



TRI-STATE ZOOLOGICAL PARK

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AT HOME IN THE MOUNTAINS

The Tri-State Zoological Park is not exactly the sort of attraction you'd expect to find in a rural setting like Western Maryland. And that's part of what makes the Park so intriguing. Nestled among the hills just east of Cumberland, along Christie Road, the Park sits behind a stone wall suggestive of an earlier and more innocent time. Just over the wall is a line of magnificent trees that shade nearby benches and picnic tables, with a miniature golf course thrown in, just for fun. The atmosphere suggests an old-fashioned sort of place, for wholesome, family-oriented fun.

Just beyond, an assortment of buildings hints that this is more than just a pretty picnic area with mini-golf. The "Zoo" sign near the entrance confirms this. A box with a hand-lettered sign saying, "Meat Donations Only" sits near the office, an area of small size but much activity. This is where patrons can buy tickets, t-shirts, various trinkets and memorabilia, and, just in case, animal flash cards. Volunteers stop by for work assignments, and the staff keeps things running.

Bob Candy, the owner, may or may not be in the office, depending on what's going on and where he's needed. He is a very busy person, cheerfully escorting as many visitors as possible while answering questions, directing volunteers, and conversing with the animals. If he's out, there's a good chance he's taking the zoo on the road, probably to a local school for an educational program.

It's all part of the Zoo's mission: to provide a place where unwanted animals can live in a safe and caring environment while educating people, especially children, to learn about these animals "up close and personal." The goal is to raise awareness about animals, their place in the natural order and the importance of the conservation of species.

"We want to give unwanted animals a safe place to live," Bob says. "We train them by love," he adds, so the animals will be approachable and friendly. He points out that Zoo animals would not survive if re-introduced to the wild. And because they receive regular care, they tend to live longer than their wild brethren. Most of the Zoo's tropical animals adapt surprisingly well to Cumberland's four seasons.

Currently the Zoo features more than 30 species. Most are rescued animals from a variety of sources. Some, like the big cats, came from zoos that just don't have enough space. Exotic birds come primarily from area homes, usually when owners, not realizing these creatures can live 50 to 60 years, discover they cannot devote the attention needed. Area colleges often call the Zoo to shelter students' pet snakes and iguanas, among other creatures, when their cleaning staff comes upon such creatures abandoned at the end of a term. Then there are the "conversation pets" that can turn out to be more of a challenge than an owner anticipated. And unfortunately, some people drop off cats along the roadside by the zoo; consequently, there are at least 20 cats around at any given time. (If any readers would like kittens, the Zoo would like to hear from you!)

It's clear that Bob absolutely loves what he's doing at the Zoo. For Bob, it represents the realization of a childhood dream. A Baltimore native, Bob grew up in rural Carroll County, where he had a tendency to bring home stray creatures. After earning a college degree in business administration, Bob embarked on a career in contract management, which

brought him to the Cumberland area. Bob liked what he saw and settled in the area about 20 years ago with his wife Donna and their three children.

During their teens, his children complained that "there's nothing to do here," a familiar lament heard by parents the world over. But in Bob's case, this complaint was the spark that brought his childhood dream to life. What better way to give children something worthwhile than by creating a zoological park to share his love for animals?

In 2003, Bob and Donna found the perfect spot — approximately 16 acres of abandoned property along Christie Road. Originally it was a campground, complete with swimming pool. It gradually deteriorated during subsequent lives as a dance club and night club. But Bob figured that it was serviceable enough to house animals, and so it was transformed into the Tri-State Zoological Park. It's somewhat of a hodge-podge of structures, some of which were constructed from salvaged and donated



Above: A European Hedgehog named Mr. Prickles.

Previous page: "Bu," a 5-year-old lion.



materials. As Bob says, "Aesthetics come last. The animals come first and always will."

One of the most impressive residents is Bu, whose full name is Mbube, or "sleeping lion." It's a good fit for a creature that sleeps about 20 hours each day. The Zoo has been Bu's home since he arrived as a 10-day-old cub, all the way from a zoo in Maine.

