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25TH ANNUAL EDITION OF ZOOLIGHTS DRAWS MORE THAN 112,000 OHHING AND AHHING GUESTS, CAPPING A YEAR OF CUBS, PUPS AND WONDROUS EVENTS AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

TACOMA, Wash. – Zoolights put on quite a glow for its 25th annual season. And Puget Sound area residents loved it.

More than 112,000 visitors strolled the zoo’s pathways in November and December to view the holiday-season light spectacular, featuring more than half a million lights arrayed around the zoo in animal shapes, animated scenes and stunning tree and plant displays.



All told, 661,748 people visited Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in 2012, nearly 550,000 of them during daylight hours.

A brand new Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater show and the births of endangered clouded leopard and tiger cubs and red wolf pups – in addition to dozens of other animal exhibits - gave visitors much to see and enjoy throughout the year.

“We’re pleased to provide our guests with an unparalleled experience that includes an array of animals they won’t see anywhere else, activities for the entire family and education about the environment at home and abroad,” said Gary Geddes, director of the Zoological and Environmental Education Division of Metro Parks Tacoma.

“Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium offers a wonderful outing at an affordable price during tough economic times,” he added.

Zoolights capped a tremendous 2012 at the zoo with a dazzling display of lights anchored by a 100-foot Giant Pacific Octopus perched atop the North Pacific Aquarium.

The lights went on the day after Thanksgiving. When they were turned off for the final time on Jan. 1, 112,564 people of all ages had oohed and ahhed at them. In recognition of the display's contribution to the community and its families, Mayor Marilyn Strickland declared December Zoolights Month in Tacoma.

Zoolights was presented by Fred Meyer.

It was the third largest Zoolights attendance in 25 glorious seasons, behind only the record-smashing 2011, when 135,907 saw the display, and the 10th annual event in 1997, which drew 116,523. The 2012 attendance was up about 21 percent over 2010.

"Even in a very rainy late fall and early winter, Puget Sound residents flocked to this display so lovingly constructed each year by dedicated zoo staff members," Geddes said. "The numbers are a testament to the work of our staff and to the residents of the region who have come to love Zoolights as a cherished holiday season tradition."

The 2012 daytime attendance of 549,184 was the fourth highest in the zoo's 107-year history, behind only 2011, 2010 and 2008.

Look for even more fun at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in 2013. Stingray Cove, featuring 50 stingrays in interactive touch tanks, is scheduled to open in May. Also this year, members of the public will have a chance to swim with the sharks during guided dives or be immersed in a cage with surface-supplied air during the Eye-to-Eye Sharks experience in the South Pacific Aquarium. And "Captain Adventure vs. Dr. Do-Nothing: The Quest to Get Outside!" returns in May for encore performances in the Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater.

Special events happen all year long at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. It's going to be an amazing 2013.

Creative Zoolights fans can help make the holiday magic even better this year by suggesting ideas for new displays. They can be made on the zoo's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/PtDefianceZoo.

Zoolights attendance in 2012: 112,564

Daytime attendance in 2012: 549,184

Total Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium attendance in 2012: 661,748.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo & aquarium, 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).