local and European breweries, groove to live music, and enjoy hors d'oeuvres while visiting the Zoo's animals. Tickets are \$25 for FONZ members and \$35 for nonmembers. Price includes a commemorative glass.

Fiesta Musical

September 18—11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

FONZ celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month with a free annual Fiesta at the National Zoo. With animal demonstrations, Latino music, costumed dancers, salsa and merengue lessons, traditional crafts, and Latin American foods, the event offers something for everyone. Animal programs are presented in Spanish and English.



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Volunteer Corner



Jesse Cohen/NZP

A giant Pacific octopus at the Invertebrate Exhibit.

Mike Bevel is a volunteer interpreter at the Invertebrate Exhibit. Here, he describes how visiting Zoo animals helps people reflect on their own lives.

"I bet it's nice in there," said the older woman in the tan coat and Sunday shoes. We stood in front of the giant octopus tank. "The water looks calm. Peaceful."

"Most visitors worry that she doesn't have enough room," I said. "When they hear 'giant Pacific octopus,' they expect a larger tank."

"You know, I lived in a studio for years after my kids moved away. I liked it just fine. Not as many things to bump into. I had good windows in that apartment." She squinted into the tank. "What are those things on the wall behind her?"

"Her eggs."

"A mama all by yourself, are you? I remember that." She rested her hand against the cool aquarium glass. The octopus reached out an arm. Maybe they were contemplating each other. "Does she see me? Does she know I'm here?"

"Probably as well as you can see her."

"If I could hold my breath long enough, I'd like to go in there. Help her with the eggs. So many of them. They look like strings of pearls."

"She'll do all the caretaking on her own. They're not very social animals."

"Probably the last thing she needs is an old busybody in there, telling her how to raise her babies. I hated that." She

smoothed down her coat, moved her purse to her other arm. She looked at me in all seriousness: "I'm humbled every time I come here to this zoo. My whole life, I paid this much attention to the life around me—" she held her thumb and index finger in front of her eye. "Then I see this octopus, or those ants you have in the back, or the otters. I really love those otters. And they're each doing things I've done, right? Raising a family, working at what seem like endless tasks, playing. There's a crow comes to my backyard that I think is mourning the loss of his wife. I never knew how much I'd understand about being a human from watching an octopus."

As a volunteer, I often spend so much of my time answering questions about the animals—what they eat, where they live, what they do, why they do it—that I forget they have much to tell me about my own life. We stood together a few more minutes, the woman and I, watching the octopus.

If you'd like to volunteer at the National Zoo, please visit www.fonz.org/volunteer.htm or call 202.633.3025.

Get the scoop on Zoo scientists' latest groundbreaking discoveries at www.fonz.org/science.htm.