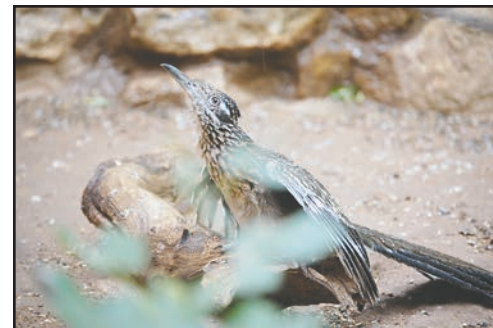
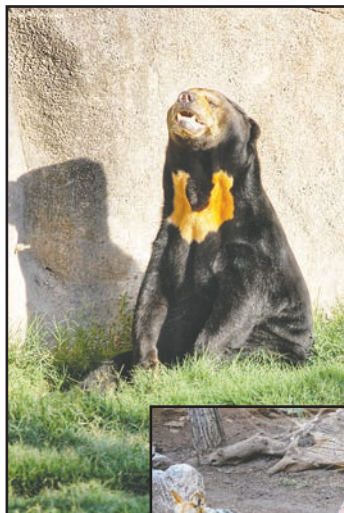


WHAT'S NEW AT THE ZOO



STORY BY LISA KAY TATE

PHOTOS BY RICK TATE

When the \$14 million, 2.3-acre Chihuahuan Desert area opens later this year, it will mark one of the biggest single improvements in the history of the El Paso Zoo.

The project is one of 27 zoo improvements funded by Quality of Life Bonds approved by voters in 2012. Those who haven't visited the zoo in years may be surprised by how much it has grown, from new or renovated areas representing Africa and Asia, to additions of event facilities, animal encounter events, and several interactive kids and family areas from a water feature play area to an Endangered Species Carousel.

Located next to Washington Park in South Central El Paso, the zoo first opened in 1940 and became a department of the City of El Paso in 1976. The zoo has made various improvements and expansions over the years, but the \$50 million allotted to the zoo from the half-billion-dollar 2021 bond package has catapulted the attraction into one of the city's top destinations.

The much-anticipated Chihuahuan Desert area will "showcase North America's most diverse desert which encompasses the El Paso region and northern Mexico." The area will feature several exhibits with regional animals such as peccaries (javelinas), wild turkeys and jackrabbits, along with public art on display. There will also be interactive environments, and ropes course with levels for both younger children, and older children to adults.

Highlights include a "Ranch House" area with insects in small areas and a "flash flood" (arroyo) interpretive experience, and a training/demonstration wall.

"The Chihuahuan Desert is a biologically diverse ecosystem that deserves to be celebrated," El Paso Zoo Director Steve Marshall said. "No one can do it better than we could here."

Here is some of The El Paso Zoo's special events planned for 2019:

- **March 30:** Brew at the Zoo beer tasting (ages 21 and older)
- **April 14-May 19:** "Game of Thrones" Sundays (ages 21 and older)
- **April 20-21:** EggstravanZoo and Party for the Planet
- **May 4:** Star Wars Day: May the Fourth Be With Zoo.
- **June 15:** Hear Me Roar: Pride Night at the Zoo

- **Aug. 24:** Feast with the Beast gala Chihuahuan Desert Exhibits preview
- **Oct. 26-27:** Boo at the Zoo
- **Dec. 13:** Jack, Sally, and Sandy Claws – at the Zoo

Regular zoo hours are 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The zoo is closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day. For more information, contact the zoo at 212-0252 or elpasozoo@elpaso-texas.gov, or visit elpasozoo.org, Facebook or Twitter.

NEW AT THE ZOO

In just the past few years, El Paso Zoo has welcomed new animal residents, renovated and added new attractions, expanded its educational offerings, and created several new special events, and further improvements are planned through 2025.

According to a Master Plan booklet prepared by WDM Architects, the El Paso Zoo plan's "Big Picture" represents development goals for a 15-year time frame ending in 2025. The funding will come not only from bond money, but also additional support expected from private sources and the El Paso Zoological Foundation.

Voters in 2012 approved a \$473 million bond proposal that included the improvements in the zoo, libraries, museums, and downtown. The zoo alone received \$50 million for more than two dozen projects.

When Marshall came to El Paso Zoo from Zoo Atlanta in 2007, residents had approved an early bond that would eventually help create the 10-acre Africa complex and the new reptile house. Marshall said those interested in the details of this plan can download a copy at the zoo's website.

"When we opened the Africa exhibit it increased the size of the zoo by one third," Marshall said.

The exhibit changed the entire feel of the zoo, by creating a new entry, gift shop and restaurant, as well as habitats for lions, giraffes, zebras and meerkats, the African



Artist's rendering of planned Penguin exhibit

Star train and El Paso Electric Kalahari Research Station Education Building, the later of which is expected to be updated in 2024.

"That was one of the things that inspired me to come here was seeing the community showing such support for the zoo, and wanting to make an investment in its future," he said.

The area also now includes the red river hogs and African wild dogs that had been anticipated since Africa's opening.

Following Africa came the Foster Treehouse Playground and a water play area. December of 2016 saw the opening of the bond-funded Wildlife Amphitheater that hosts the Wings of the World Bird Show. There is also a new Asia entrance, where guests can find the new, Endangered Species Carousel with 30 hand-painted animals.

A new events pavilion on the edge of the zebra enclosure also serves as a venue weddings, corporate events and other gatherings.

These added attractions, as well as shows, and interactive encounters such as Meet the Keeper programs, Marshall said, help create a memorable experience for guests. That in turn inspires visitors to share responsibility to the animals and ecosystems of the world.

"The zoo's Master Plan's goal is to offer more than just a passive experience," Marshall explained. "If we can reach a person at an emotional level, we can help reach that mission."

This plan includes seven areas in all, with new animal residents still to come, including exhibits and habitats for Chilean flamingos (near the spider monkey island at the entrance to The Americas), komodo dragons, red pandas, anteaters, otters, langurs and penguins.

"We're always being asked how are we going to have penguins in the desert, but these are Humboldt Penguins from South America around the Galapagos Islands," Marshall said. "We think this is going to be a well-loved exhibit."

The penguin exhibit is estimated for completion around 2021.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

One of the zoo's main means of support is the El Paso Zoological Society, which has made it their mission to support El Paso Zoo from its inception in 1963.

Society Executive Director Renee Neuert said there are currently more than 4,000 families taking advantage of the zoo's membership program, one of the best ways for area residents to help the society in this mission.

Among other benefits, she said, membership "is your bridge to more than just unlimited zoo visits. You become a partner in the zoo's global efforts to support animal well-being and conservation efforts to Save Animals From Extinction (SAFE)."

She said being part of the society is like being part of a "family that cares about

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