

Blank Park Zoo releases its spring and summer lineup for 2012

Written by Richard Martin

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DES MOINES, Iowa (February 16, 2012) - Iowa's only accredited Zoo announced today its spring and summer lineup that includes an Ice Age Mammals exhibit, the grand opening of the new seal and sea lion pool, watusi cattle, a new entrance and park plus many new events.

"There will be more going on at the Zoo than ever before," said Mark Vukovich, CEO of Blank Park Zoo. "We are having a ton of events, new exhibits and of course, lots of fun. You'll want to 'Do the Zoo' many times this summer."

The kick-off of the season will be the grand opening of the seal & sea lion pool, the entrance and new drive and the opening of Ice Age Mammals on March 17, 2012.

Blank Park Zoo will also make field trips extremely affordable this spring by continuing \$2 per child admission on K-12 field trips.

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“Field trips are usually one of the first things eliminated during education budget cuts,” said Vukovich. “The Zoo wanted to show our commitment to the importance of educating children about animals and conservation.”

Here’s a list of happenings at the Blank Park Zoo this spring/summer:

- Ice Age Mammals- The unbelievably mild winter will be followed by a spring full of Ice! Well, artificial ice for sure. Blank Park Zoo is bringing in an Ice Age Mammals exhibit. These animatronic wonders will be chillin’ it old school in the ZooPlex this spring. Experience a woolly mammoth, a smilodon family and more amazing creatures from the past. (free with regular Zoo admission, March 17 – June 10, 2012)

- New Seal & Sea Lion Pool- This new \$1.3 million pool is a huge improvement to the Zoo and features underwater viewing, a new observation deck, a bigger island for training demonstrations and two new seal pups. (Grand Opening March 17, 2012)

- Front Entrance and Park- This new, safer entrance to Blank Park Zoo has a new sign,

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new pond and waterfall as well as a new shelter house, playground and picnic area for the community to enjoy. (Grand Opening March 17, 2012)

- Watusi- This African longhorn cattle breed is known as the “cattle of kings” and will be sure to amaze with their impressive horns.

- Japanese Macaque exhibit- The Japanese macaque exhibit needed an ‘extreme exhibit makeover,’ so this winter the zoo added a new mesh exhibit containment system, and a new interactive tunnel where visitors can now go into the exhibit and see the macaques up close and personal! (expected completion May 2012)

- Squirrel Monkey- A new animal to Blank Park Zoo will make its home at the former clock tower circle. This South American primate will amaze you with their silly antics.

- King Vulture- This central and South American bird will take up residence with the squirrel monkeys near the penguins and sea lion pool. “Long live the king vulture.”

- New Parakeet Feeding Area- Due to popular demand, Blank Park Zoo will be opening a permanent parakeet feeding exhibit in the David Kruidenier Australia Adventure.

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- Pacific Reef- As we bid farewell to the jellyfish, Blank Park Zoo has converted the circular aquarium into a northwest Pacific reef aquarium, featuring Starfish and other colorful cold water fish from the northwest.

- Miniature Zebu Cattle- Joining the Kids' Kingdom contact area of the Zoo this spring will be miniature Zebu cattle that the public can feed.

- Roller Pigeons- Also joining Kids' Kingdom will be a unique acrobatic pigeon called a roller pigeon.

- Australia Adventure- This exhibit opened last July to popular reviews. The exhibit tells the story of Australia with an Australian Station, bouncing wallabies, emus, kookaburras, rare cassowary and more. (Now Open)

- New Interactives- Thanks to John Deere Foundation, the Discovery Center and Kids' Kingdom exhibits are going to be equipped with all-new interactive displays.

- Expanded Zoo Hours – Due to popular demand, Blank Park Zoo will be expanding its

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summer hours and opening an hour earlier every day, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m (May through September).

EDUCATION:

- Ice Age Field Trip Pricing- Blank Park Zoo is continuing its reduced price of Kindergarten through grade 12 field trips for only \$2. “You’ll have to go back to the Ice Age to find a field trip so affordable,” said Mark Vukovich, CEO. School groups that wish to participate must pre-register at www.blankparkzoo.com and be from a recognized school.

- Summer Safari Day Camps, expanded all-day camps will return this summer for children ages 5-13. Half-day camps will also be available for children ages 3-6. Online registration now available at www.blankparkzoo.com.

- ZooTots- Join some furry, feathery, slimy and fuzzy animal friends in an exciting, hands-on adventure. We will read books, make crafts, and eat some yummy animal snacks. Classes are held at 9:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Ages 2-4 with an adult (Now through March 10, register at www.blankparkzoo.com)

- Zoo Tots Cooking- Classes consist of exciting cooking lessons right here at the Zoo. Each week, you and your toddler will cook a treat and participate in fun activities. These classes will be held on Fridays at 9:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Ages 2-4 with an adult (Now through March 2, register now at www.blankparkzoo.com)

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- ZooTunes- New to Blank Park Zoo's education lineup is ZooTunes, a music class for ages 6 mo.-2 years with an adult. Participants in this class will sing songs, play instruments, dance, join in hands-on activities, and enjoy animal visitors. Adults will be actively involved in the class, helping to engage the young children in music. Classes will be held alternating Wednesdays at 9:15 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 6:00 p.m. and are about 30-45 min. in length. (Now through February 29, register now at www.blankparkzoo.com)

- Zoodlers! is a drop off class for children 3-5 years of age. Children will attend every Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/ Thursday for 4 weeks. Classes will be held from March 12-April 12 from 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. During Zoodlers!, children will participate in fun games and crafts, explore the Zoo, read a story, have a snack and meet an animal friend! Zoodlers! is a great way to get ready for pre-school and spend some time at the Blank Park Zoo! Children must be potty trained.