"He's my buddy," Bob says. He likes to surprise onlookers by going into Bu's cage to rouse him a bit by brushing and gently teasing him. Bu's favorite toy, an almost unrecognizable bowling ball, indicates that Bu likes to play rough when he's up and about. He may soon have a companion, as Bob is actively looking for a female lion.

Another popular Zoo resident is Mowgli, a white Bengal tiger who arrived from National Bridge, Virginia, when only two weeks old. A member of the largest and rarest species of the cat family, Mowgli seems to enjoy being admired. He has his own pet cat, one of the strays, who likes to hang out by his cage within paw's reach.

Two of the Siberian tigers at the zoo are old-timers, arriving at the Zoo since 2003. Cheyenne and Khan, a female and male, are parents to Kumar, India and Cayenne. With only several hundred remaining in the wild, these tigers are considered "critically endangered," according to National Geographic's web site. An interesting tidbit from Bob: "Tigers 'chuff' because they can't purr."

Above: Siberian Tiger, India, is one of three tiger cubs born to Cheyenne and Khan and raised at the zoo. Even though India looks full grown, she is only three years old and still has some growing to do.

Below: Sheba, one of two Arctic Foxes.



"MOWGLI"



A WHITE BENGAL TIGER



Other notable creatures at the Zoo include:

- Two Himalayan Black Bears, another endangered species
- Charlie and Sian, a male and female mountain lion (Charlie has had little success to date with overtures to Sian.)
- Brownie and Sheba, Arctic foxes
- Bandit, a ring-tailed lemur born at the Zoo
- Several monkeys rescued from testing labs, including a Squirrel Monkey
- Kojak and Demo, two donkeys that like to complain noisily when feeling neglected
- Immaculate Conception, a goat of unknown parentage
- Three llamas named Llama, Llama Llama, and Llama Llama Ding Dong (After naming them, Bob was told that he is no longer allowed to name any more zoo animals.)
- A serval cat Simba, that Bob says is “mean”
- Chewy, a Binturong (or “Bear Cat” in Malay), the Zoo’s oldest resident at age 18, a tree-dweller that smells like popcorn

Fans of feathered creatures and/or reptiles will enjoy a visit to the Bird and Snake House. A group of tropical birds greet visitors with enthusiastic and almost competitive

Facing page and above: Mowgli, the white Bengal tiger and Bob Candy, Tri-State Zoological Park owner.

Top photo: Morgan Cranford and Makayla Siebert of Washington Middle School, with Mowgli and Bob, at a customized program for middle schools.

Bottom photo: Washington Middle School students enjoy Mowgli's antics.

squawking as each tries to outshriek the other. “At night you’d think there was a poker game going on,” Bob says. “They’ll yell, ‘Shut up! Go away’ at each other.” Moving on to a separate area, visitors will find several types of large snakes, including boa constrictors and black snakes, plus iguanas, alligators and a savannah monitor lizard, native to Africa.

Support from the local community and beyond has been key to the Zoo’s continued existence, especially after a devastating fire in March, 2006, completely destroyed the main building. About 100 creatures housed within perished, including all of the exotic birds, reptiles, monkeys and numerous small animals. A Memorial Garden, dedicated to these animals, serves as their final resting ground and quiet space for reflection where visitors can sit upon benches placed within the circular design.

Four years after, the healing process continues and Bob is forging ahead with big plans, with help from volunteers, donations and fundraising efforts sponsored by community organizations. The Zoo is a non-profit organization. Currently the Zoo is seeking tax-exempt status so that it will be eligible for grant funding. The former campground pool and pool house are being transformed into new living quarters for the tigers, bears and lions. Art students from Frostburg State University have painted murals upon the pool walls near pools of water where the tigers now enjoy one of their favorite pastimes – swimming. Bob plans separate “condos with pools” for each tiger. Glassed-in areas will allow visitors to safely view the animals’ antics. Just beyond, Bob plans to create an area for exotic “hoof stock” such as giraffes and zebras. KMK Insurance recently sponsored a car wash to help raise funds for a giraffe, which come with a price tag of \$25,000 each. An art auction benefit is planned for July.

