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### **POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM SMASHES ATTENDANCE RECORD**

*More than 700,000 visitors make 2013 the highest visitor year in zoo's 109-year history*

**TACOMA, Wash.** – Stingrays, shark divers, seal pups, tiger cubs, clouded leopard cubs and breathtaking LED displays of Mount Rainier and a majestic polar bear family helped draw more than 700,000 visitors to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium last year.



“Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is one of the true jewels of Tacoma and has remained so for more than a century, thanks to the unwavering support of the community,” said Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners President Aaron Pointer.

“This attendance record is testament to the strong ties between Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and the residents of Tacoma, Pierce County and Western Washington,” he added.

The zoo's 2013 attendance totaled 711,077, breaking the record set in 2011 by 15,264 visitors.

Some 581,410 people flocked to the zoo during daytime hours last year. Another 129,667 came over the last several weeks to ooh and ahh at what many described as the best-ever edition of Zoolights. That's the second-highest number in Zoolights' 26 years, just behind the 2011 attendance of 135,907.

"This unparalleled attendance validates the work we do at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium every day to bring the public quality exhibits showcasing many of the most precious animals on earth," said Gary Geddes, director of zoological and environmental education for Metro Parks Tacoma.

"Visitors tell us they value the zoo as an affordable place for family outings year-round and that attendance at Zoolights is a much cherished holiday tradition," Geddes added.



The bond between the community and its zoo was forged in 1905 when the City of Tacoma received title to Point Defiance Park and Oscar Olsen became "custodian and keeper of mammals." It's remained unshakable ever since.

Point Defiance is home to the only combined zoo and aquarium in the Northwest, and that pairing drew visitors last year to see exhibits as varied as Stingray Cove, a touch experience, and critically

endangered clouded leopard cubs leaping from branch to branch in the Cats of the Canopy Exhibit.

If there were a Hollywood highlight reel of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium's accomplishments in 2013, it would include:

- April 15 presentation of the zoo's very first Paw of Approval Awards to community businesses actively engaged in promoting awareness of the plight of polar bears and reducing carbon emissions.
- April 17 birth of Kali, a member of the critically endangered Sumatran tiger subspecies.
- May 1 birth of Tien, a clouded leopard cub who was joined later in the year by Sang Dao, his future mate.
- May 4 opening of Stingray Cove, an all-new exhibit in the South Pacific Aquarium in which visitors can reach into a tank and feel the velvety surfaces of stingrays. It gets guests closer than ever to nature.
- June 2 and June 10 births of harbor seal pups Hogan and Saya.
- Aug. 23-24 celebration of the first birthdays of Malayan tiger cub Berani and Sumatran tiger cub Dumai.

- Oct. 11 grand opening of the Eye-to-Eye Shark Dive programs, which allow both novice divers and experienced scuba divers to view sharks underwater in the South Pacific Aquarium.
- Holiday season Zoolights display of more than half a million lights arranged around the zoo in scenes that brought animals to life in lights and depicted much-loved local landmarks. The centerpiece of the 2013 edition of Zoolights was a family of bright white polar bears, backed by a squad of ice skating puffins. A blue-and-green “Seahawks 12<sup>th</sup> Man Tree” towered over the entrance to Zoolights, delighting guests supporting the highly successful football team.

“Our staff worked tirelessly last year to provide meaningful and educational experiences that visitors will remember for years to come,” said zoo deputy director John Houck. “And we are always mindful of our conservation mission.”

Zoo visitors responded to that with donations to conservation projects to help endangered species around the world, particularly tigers and clouded leopards in Southeast Asia, and to help promote education about sharks and curb worldwide practices that threaten their populations.

Tacoma and Puget Sound area residents will see more new exhibits and programs in 2014. Small epaulette and bamboo sharks will be added to the Stingray Cove touch tank in the spring, giving visitors new elements of nature to reach out and touch. Critically endangered black and white ruffed lemurs will soon debut in the zoo’s Kids’ Zone area. And a brand new show featuring resident dog Herald as “Indiana Bones” and a supportive cast of amazing animals will debut at the Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater in May.

“We know the community will love what we have in store in 2014,” Houck said. “We promise to uphold the very best of the zoo’s 109-year-old traditions.”

### **A record year**

**Total 2013 attendance:** 711,077

**Previous total attendance record:** 695,813 (2011)

**Daytime 2013 attendance:** 581,410

**Zoolights 2013 attendance:** 129,667

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*Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only combined zoo and 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).*