



MADAGASCAR HISSING COCKROACH

(*Gromphadorrhina portentosa*)

Life span: 18 months

Diet: Rotten fruits and other leaf litter; recyclers of the forest floor

Cool fact: Forces air through small holes in shell, making a hissing sound to scare away predators



SONORAN CENTIPEDE

(*Scolopendra heros*)

Life span: 2-3 years

Diet: Carnivorous, eats crickets in captivity

Cool fact: Does not have 100 legs – rather one pair of legs per body segment



COMMON HERMIT CRAB

(*Pagurus bernhardus*)

Life span: Up to 20 years

Diet: Scavenger, eats plant and animal matter

Cool fact: Takes empty shells for housing



ROSE-HAIRED CHILEAN TARANTULA

(*Grammostola rosea*)

Life span: Up to 20 years for some females

Diet: Carnivorous, eats crickets in captivity

Cool fact: Will kill other members of its species; has eight eyes



GIANT AFRICAN MILLIPEDE

(*Archispirostreptus gigas*)

Life span: 5-7 years

Diet: Rotten fruits and other leaf litter, recycler of the forest floor

Cool fact: Does not have 1,000 legs – rather two pairs of legs per body segment



AUSTRALIAN WALKING STICK (*Extatosoma tiaratum*)

Life span: 10-12 months

Diet: Leaves of blackberry trees and other members of the rose family

Cool fact: Camouflages as dead leaves; males grow wings to enable them to find a mate

Bedazzled by bugs

The Oregon Zoo revamps its insect exhibit and hopes visitors will go “Ooo,” not “Eww”

By BEN LARSON | THE OREGONIAN

“Spiders!” is the first word on the lips of delighted children as they gallop with fingers pointing toward the compact wooden building housing the newly revamped insect exhibit at the Oregon Zoo.

The huge hairy tarantulas have always drawn the young and fearless to the Insect Zoo, which opened formally Saturday after a three-month rehabilitation. Now, visitors can do much more than peer through the windows at the exotic bugs: One of two new staff members will be on hand daily through Labor Day to explain the behavior and features of the longtime residents. And although they won't be easy to spot, the zoo has added native insects to the display for the first time.

The Insect Zoo was staffed through 2002, but since then there was money only to keep the bugs fed and the building in acceptable condition. Local high school student volunteers, known as Zoo Teens, filled in during the summer 2006. But this year, the zoo has spent an additional \$26,000 on the popular, long-running exhibit, according to spokesman Bill LaMarche. The exhibit received a complete overhaul, including a brand-new roof and coat of paint, as well as the seasonal staff.

New Insect Zoo coordinators Ellen Zientek and Suzanne Rosen have juxtaposed exotic species from around

Insect Zoo

Description: At least 300 insects representing about 20 species

Where: Oregon Zoo between the penguin and parakeet exhibits

Hours: 8 a.m.-6 p.m. daily, June 16-Sept. 3

Cost: Free with regular zoo admission

More information: www.oregonzoo.org/Exhibits/insect_zoo.htm; 503-226-1561

the world with native Northwest species that can be found in Oregon backyards. Representatives of local species include a centipede, a spider, a beetle and a thimble-sized snail, which is technically a mollusk.

Charis Henrie, zoo education program coordinator, hopes the reworked exhibit will send the message that bugs are not only cool but also important to the environment. In recalling her own childhood immersion in the outdoors, she worries that “kids have lost a connection to nature.”

Last Thursday, Zientek and Rosen accompanied Henrie on a mission to collect native arthropods from the forested slope behind the cougar enclosure to help drive home the idea that habitat begins at home. The new additions are part of a zoo-wide effort to emphasize that wildlife habitat is

everywhere, not just something that's preserved in an exhibit.

“We can't just save the animals, we also have to save the habitat that goes with them,” Henrie says.

The Insect Zoo, topped with giant wooden replicas of its residents, opened 30 years ago in what had been a concession stand, according to Henrie. For many years, visitors would see the Insect Zoo as soon as they entered zoo grounds. Now it's found between the penguin and parakeet exhibits.

Although the Insect Zoo is now home to several Portland bugs, veteran exotic species from the African continent and other faraway places still steal the show. In addition to the Chilean rose and desert blonde tarantulas, which fall into the arachnid class, visitors will see other arthropods, such as the giant African millipedes, Madagascar hissing cockroaches, a Sonoran centipede, darkling beetles and hermit crabs.

One of the most intriguing residents almost goes unnoticed. A glass case right upfront appears to contain nothing more than blackberry branches covered in dead leaves swaying in the breeze. But those leaves are actually a colony of Australian walking sticks whose camouflage is so complete that the insects are hidden in plain sight.

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Ellen Zientek, Insect Zoo coordinator, searches the woods behind the Oregon Zoo's cougar enclosure for local bugs to include in a revamped exhibit.

BENJAMIN BRINK
THE OREGONIAN

Bugs: Kids are generally fascinated

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Survival strategies for the arthropod inhabitants are as varied as their appearance. While the Australian walking stick relies on disguise, other species are a bit more proactive. Both centipedes and tarantulas are active hunters whose venomous bites spell doom for their prey. Still, Australian walking sticks are not totally harmless. Their affinity for any member of the rose family makes them a potential pest to pear and apple trees, as well as rose gardens.

"If they establish themselves in Oregon, you could say goodbye to the rose population" Zientek says.

To prevent that, zoo employees take precautions, which range from closing the door to the exhibit when changing the food supply to freezing and incinerating all waste from the enclosure. Nevertheless, these slow moving critters and the hissing cockroaches will be available for visitors to touch if they are so inclined. "Our goal is to change the reaction from 'Eww' to 'Ooo'" Henrie says.

Other members of the exhibit, however, will be tightly locked away not only from the public but also from one another. If allowed to mingle, Chica and Rosy, the two female Chilean rose tarantulas, would probably try to kill each other to protect their territory. Chica, the larger of the two, is the odds-on favorite in this matchup. Another species, the katydid, is known to eat others of its kind.

While most children are fascinated by the strange collection of bugs and their intriguing behavior, adult reactions span a broader spectrum. Some are

right in the mix with the kids. Others urge kids to move closer while they keep a safe distance. Some adults quicken their pace as they pass the Insect Zoo suggesting to kids that they would probably rather see the penguins just down the way.

For Rosen, arthropods are more than an exhibit: They are a passion. While studying psychology and animal behavior, she took an entomology class in her senior year at the University of Washington and was immediately hooked. She is fascinated by the staggering diversity in their appearance and behavior.

Rosen's knowledge of the diminutive life-forms is extensive, but it's not all business for her. After collecting local bugs last week, she cooed over her new-found snail the way some people might for a newborn kitten.

She held up a plastic collection bin and declared, "My snail is so cute!"

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