

News Release

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For Immediate Release

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New Black Bear Hammock Exhibit Opens May 23 and officially launches *Lions, Tigers, and Bears, '09!*

Many Southwest Floridians and visitors have been surprised to learn they share the region with black bears. To educate Zoo guests about living with the state's wild bears, Naples Zoo created *Black Bear Hammock* featuring two distinct habitats: a natural habitat and a backyard habitat. Visitors will both have the opportunity to learn basic safety tips if a bear is encountered in the wild as well as how to avoid attracting them to their yard. They will also gain a deeper appreciation of the bears' crucial role in the local environment. Premiering along with the two bears will be a stunning white tiger. This strikingly colored cat will be seen until Labor Day stalking through the historic plantings in Tiger Forest. And rounding out the famous *Wizard of Oz* phrase are the two young purebred South African Lions which just debuted last month.

When Black Bear Hammock opens on Saturday, May 23 at Naples Zoo, it will be the **largest Black bear exhibit at any AZA accredited zoo east of the Mississippi**. At approximately 15,000 square feet, it is thirty times larger than the state's requirements and 50% larger than long range recommendations set by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

Commitment to Native Species Conservation As one of just over 200 zoos in the United States that has achieved the AZA's rigorous accreditation standards, Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens plays a global role in guest education as well as selective breeding of rare animals. To be consistent with the education and conservation programs it funds in various countries around the world, Naples Zoo is also doing the same for threatened and endangered wildlife in Southwest Florida. This is currently done through exhibits like Panther Glade, Alligator Bay, the *National Wildlife Federation* certified Backyard Wildlife Habitat, and the native reptiles in the Serpents: Fangs & Fiction presentation and Snake Sunbathing activity.

Why Black Bears Specifically? One of the main missions of Black Bear Hammock is to help visitors understand their role in sharing their backyards with Southwest Florida's abundant wildlife. As Florida's population grows, many newer residents are unfamiliar with local wildlife. And while the average family who moves to Tennessee may have an expectation that they are living in bear country, this might not be said for many incoming residents to Southwest Florida. Part of this can be seen in



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the exponentially growing number of bear related calls coming into the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission over the past decades.

Our areas largely unprotected garbage and other food sources represent time-saving meals and can lead to a bear being euthanized as relocation efforts aren't always effective. For example, a couple slices of leftover pieces save a bear from foraging for about 750 acorns. A half full 25 lb bag of dog food or bird seed in a screened-in porch saves a bear from finding over 5,000 acorns.

The good news is that steps taken to prevent bears from becoming nuisance animals also prevent other species from becoming problems such as raccoons, skunks, fox, opossums, mice, and rats. This also decreases human and pet exposure to diseases like rabies and damage to crops and property. A bear-resistant trash container and other tips about barbecue grills and bird feeders can be seen at the exhibit.

Naples Zoo's education philosophy is to balance the science with fun and facts that visitors can use to guide their decisions as consumers in order to play an informed, positive role in conservation.

The Exhibit The Black Bear Hammock exhibit includes two distinct habitats: a natural Florida habitat and a backyard habitat. A series of large format full-color interpretive graphics, interactive flip panels, and thematic elements in the viewing areas highlight the important role bears play in the Florida ecosystem. The graphics will also provide practical information about living with Florida's bears from visiting natural areas to your backyard.

Natural Habitat

The "Natural Habitat" area contains native plantings to replicate the hardwood hammock ecosystem with the existing mature oak tree serving as a centerpiece. This area contains descending pools culminating in a rockwork pond for the bears to enjoy a cool swim. Spanning the water feature is a remnant railroad trestle and is surrounded by stumps and deadfall trees or logs replicating a landscape that one might see in a cypress swamp that has been logged.

The bears can get totally submerged in the pool, climb on the deadfall or the trestle, or relax in the shade of the porch attached to an old style Florida shack. The public watches the bears from inside the shack through full height 2" thick zoo grade glass. Interpretive graphics in the shack tell the story of cypress logging in the 1940s and 50s.

Backyard Habitat

The "Backyard Habitat" is a landscape themed like a suburban South Florida backyard complete with a lanai where visitors watch the bears through full height glass resembling sliding glass doors. On the other side of the 2" glass the bears will explore food that has been left on the picnic table, wade in the plastic wading pool near the patio (actually a concrete



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replica), rummaging through the non-bear-proof trash can, climbing on the timber play structure, digging in the sand, or just relaxing in the shade.

A Fast Growing Zoo Since having its future secured by the voters, Naples Zoo has been moving rapidly under the guidance of the nonprofit's board of directors and management of Executive Director David Tetzlaff whose parents introduced the wild animals to the garden in 1969.

Naples Zoo recently opened three feature exhibits in 30 months: African Wild Dogs, Leopard Rock, and The Fosa: Madagascar's Legendary Carnivore. Along with amenity improvements like paved pathways, drinking fountains, misters, and expanded food services, the Zoo has also introduced a variety of new species during that same time including Grant's zebras, Honduran milk snakes, Uromastix lizards, red river hogs, screech owls, Massasauga rattlesnake, striped skunk, three species of monitor lizards, red-shouldered hawk, South African lions, Gila monsters, and now black bears.

Naples Zoo is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization located at 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road across from the Coastland Center mall in the heart of Naples. In addition to innovative presentations like *Serpents: Fangs & Fiction* and *Planet Predator*, the Zoo offers a historic botanical garden and many rare animals. Guests board the Primate Expedition Cruise to glide by islands inhabited by monkeys, lemurs, and apes living in natural habitats. Admission includes all shows, botanical tour, and the boat ride (\$19.95 adults age 13+/ \$11.95 children 3 to 12, under 3 free. Twenty-five cents of each admission goes to the *Naples Zoo Conservation Fund* to support regional and international conservation projects.) Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years of age.

Visitors can also pick up a healthy lunch and snacks at the SUBWAY® Cafe and shop for wild gifts at tame prices in The ZOO Gift Shop. Pursuing its mission to delight guests with the wonders of the natural world to inspire the conservation of our planet's remaining wild areas and their wondrous inhabitants, the Zoo welcomes guests daily from 9:00 to 5:00 with the last ticket sold at 4:00. Zoo memberships and discount tickets are available online at www.napleszoo.org.

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PHOTOS available via request to tim@napleszoo.org



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