



FRIENDS OF OXBOW

www.friendsofoxbow.org

April/May 2008

New Exhibit is For the Birds

What do you do when an exhibit deteriorates to the point where repairs are not economical, and it's time to build a new one? Built in the 70's, the old exhibit had served its purpose, and now a plan for replacement was needed. As they have done many times before, the park staff turned to architect Byron Stadsvold, who has donated his design plans for all the newer zoo displays.



The raptor's new enclosure is projected to cost \$46,000. Funding for this project comes from donations received from the more than 50,000 annual visitors to the Park and Zoo. The Friends of Oxbow are stepping in if additional funds are needed. Without

this support, the project would not be possible.

Although Friends is actively soliciting for its' current project, the new Wildcat Exhibit, the cost of that project is very high (\$90,000) and at the current rate of donations, it is going to take several years to accumulate sufficient funds, so the decision was made to assist with funding the raptor building if needed.

The new exhibit will be built in the same location as the current one. Construction will start in June and should be finished by late fall. Raptors do not tolerate the loud noises and activity of construction so they will be off display for the summer.

Visitors will still be able see common raptors up close and personal though, since Friends-sponsored summer interns will often be showing our native Red-tailed Hawk, Screech Owl, Kestrel and Saw-whet owl.

The new habitat will be almost 40% larger than the current one and will feature a design similar to that of the fox and bobcat – two larger end towers (for eagles and vultures) with lower areas in between. Similar stone will be used in the back walls to keep the “look” of all the exhibits consistent. Flexible mesh walls will prevent the birds from harming themselves if they fly up against them when startled, but will be nearly invisible to visitors viewing them from outside

The split rail safety barrier will be similar to those all around the rest of the park..

Donations are still needed for both the Wild Cat and Raptor exhibits. Anyone wishing to donate can contact the park staff or Friends of Oxbow.

The park staff wish to thank all those generous visitors who have donated the money needed to rebuild this showcase for our magnificent native raptors.

PART-TIME NATURALIST HIRED

The park staff welcome Karlin Zeigler as the new part-time naturalist. Karlin graduated from South Dakota State U. in 2000 with a major in Biology. She has worked at the Bramble Park Zoo and also for nearly 5 years in the Marine Mammal area of the Indianapolis Zoo. She moved back to MN recently with her husband to advance his career and to raise their new family.

Celeste Lewis, the full-time naturalist, says Karlin “comes to us with a wealth of previous zoo experience. She is a friendly, hard-working, and extremely insightful young lady. She is making a wonderful addition to our family of staff here at the park.” Karlin says she is “very excited to be joining the staff and I look forward to meeting friends and visitors at Oxbow Park.”



About Our Organization

Friends mission is to support the educational, environmental and recreational goals of Oxbow Park.

This Newsletter is published 6 times a year. Send comments, ideas to the editor at ryegr@q.com.

Friends board meets monthly at Oxbow Park Nature Center. Call 775-2451 for date and time. Everyone is welcome.

Friends Board Officers

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Friends Web page

www.friendsofowbow.org

Olmsted County Parks Information

www.co.olmsted.mn.us

Oxbow Park Hours

Park Grounds: 7 am -10pm

Nature Center & Zoo:

10 am to 4 pm daily

Nature Center, Zoo are closed for Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years Day and Easter

Want to sponsor a zoo animal?

Go to:

www.friendsofowbow.org

Park Report by Celeste Lewis, park naturalist

The snow is slowly melting away, the maple sap is running, and the woodchucks have come out of hibernation. Could this mean that spring is finally on its way? I definitely hope so! It has been a very long and snowy winter so I, like many others, am ready for sunshine and green grass.

As the days are getting longer (and a little warmer) the number of visitors at the zoo is getting greater and greater. The animals are also noticing the change in seasons. We have a few "frisky" critters out here if you know what I mean!

The staff, here at the park, is busy preparing for the upcoming busy months ahead. Pat has been working on the new quarantine shed, and Tim has been making sure all the equipment is up and running and keeping up with all the other daily maintenance duties of the park. Some good news is that the well work that has been a bit of a thorn in everyone's sides, has finally begun. Some sad news is that our very elderly raccoon finally passed away. We will be searching for a different animal to take his place, perhaps a Pine Marten or a Fisher.