EVENTS:

- Eggstravaganza- Kicking off Blank Park Zoo's 2012 event season is "Eggstravaganza." Children of all ages embark on a safari Easter egg hunt. Some of the animals will participate in an egg hunt of their own. Photo opportunities with the Easter Bunny will be available. (April 7, 2012)

- Adventure Days- This summer families will enjoy added education, activities and different themes during nine Saturdays at Adventure Days at Blank Park Zoo. Themes include Latino culture, gardening and conservation, life in the Ice Age and more.

- Zoo Brew returns with even more fun evenings every Wednesday this June, July & August. Each 21-and-over event will feature beer or wine sampling, live music and, of course,

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all of the animals at Blank Park Zoo. The event is FREE with paid Zoo Admission and free to Blank Park Zoo Members.

- Jack Hanna Returns – Join Blank Park Zoo for a special evening with America’s favorite zookeeper at the Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center at Veterans Memorial. Tickets start at \$100 with proceeds benefiting the non-profit Blank Park Zoo and can be purchased now at www.blankparkzoo.com . Presented by Nationwide Insurance.

- Gators on the Green- Help Blank Park Zoo continue its mission of conservation, education and recreation by participating in this new golf tournament. After all, where else in Iowa can you golf while viewing ‘real’ alligators on the green! (Wakonda Country Club, May 21, 2012, \$300 single, \$1,200 foursome, \$2,000 foursome with hole sponsorship).

- Pit Bulls, Parrots & Primates- Blank Park Zoo is excited to announce three conservation events in 2012 in cooperation with the Animal Rescue League of Iowa! The evening events include the sold out Tia Torres talk (March 2, 2012), Dr. Irene Pepperberg (April 6, 2012) will talk about her work with grey parrots and Dr. Herbert Covert (May 4, 2012) will talk about his work with Asian primates.

- Facebook Fan Night- This night will allow our loyal Facebook fans to have the Zoo to themselves for a few hours. This exclusive event will feature some fun behind-the-scenes activities and unique opportunities. (June 7, 2012)

- Run for the Wild: The Tortoise Trot- Lace up your shoes for a one-of-a-kind run through Blank Park Zoo which will include a 5k race and a 1 mile fun fun. This year’s run will honor the Aldabra Tortoises, two of which will be celebrating birthday number 5-0. (June 16, 2012)

- Say I Do at the Zoo Bridal Show – Blank Park Zoo is inviting soon-to-be brides to meet

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dozens of vendors in the wedding industry. The ZooPlex will be set up with vendor booths including DJs, local cake shops, dress boutiques, photographers, and more! Blank Park Zoo will be featured as the location venue. Johnny's Italian Steakhouse will provide food samples. (July 22, 2012)

- Zoobilation- The gala is making a comeback at Blank Park Zoo in 2012. Whether you enjoy the Zoo for the animals, education or conservation, this event will allow you to support your favorite aspect while enjoying cocktails, food stations and fun entertainment. (Friday, September 21, 2012)

- Campout at the Zoo- This outdoor overnight adventure will be an unforgettable night with Blank Park Zoo's animals. Enjoy the Zoo after hours to see animal behaviors you may not have seen before, plus campfire stories, s'mores, interact with the Zoo's small animal friends and more! (October 5, 2012)

- Night Eyes- Everyone's favorite trick-or-treat event returns this October for its 22 straight year of "merry not scary" fun. Over 500,000 treats will be passed out at the number-one family Halloween event.

- Santa at the Zoo- This international celebrity is rumored to make another appearance at Blank Park Zoo with a couple of his reindeer friends. Plus, watch animals open some of their early presents they have been waiting for all year long! (December 8 & 15, 2012)

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MEMBERSHIP

- Blank Park Zoo, Living History Farms & Science Center of Iowa Tri Membership Pass- This is the seventh anniversary of when three great Iowa non-profits combined forces to offer a unique pass for the greatest attractions around. For only \$219, you and your family can experience the fun and excitement of all these attractions for a whole year.

- Blank Park Zoo Membership - The \$89 Blank Park Zoo family member pass will be the best value to return for each of the Zoo's new attractions. In addition to free, year-round admittance to the Blank Park Zoo and free or discounted admission to 160 other Zoos, this year members will receive one free train ride and bring one additional guest for free (one guest per family) on "Member Mondays" and free admission to Zoo Brew and Adventure Days.

RENTALS

- Group Safari Packages- Blank Park Zoo is perfect for family reunions, company picnics and meetings, group outings and more. Enjoy all the animals and activities the Zoo has to offer at a reduced cost. Ask about our special group tours and meal packages.

- Birthday Parties- The best place to take the kids is now the wildest place for a birthday party. Check out www.blankparkzoo.com for details.

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OPPORTUNITIES

- 'Wild' Summer Jobs- Look for our summer job fair announcement during spring break. Positions include cashiers, train driver, retail, camp instructors, exhibit interpreters and seasonal keepers.

- Volunteers- Volunteers work in many areas of the Zoo including horticulture, exhibit interpretation, Kids' Kingdom, events and more. Visit www.blankparkzoo.com for more information.

About Blank Park Zoo

Blank Park Zoo, Iowa's WILDEST Adventure, will be open 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. this winter. Winter admission rates are \$7 for adults, \$3 for children under 12, and \$5 for seniors and active military. Children two years and under and Blank Park Zoo members are free. The Zoo is located at 7401 SW 9th St., Des Moines, IA 50315. Visit the Zoo online at <http://www.blankparkzoo.com>. The Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) The AZA is America's leading accrediting organization that sets rigorous, professional standards for zoos and aquariums. The AZA is building North America's largest wildlife conservation movement by engaging and inspiring the 143 million annual visitors to its member institutions and their communities to care about and take action to help protect wildlife.

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