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**Password:** 2015

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**POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM SETS ATTENDANCE RECORD AS 732,208 PEOPLE VISIT DURING 2015 TO SEE CLOUDED LEOPARD QUADRUPLETS, TIGER TRIPLETS AND MUCH MORE**

*Guests also dove with sharks, went Jammin' with Jellies, oohed and ahed at Zoolights and learned about conservation resources and the perils facing many endangered species*

TACOMA, Wash. – It was a year of triple the fun. Quadruple the cuteness. Jammin' with Jellies and making solid contributions to conservation.



By any measure, 2015 stood out as one of the most exciting in Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium's history, what with tiger cub triplets and clouded leopard quadruplets engaging visitors and helping to tell the story of their endangered species.

And there's one more superlative to add: It was record-setting. More visitors poured through the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium gates in 2015 than in any previous year. The record number: 732,208. That smashed the previous attendance record – set in 2013 – by more than 21,000 guests.

“We are grateful to residents from across the Puget Sound region and around the country who come to visit Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, and we thank them for their continued support,” said Tim Reid, president of the Metro Parks Board of Park Commissioners.

“The numbers in which people visited during 2015 are an affirmation of the work that we do to showcase endangered species and deliver resonant messages on conservation and environmental stewardship,” he added.

Of those 732,208 guests, 628,636 visited the zoo during daylight hours to view marine mammals like walrus, polar bears and sea otters; watch endangered cats like Sumatran tigers and clouded leopards on the prowl; laugh

at the antics of mischievous meerkats and leaping lemurs; take in a live animal show featuring wild cats, soaring birds, an armadillo with an impossibly long tongue, and a dog; and be mesmerized by a sea of colorful, silently floating jellies.



Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is the only combined zoo and aquarium in the Northwest, a place where one can dive with sharks, touch stingrays and be amazed at the recovery story of the red wolf – all in the same visit.

Among daytime highlights for visitors in 2015 were:

- Watching Sumatran tiger triplets Dari, Indah and Kirana grow from nursing cubs who weighed just a few pounds at birth to young tigresses chasing one another around outdoor exhibits, testing out longer legs and exercising growing muscles.
- Seeing a rare litter of clouded leopard quadruplets and viewing them from the zoo's Cub Den glass as keepers fed and cared for them following their birth in May. Just a few months later, brothers Banyan, Kapok and Teak and sister Orchid were wowing visitors as they learned to run, jump and climb in an outdoor exercise yard.
- Viewing flowing jellyfish in the new Jammin' with Jellies exhibit, which opened in the North Pacific Aquarium in May to spotlight often unseen and misunderstood sea creatures that come in wondrous shapes, sizes and colors, including one that looks like a floating egg yolk.
- Getting a first glimpse of Malayan tapir Baku, a handsome black-and-white animal who looks a bit like a pig with a long snout but is more closely related to horses and rhinoceroses. He made his public debut at the zoo in October.
- Diving with sharks in the zoo's three Eye-to-Eye Shark Dive programs, including the brand new Beyond the Cage experience that debuted in October. It allows non-certified divers to get closer than ever to the zoo's 16 sharks as they enter the tropical waters of the South Pacific Aquarium through a cage and then settle on the sandy bottom for an unparalleled close encounter with the animals. Participants breathe air supplied through hoses from the surface during their underwater adventure.

- Enjoying a wide range of special events and activities focusing on endangered species, conservation of resources and just plain fun. These included an Earth Day-related Party for the Planet, monthly garden tours, celebration of milestone animal birthdays, an icy Arctic Blast play day in August and Zoo Boo in October.

And when the days grew short and the nights long in late fall and winter, Zoolights came on, delighting 103,572 visitors over the holidays with bright displays created from more than 600,000 energy-efficient LED lights. They included animated animal scenes, local landmarks built to scale and a 30,030-light purple-and-green Flame Tree.

“Our staff worked tirelessly throughout 2015 to provide our guests with meaningful experiences that we believe they will remember for years to come,” Zoo Deputy Director John Houck said. “And we made significant contributions to conservation through our Species Survival Plan® managed breeding programs, research efforts, Citizen Science programs and community leadership in this area.

“We believe the zoo is a source of great pride for Tacoma and the entire Puget Sound region,” Houck added. “It’s also a great destination for families and people of all ages.”

The zoo is well more than a century old, tracing its earliest beginnings in Point Defiance Park all the way back to 1891.

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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). The zoo is more than a century old, tracing its earliest beginnings in Point Defiance Park all the way back to 1891.*

## **A record year**

**Total 2015 attendance:** 732,208

**Previous total attendance record:** 711,077 (2013)

**Daytime 2015 zoo attendance:** 628,636

**Zoolights 2015 attendance:** 103,572

### **Photo captions:**

**Photo 1:** Feeding time for four growing clouded leopard cubs kept zookeepers busy for several weeks after the rare quadruplets were born in May. This photo is from July 2015.

**Photo 2:** Many families brought their human “cubs” to meet those of the wild animal variety at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium during 2015. In this photo, taken in March, a child peers through a glass exhibit wall at the young tiger family.

**Photo credits:** Ingrid Barrentine/Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium