

News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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“AWESOME AMPHIBIANS” TO OPEN AT SAINT LOUIS ZOO ON LEAP DAY
Rare Chinese giant salamanders will go on exhibit

What: New amphibian exhibit
When: Friday, February 29, 2008
Grand opening at 10:30 a.m. for media and public

Leap Day Weekend activities
Friday, February 29, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday, March 1-2, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Where: Exhibit and activities in The Living World

On Leap Day, Friday, February 29, 2008, the Saint Louis Zoo will open its new year-long “Awesome Amphibians” exhibit showcasing more than 150 frogs, toads, newts, salamanders and caecilians [pronounced suh-SEEL-yuns] representing 18 species in a renovated 3,000-square-foot space in The Living World. Families can help celebrate with Leap Day Weekend activities from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Friday and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, March 1-2. Admission to the exhibit and event is free.

A pair of rare and critically endangered Chinese giant salamanders, distant relatives of the Missouri Ozark hellbender, will be on display in a 60-foot-long, 7,000 gallon aquarium with a flowing stream and schools of white cloud minnows. The Zoo is one of only four zoos and aquariums in the U.S. to exhibit this species of giant salamander, the largest living amphibian in the world, reaching lengths of nearly six feet. The Zoo’s male and female are approximately 13 years old, weigh about 25-30 pounds and measure about three feet in length.

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums and World Association of Zoos and Aquariums have declared 2008 the Year of the Frog to raise awareness of a looming, mass extinction of amphibian species - the most significant since the dinosaur.

“We want our visitors to know that widespread extinction of amphibians would be catastrophic,” said Jeffrey P. Bonner, Ph.D., president of the Saint Louis Zoo and chairman of Amphibian Ark, a worldwide effort to save this vital group of animals. “Amphibians are a critical part of a healthy world. They play an important role as both predator and prey, eating insects which benefits agriculture and minimizes disease spread. Their skin also has substances that protect them from some microbes and viruses, offering promising medical cures for a variety of human diseases.”

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awesome amphibians
add one

Awesome Amphibians includes 13 new displays featuring the diversity of amphibian life with emphasis on the problems they face in the wild such as pollution, disease and habitat loss, plus the extraordinary measures zoos are taking in order to save them from extinction. Visitors will discover how important these animals are to the planet, the food web, human culture and our future, and learn what they can do to help right in their own backyards.

Amphibians on exhibit include Missouri's own hellbender salamander, African clawed frog, poison frog, cave salamander, Chacoan waxy tree frog, Malaysian horned frog, Panamanian golden frog, Puerto Rican crested toad, Sambava tomato frog, Surinam toad, fire-bellied newt, Mexican caecilian and more.

Kids will dig the "toadally cool" tadpole pool where they can see 150 American bullfrog tadpoles in various stages of their two-year metamorphosis from larvae to adult.

Other features include a family photo opportunity, videos about the Zoo's conservation work with hellbenders and the short movie "Leap of Faith: Saving Panama's Golden Frogs."

The Emerson Children's Zoo and Charles H. Hoessle Herpetarium are also gettin' froggy during this year of the frog! Four new biome areas in the Children's Zoo building explain that frogs are everywhere from the desert, forest, water and even the backyard. Kids can crawl through the Frog Surround to see tree frogs above them, climb about a tree house, learn how to attract frogs to the garden, touch live animals and much more. Admission to Children's Zoo is free from 9-10 a.m. and \$4 per person after 10 a.m.

A wide variety of amphibians can also be seen at the Herpetarium, one of the largest exhibits of reptiles and amphibians in any U.S. zoo. Special displays will highlight the Zoo's conservation work with some of the most endangered amphibians on the planet.

The Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Institute is leading conservation efforts for hellbenders in Missouri with the Ron Goellner Center for Hellbender Conservation, participating in a reintroduction program for the Puerto Rican crested toad, and supporting work in Ecuador where there are 448 known species of amphibians, many of them endangered.

Awesome Amphibians exhibit will be open daily 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through 2008.
Admission is free.

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Named America's #1 Zoo by Zagat Survey and Parenting Magazine, the Saint Louis Zoo is widely recognized for its innovative approaches to animal management, wildlife conservation, research and education. One of the few free zoos in the nation, it attracts about 3,000,000 visitors a year.