Many visitors return to the zoo as volunteers. About 20 help out on a regular basis in a variety of capacities. Long-term volunteers are Ginger and Tim Squires. Ginger, a staff member at the Allegany Arts Council serves as Zoo photographer, among other duties. Tim, retired from the US Park Police, is always willing to help wherever needed. The Zoo welcomes volunteers age 16 or older who meet certain criteria; first and foremost is a love of and respect for animals. For more information, visit the Zoo web site at www.tristatezoo.org.

Donations of all kinds are always needed, such as building materials, office supplies, gift cards from area stores, food, pet supplies, tools, hay and animal toys. A more complete list can be found on the Zoo web site. Monetary donations by credit or debit card can now be made safely and conveniently online.

Sometimes donations come about in unconventional ways. When the Allegany County Roads Division was having problems disposing of an overabundance of roadkill, especially deer, Bob called and said, “We have your solution!” For the animals’ safety, the Zoo is choosy about accepting roadkill and asks that anyone wanting to make such a donation please call first for approval.

With the public’s help, Bob hopes to expand the variety of animals at the Zoo,



Bob and Chewy, a Binturong or “Bear Cat” (above); a white peacock (right) and below, Muscovy ducklings.



continuing its tradition of animal rescue. Anyone interested in donating an animal should be aware that the Zoo cannot accept any animal that is native to Maryland because of state regulations.

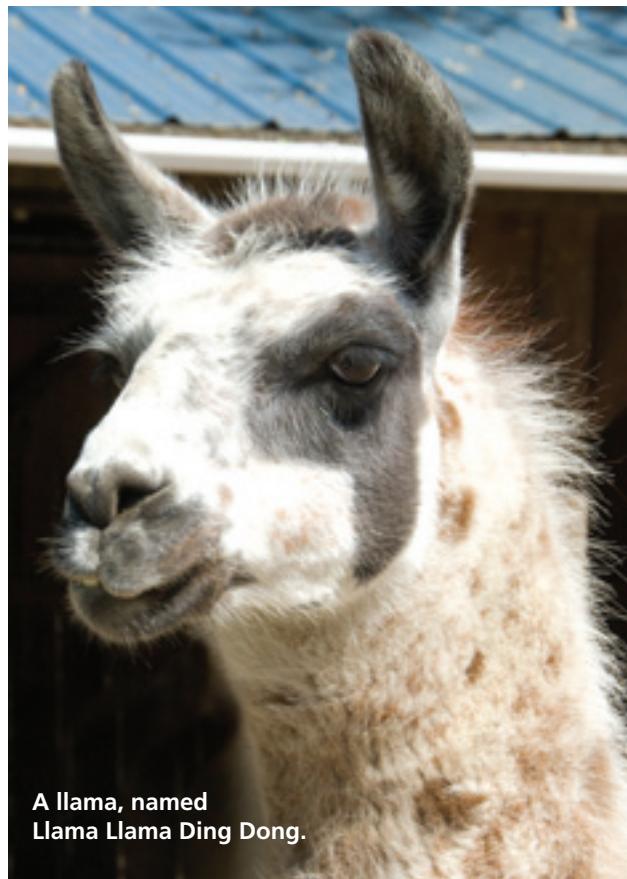
Besides individual and group tours at the Park, the Zoo offers on-site visits featuring customized programs for schools and other, as well as birthday parties with an option for miniature golf. Special events include an Easter Egg Hunt and other holiday-themed happenings, plus visits to area festivities like Heritage Days and CanalFest/RailFest.

In the end, it's all about education and stewardship at the Zoo. "The best education happens when someone can feel a personal connection with an animal through interacting with that animal," Bob says. Visitors are allowed to feed some of the animals, primarily those commonly found in a farm setting. A list is posted near the Zoo office.

Connecting with children of all ages is especially important to Bob because, he says, "Kids are our future zookeepers." He uses storytelling to help them connect with each animal. With older children, he tries to convey a bigger message: "We had a fire, but we didn't just give up. You move forward or you find another passion."

As for Bob and the Zoo, he says enthusiastically, "We plan to be around forever!"

Tri-State Zoological Park, 10105 Cottage Inn Lane, Cumberland, MD 21502 • 301-724-2400 • www.tristatezoologicalpark.com



A llama, named
Llama Llama Ding Dong.

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