The biggest news here at the park would be hiring of Karlin Zeigler as the new part-time naturalist. We're excited to have her! (See front page)

Oxbow Park Programs and Events

*All programs are appropriate for all ages unless otherwise noted
In case of inclement weather, call 775-2451 for program details*

April Programs

Deer/Elk Feeding – April 5 at 1:00pm
Feed the Otters – April 12 at 3:00pm
Feed the Critters – April 19 at 3:00pm
Feed the Bison – April 26 at 1:00pm

May Programs

Wildflower Hike – May 3 at 10:00am
Feed the Bear – May 10 at 1:00pm
Tree Identification – May 24 at 1:00pm
Feed the Snakes – May 31 at 1:00pm

Friends Annual Spring Fun Fest May 17 from 11:00-3:00pm

Mark your calendar! You won't want to miss this fabulous family event - an afternoon of games, wagon rides, food, and fun! Join us and the Oxbow critters at our annual celebration of spring here at Oxbow Park/Zollman Zoo.

Chester Woods Park Programs

A \$5.00 daily or \$25.00 annual vehicle pass is required to enter Chester Woods Park. Call 287-2624 for program information, registration and in case of inclement weather. Meet at the kiosk near the boat ramp unless otherwise noted.

Woodcock Hike-Thur., April 17th at 7:30 PM (sunset). Meet at the horse parking lot.
Friends of Chester Woods Clean-up Day - Sat., April 26th at 10-2 PM
Frogs & Toads - Sat., May 17th at 9:00 AM .
Moonlight Paddle – Sat., May 17th at 8:45 PM
Dam Hike- Sun., May 25th at 11:00 AM
Bluebird Banding - Tue., May 27th at 7:00 PM

Critter Column by R. Yaeger *Porcupines* (*Erethizon dorsatum*)



If you ask the zoo staff at Oxbow, several will say that these gentle, slow-moving rodents are their favorites. They are quite curious and despite their fearsome array of quills are quite non-aggressive. Woe unto those who try to antagonize them

however! Read on and find out more about these unusual creatures including the real answer to everyone's burning question about porcupines....

Porcupines are the 2nd largest rodent in North America. Only beavers are bigger. They are heavy-set, short-legged, slow moving. Yellowish guard hairs cover the front of the body, with up to 30,000 quills about 3 inches long scattered among black hairs on the back. They are not related to hedgehogs. Found throughout much of North America, from Canada to northern Mexico, they live mostly in woods and scrublands, wherever trees and brush are available. Strict vegetarians, they feed on buds, twigs, bark, leaves, flowering plants, and some fruits. They are largely nocturnal and their sense of smell is far more acute than their eyesight.

My friend says he's seen them around in winter. Don't they hibernate like woodchucks?

No. They do "den up", often with other porcupines, but are not true hibernators like some other rodents. To see them out and about in the dead of winter however, is not uncommon unless the weather is really bad.

I saw one in a tree once. Is that unusual?

No. In fact, it's *more* unusual to see them anywhere else! They spend most of their time in trees, using their stiff tail as a prop. They even sleep in trees, but are difficult to spot, appearing to be a nest or clump of leaves.

Why is it so hard to pull out quills and how do they shoot them at you?

Quills are modified hairs that are loosely attached at the base and very easily detached. The scales on most mammalian hair (including our own) point away from the roots, but the scales of a porcupine's quills (they are not true barbs) point toward the root. This allows a quill to penetrate easily, but ensures that it will be hard to remove. Once embedded, it is drawn in more deeply every time the victim's muscles contract, often traveling over an inch per day. A quill that entered the face of one too-inquisitive dog later emerged as far away as its leg! Despite all the old wives tales, porcupines cannot "shoot" their quills – instead, they rapidly swat their tails, driving many loose quills into their attacker.

Why do they eat tires, tools, gloves and stuff?

Porcupines love salt and gnaw anything that humans have worn or handled due to the residue of dried sweat on these things. They also damage pit toilets for the salt in urine, and tires for road salt.

Can any critters eat them?

Not many! That arsenal of quills keeps them safe from most predators, but a few very clever, quick and lucky critters, mostly foxes, can make a meal out of them by flipping them over, especially the very young ones.

