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BUGS ALIVE! NEW PROGRAM DEBUTS SATURDAY AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM TO GIVE VISITORS AN UP-CLOSE VIEW INTO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF CRAWLY THINGS

New program is just one experience in a summer filled with animals visitors can see up close and – in many cases – touch to learn more about interesting creatures and conservation



Harriet the Brazilian black tarantula is certain to stir the curiosity of visitors to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium during the debut this weekend of Bugs Alive!

TACOMA, Wash. – What do a Brazilian black tarantula named Harriet, an insect that looks like a tree leaf, a giant African millipede and a tobacco hornworm named Heimlich have in common?

Gracious sakes, they are Bugs Alive!

A brand new program debuts at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium this Saturday -during Memorial Day Weekend - to introduce visitors to the wonderful world of bugs. Featuring caterpillars, beetles, stick insects, and other interesting arthropods from around the world.

Bugs Alive! will feature zoo staff members and volunteers with an array of bugs at 1 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. daily. They will show the critters and talk about bugs' important roles in our ecosystems.

The presentations will take place in the new Close Encounter area at the Discovery Hut, which is near the Budgie Buddies exhibit and the lower entrance to the North Pacific Aquarium.

The bugs will be on stage, but staff members also will use a macro camera and a video screen to point out some of the creatures' most amazing features. Some of them, like the, hornworms and silkworms will be touchable by members of the public.



This week's Bugs Alive! stars will include:

- **Giant leaf insects**, which have such amazing camouflage you can't distinguish them from the leaves on the trees in which they live.

- **A Brazilian black tarantula** named Harriet, who is destined to be a crowd favorite.

- **Giant African millipedes**, which look a bit like 9-inch-long, ribbed rubber hoses with

hundreds of constantly wiggly legs.

- **Tobacco hornworms**, including one named Heimlich, which are a verdant green to match the plants on which they climb.

In coming weeks, more bugs will be added to the presentations, including jungle nymphs, lubber grasshoppers, praying mantis, an emperor scorpion, a vinegaroon that looks like a cross between a scorpion and a spider, a bronze stag beetle, silkworms and a variety of cockroach species.

The bugs that will be the stars of this presentation come from a variety of ecosystems around the world. Some are native to the United States, some to Africa, some to Asia, and other exotic places.

"We're excited to introduce this exciting new program to our visitors," said Staff Biologist Jessica Sutherland, a member of the Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater staff who is coordinating Bugs Alive! "We believe that providing up-close views of these fascinating animals – plus information about their role in the ecosystems of the world – will help our visitors learn more about the critters they often see in their own backyards."

Bugs Alive! is just one of a series of animal Close Encounters and *In Touch* with the Wild experiences scheduled at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium this summer.

Besides Bugs Alive!, here's the some of the schedule:

- ***In Touch with the Wild***: Animals that members of the public may see and – in some cases - touch will be presented daily at 1:30 p.m. on the new stage near the Muskox Exhibit and Monday through Friday at 2:30 p.m. at the Discovery Hut. These might range from an armadillo, hedgehog, iguana and many others.
- **Groom a Goat**: On Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to Noon, visitors will be able to brush the fur of a friendly goat at Kids' Zone. Visitors also can feed these adorable animals from the palms of their hands.
- **Touch a sea star and other marine animals**: The Marine Discovery Center in the North Pacific Aquarium is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily for visitors who want to observe and touch a variety of marine creatures; take part in a squid dissection; and learn more about the animals that live in Puget Sound and why it's important to care for the health of our oceans.
- **Touch stingrays and small sharks at Stingray Cove**: An array of dinner-plate stingrays (with barbs removed) and small sharks swim placidly through the waters of Stingray Cove, which is

open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Visitors can reach in and carefully feel the gelatinous-like surface of the stingrays and the rough bodies of the sharks.



Above: A tobacco hornworm clings to a stem and blends in quite nicely with the leaves of a plant. The large caterpillar will eventually turn into a pupal stage and become a moth.

At left: A giant African millipede crawls across a log, its little legs moving in what looks like about a million miles an hour.

- **See Tilli dig:** Watching Tilli the aardvark dig in her special yard near the Discovery Hut is one of the most fun activities at the zoo for many guests. She comes out for visitors to watch on Tuesdays and Fridays at 1:30 p.m., weather permitting.
- **Feed a colorful budgie:** The zoo's Budgie Buddies exhibit is full of colorful flying budgerigars, or small Australian parakeets. Visitors may purchase sticks with seeds on the ends, and the budgies

will usually land on the sticks and eat the seeds, right out of visitors' hands.

For more information on these programs, go to www.pdza.org/close-encounters and www.pdza.org/daily-presentations.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo & aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).