

Camp Week 2: June 8-12

Happy Friday Everyone!

Our second week of camp is in the books! Our campers were excited and ready to go, so we jumped straight into our zoo tour. This week we spent a lot of time talking about animal camouflage, specifically spots and stripes. Mr. Nick was the camp guide this week! He loves the clouded leopards and thinks it is funny when these tiny cats try to stalk any guests in the Zoo.

Before heading into the Zoo, Mr. Nick prepared the campers by letting them know that some of the areas we would be walking through are not open to Zoo guests right now. Since all of our campers are virtual, though, there was no problem having them visit these exhibits and they got to explore on their own!

The first stop was a quick pass through of the jaguars. While many of the campers looked for Tesoro or Maya, we all got the impression that they had an easier time spotting us. Jaguars use disruptive camouflage, having fur that is covered with spots filled with dots. These distinctive “chocolate-chip cookie” rosettes differentiate a jaguar’s fur from the solid spots, or “oreo” rosettes of the cheetah or the simple circles, or “sugar-cookie” rosettes of the leopard and allow jaguars to hide easily among the tree branches and leaves. Finally, we were able to spot one of our jaguars lounging on the top of the rocks.

After the stop at jaguars, we moved off of the public path to visit Suksn and Tarak, the clouded leopards. This mated pair recently had two cubs, Luna and Nova, in November, though the cubs have grown enough to live on their own now. Tarak was excited to see people and was not shy about voicing his excitement. He vocalizes a lot with his keepers, and it was no different when our virtual campers stopped by. Luna and Nova were also very curious and attempted to stalk the yellow group!

Next on our tour was the ocelot, Jack. Even before we reached this Texas native, campers could smell him. Jack likes to mark his territory, just like a wild ocelot, and to do this he makes use of his smelly urine. It was fun to see, though, an example of a cat that has both stripes and spots. Just like the jaguars, this disruptive camouflage ensures that Jack has an easier time sneaking up on his prey. Unlike the clouded leopards, Jack prefers to sleep and move around on the ground. Even though he likes to hunt on the ground, Jack is an excellent climber and he loves to nap on his raised platform to catch any breezes to stay cool.

The final animal on this week’s tour are the fossa, Hansel and Riana. Fossa are from Madagascar, where they are the largest carnivores around. Because of this, our fossa do not realize how small they are compared to other carnivores. Keepers noticed Hansel at the top of his exhibit, trying to stalk some of the other carnivores nearby, like the jaguars. In the wild, fossa hunt lemurs, though at the Zoo both Hansel and Riana love raw eggs! To help fossa in the wild, the Houston Zoo is working with a lemur conservation group called GERP. GERP works with local teams to increase community knowledge about the importance of native wildlife and they help plant seedlings to provide food and habitat to a variety of lemurs. By helping lemurs, GERP is also helping fossa!

We hope everyone is doing well and you enjoy the attached photos. Next week we will be taking a look at some of our reptilian friends!

-Mr. Nick and the Camp Zoofari Team