Why are their front teeth so orange stained?

That orange "stain" on the front incisors is actually a very tough protective layer that makes the back of the tooth wear faster than the front, keeping the tooth razor sharp. Those incisors never stop growing, so breaking an upper one can be a slowly fatal experience for a porcupine.

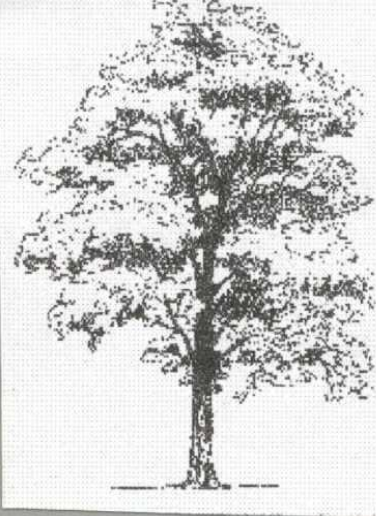
OK. I've got to ask – how do they mate?

OK. I've got to reply: *verrry* carefully! The porcupine, of course, is known for its sharp quills - excellent for self-defense but rather intimidating for a suitor. Come on too strong and . . . ouch! So it's safety first! Porcupines are able to mate without inflicting serious harm on one another, but it's important not to surprise their partner. Courting porcupines perform a "dance", walking toward each other on their hind legs and putting their paws on each other's shoulders while circling, rubbing noses and making humming noises. Finally, the female must relax her quills, and then the male must squirt the female with high-pressure jets of urine. No, I am *not* making this up. These are just a few of the steps in one of nature's more elaborate mating rituals. If the encounter is a success, a den is made in a hollow tree, or a natural cave of rocks, and a porcupette is born seven months later - an unusually long gestation time for a rodent. Fortunately for the mother, the infant is born in a placental sac, and its short quills (about ¼ inch) are soft for the first half hour or so of its life. Born with its eyes open, the porkie is climbing and eating some solid food within a few hours! Weaning occurs in 6-7 weeks, sexual maturity at about 3 years and their lifespan is about 5 – 9 years.

What about the porcupines at the Zollman Zoo?

The zoo currently has 3 porcupines – 2 males and a female. They came to us from a game farm in Sandstone, MN. The older male was born in 2005 and the other two were born in 2007. Come on down and watch these creatures delicately manipulate their food, like ladies at tea. You may even see the "dance" they do to get attention or be able to find a shed quill or two that have rolled outside the fence!

The Walnut Search



City Forester Jacob Ryg wants our readers to know about a tree-cutting offer that you should avoid. You may get a notice in the mail or be approached door-to-door by tree cutting services that offer to cut your “old” walnut tree(s) and pay you for them, saying that lumber mills will not take city trees and that their service is the only one that will pay you for them. He cautions that

this type of “walnut search” goes on almost every year and wants all citizens to think carefully before accepting such an offer. His advice:

- ◆ When done ethically, harvesting trees for lumber production is an important and viable part of our economy but make sure you know what you’re getting into.

- ◆ A reputable company does not drive around the city knocking on doors looking for work – or offering to buy your walnut trees. Walnut lumber prices are very high at this time...don’t let yourself get ripped off.
- ◆ Even if a tree company claims to be licensed and insured, always ask for a copy of the license and a list of references – or call your city forester to find out (507-328-2515).
- ◆ It is true that most lumber mills will not take urban grown trees because of the potential for metal or defects in the trees. The exception is when the trees are extremely valuable and worth the risk of blade damage.
- ◆ This type of offer, while not illegal, is quite unethical. Protect yourself and your neighbor’s trees. In my opinion these trees are far more valuable alive and standing - providing the numerous benefits urban trees give us.

If you have questions or concerns please feel free to give your city forester a call.

FRIENDS OF OXBOW
 PO Box 6552
 ROCHESTER, MN 55903-6552

Friends of Oxbow

Yes, I'd like to be a Friend of this great Park!

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|
| ___ Friend: | \$25 - 49 | <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal |
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Be sure to ask if your company matches donations!

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Make checks payable to Friends of Oxbow.

Mail to: Friends of Oxbow
 PO Box 6552
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