

LIBERTY CALL

Where's Puumba?

A day trip to the Honolulu Zoo

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You'd expect to see lions (Simba), tigers (Tiggers bounce) and bears (Pooh maybe?); but, oh my, what about colorful tropical birds of paradise, long-legged pink flamingos, tree-swinging chimpanzees, spotted cheetas, tough-skinned rhinoceros, long-necked giraffe, shell-backed Galapagos turtles and the fine-feathered Hawaiian state bird, the Nene (Hawaiian goose)? Well, if

you're persistent and a little lucky, you can even catch a glimpse of a near-sighted, tusk-snouted, keen-smelling wart-hog. It's not certain if he's related to Puumba from Disney's 'Lion King', but he sure looks like it. You can also find his buddy, Timon, the hind-leg standing Miricat.

The Honolulu Zoo, located just off Waikiki Beach, is a lush, 42-acre botanical garden at the base of Diamond Head, filled with some of the world's rare and unique animals still roaming the earth today.

One of the highlights of the zoo is the addition of a newborn chimpanzee "Puiwa," his

Hawaiian name, meaning 'surprise.' He was born Aug. 20 this year, weighing a healthy three pounds.

Ken Redman, Honolulu Zoo director and former naval officer, is proud of his zoo and its improvements.

"We're moving away from the traditional gates and chains used in zoos before," Redman pointed out. "What we're building is the illusion that there's nothing keeping animals in, hiding the fences and moats as best we can. We're also moving toward making the animal areas look like natural habitats wherever possible.

"What that does is build a feeling for the visitors of immersion - getting the visitor to be an active participant rather than just a passive onlooker."



In the near future, the zoo will be taking on an even newer look.

"Everything in the zoo is going to be tropical," Redman explained. "We're putting more emphasis on the tropical zoological garden - tropical plants, flowers etc., to beautify the zoo. We're also getting more tropical animals like the Gharial, a rare Indian crocodile, and Malayan sun bears" - sorry, no snow white polar bears here.

The zoo designer's newest work is the redesigned 'Karibuni Reserve,' a 12-acre habitat resembling the African Savannah. Their goal was to make the habitats as close to a natural representation as possible. The improved environments nearly challenge you to find the fences keeping the wildlife in.

"The best feature of the zoo - and the newest - is the African Savannah exhibit," Redman informed. "With a little bit of imagination, you can picture yourself walking through the African plain. There's a real illusion of walking with out barriers."

Although zoos have a special place in the hearts of adults, they seem to be enjoyed most by kids (no, not Billy goats) or rather, children.

The children's zoo has regular petting animals, goats, chickens and the occasional lizard. There's also a pony to ride, ducks and a few surprises.

The zoo also offers educational programs for children and adults like their moonlight tours and the 'Snooze at the Zoo' program.

"The program is a children's program, but many adults take it too," Redman pointed out. "Our education department conducts the tours for 30 to 35 people. The visitor is treated to seeing how the animals behave at night and to hearing their nocturnal sounds. The guide tells stories before participants bed down for the night.

"The next morning, they have 'breakfast with the animals.' 'Breakfast with the Zookeeper' program allows visitors to help prepare rhino's first meal of the day and get to watch them eat the meal you helped prepare... from a safe distance."

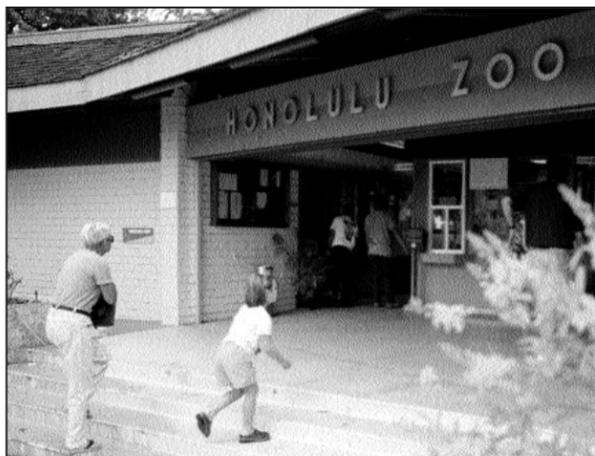
The zoo hosted more than half a million visitors last year - both public and private events - treating them to regular self-guided touring, birthday parties, live music, crafts for the keiki, vacation adventures, veterinary education and many other programs.

Redman said the zoo is home to about 1,250 animals, but reports that, "something hatches or is born every day."

So, if you're still wondering 'where's Puumba?', he's right downtown at the Honolulu Zoo.



(Top) A Miricat, like Timon in Disney's 'Lion King', stands on his hind legs 'looking for his buddy?' (Top right) One of Godzilla's relatives tastes the air at the children's petting zoo. (Above) A group of chimpanzees stop for a cool drink in their redesigned habitat as visitors look on. A month-old baby chimp "Puiwa" is one of the zoo's newest additions. (Extreme right) A Giraffe eyes a family stopped in front of its "Karibuni Reserve" habitat where fences are at a minimum. (Right) Honolulu Zoo is popular with both children and children at heart.



Photos by Jo2 Greg Cleghorne