

Popular exhibits, events help Oregon Zoo to record-breaking 2007

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

PORTLAND, Ore. - For the second year in a row and the third time in the past four years, the Oregon Zoo has broken its all-time calendar-year attendance record, with 1,503,565 visitors in 2007. This marks the first time zoo attendance has topped 1.5 million in a calendar year. The zoo's previous record, set in 2006, was 1,447,116 visitors.

Visitors enjoy an up-close encounter with Homer, a 600-pound black bear, at the Oregon Zoo's popular Black Bear Ridge exhibit. The March 2007 opening of Black Bear Ridge helped boost zoo attendance to an all-time high of 1.5 million visitors last year. Photo by Mary Faber. © Oregon Zoo

"We continue to open new exhibits and host events visitors expect and enjoy," says Tony Vecchio, zoo director. "We're always trying to make new and innovative additions to draw in first-time visitors and bring back our loyal supporters." Vecchio added that creative marketing and public relations helped the zoo garner strong media coverage, which translated into more visitors. The zoo had a strong spring with the March opening of its Black Bear Ridge exhibit, featuring black bears and bobcats, and its "Zoo's Gone Wild" spring break activities. In late May, a pair of charismatic babirusas joined the Island Pigs of Asia exhibit, alongside the zoo's popular Visayan warty pigs. Summer was characteristically busy with the return of the Winged Wonders butterfly exhibit combined with the well-attended Wells Fargo Summer Concert Series. August was the zoo's busiest month, with 224,788 visitors. After a record-breaking 2007, the zoo's director anticipates an even better year for 2008. "We have big plans for 2008," says Vecchio. "In May, the zoo will be overtaken by a blockbuster summer exhibit of lifelike robotic dinosaurs. And later this summer, Red Ape Reserve, the new orangutan and white-cheeked gibbon exhibit is set to open." This \$1.8 million indoor-outdoor space will be more than 3.5 times larger than the orangs' current exhibit. "If that isn't enough," Vecchio adds, "Rose-Tu, our second-youngest Asian elephant, is expecting a baby in the fall of 2008. Our visitors will have a lot to see in the coming year."

The first time the zoo's attendance topped a million was during 1962, the year Packy was born. The baby pachyderm, born that April, helped draw 1,211,170 spectators from all over the Northwest, eager to see the first elephant born in the United States in 44 years. It wasn't until 1989 that the zoo broke the million mark again. Since then, the zoo has welcomed more than a million guests in 16 of the past 19 years. The Oregon Zoo continues to have the highest attendance of any fee-based tourist attraction in Oregon. Only Multnomah Falls and Spirit Mountain Casino, which do not charge admission fees, have more annual visitors.

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