

Zoo To You Article

Kristi Newland, Zoo Director

21 February 2018

Topic: Zoo Forecast

Spring is coming, at least according to the calendar. As far as indications from Mother Nature, currently that depends on the day. But that's Kansas weather this time of year. So everyone is watching the weather to make plans for the day, the next few days, and even the week. We all know though, that until the day actually happens, the forecast can be a bit off. Not only does this affect what you wear to school or work, when you plan outdoor yard projects and other outdoor activities, it also affects which animals you may see at the zoo when you visit.

Lee Richardson Zoo is home to species from around the world. Like you and I, each of the animals at the zoo have temperatures that are safe for them. When necessary, the weather forecaster on TV or the weather app on your phone or computer gives warnings related to weather hazards such as, "If you go outside you will get frostbite in 10 minutes on any unprotected skin." That's definitely not a safe temperature for humans, and the hope is that we modify our plans for the day accordingly. Zoo staff perform a similar service for the zoo animals as part of their daily care responsibilities. They utilize weather forecasts as well as first-hand weather experience (i.e. stepping outside, watching the sky), combined with their knowledge of the species and individual animals at the zoo to make decisions on what to do for the animals. Will the weather be right for all the animals to spend all day outside? Will the animals that don't do well in colder temperatures need to have access inside to their heated quarters?

These decisions and ones like them are made daily by animal care staff. So if you bundle up and stroll or drive through the zoo on a chilly day, some of the animals that like it warm may be inside or have access to their indoor accommodations depending on what's best for them. Giraffes do better when it's 50 degrees Fahrenheit or above. If the giraffes are inside, there is a sheltered viewing area where guests can get a peek into the giraffe's private housing. Snow leopards on the other hand, like the colder temperatures but will be spending time in their air conditioned indoor quarters during the summer heat.

A bigger discussion occurs when considering if it's time to move the more tropical birds that reside at the zoo from their temperature controlled off-exhibit areas back out to their outdoor residence where zoo guests can enjoy them and the birds can enjoy the heat from the sun, the warm breeze, and all

other aspects of being outside when the temperature is right. The decision to move them is not made lightly. The goal is to move the birds as few times as possible during the year. Moves can be stressful to all involved, birds and staff alike. Staff make sure nighttime temperatures are reliably warm enough that once the birds are back outside, we won't have to bring them back in again until the next winter approaches.

When the move to their summer home takes place can vary, but generally, all the tropical birds at Lee Richardson Zoo are in their outdoor flight areas by mid-May. While looking forward to their return, if birds are your favorite, there are still many to see at the zoo during the colder months. You can enjoy watching the bald eagle, Sarus cranes, and the trumpeter swans, just to name a few. Don't forget about the birds in the Marie Osterbuhr Aviary building. You can enjoy viewing these birds, the Goeldi's monkeys, and the green crested basilisk while warming up on a chilly day.

No matter the day, there's always something to enjoy at Lee Richardson Zoo. Stay up with zoo happenings by visiting our website (www.leerichardsonzoo.org) or our Facebook page. You can also visit the zoo's Pinterest page if looking for some fun craft ideas for the kids on those chilly indoor days.