

Zoo Exploration Guide

We've created this guide to help you facilitate an educational tour at the Saint Louis Zoo. We have provided you a brief insider description about a few of our animal habitats and a few questions to help prompt a discussion with your group.

Working with animal needs

When we provide the proper care for an animal, we are addressing that animal's social needs and adaptations. At the Zoo, we have over 500 species. In Rivers' Edge alone, we have over 27 species. Each of these animals has its own social needs and adaptations to be addressed. How do we do this?

Living alone

Several of our Rivers' Edge species live alone in the wild. At the Zoo, however, we typically have more than one of that species (males and females). We have off-viewing habitats, which allow us to provide the proper space for our animals that can't be in the yard together.

Social groupings

Some animals must live in social groups. Several of our animals in River's Edge live in family groups or coalitions. Zoo habitats for social animals must provide space for several animals to be together, but also provide areas to separate out an animal for special times like trainings, health checks or introductions to new animals.

Working with adaptations

There are over 27 species in River's Edge and many of them have unique adaptations that keepers must understand in order to provide their care. Keepers often give an animal food, toys or features in their Zoo habitats that encourage an animal to display natural behaviors. We call this enrichment. For example, elephants naturally forage throughout the day, searching trees for fruit and juicy leaves. In the elephant Zoo habitat, you will notice trees and exposed cliffs with cavities in which keepers can hide food items. These cavities allow elephants to forage for food throughout the day.

At the Zoo...

While you explore the Zoo, take a few minutes to look at these aspects within each animal habitat. You will notice that each habitat provides these features in different ways.

At home or school...

Planning animal habitats is a great example of critical thinking. Pick your favorite animal and research its habitat requirements. Draw an exhibit or create one out of recyclable materials like a shoe box, paper towel tubes and bottle caps. Remember to not only include food, water, shelter and space, but also provide ways for keepers to access the space and an off-viewing space for the animal.

For more information about our animals and our animal care, visit our website: stlzoo.org



Saint Louis Zoo
Animals Always®

1. Cheetahs



Female cheetahs live alone except for the time she is raising her young. Males live in coalitions of two to five individuals. You might get a glimpse of some of the Zoo's cheetahs in their off-site viewing area. Keepers must think about the social needs of these animals when they change cheetahs to the visitor-viewing habitat. Cheetahs are adapted to run quickly for short distances. Keepers provide a lure course to give them the opportunity to quickly run through the habitat.

- How many cheetahs are in the public viewing habitat? Are you seeing males or a female?
- Do you see any portions of the lure course on the ground?

2. Painted dogs



Painted dogs are highly social and live in packs. Each member of the pack has a job – hunting, caring for young, etc. In the wild, there is little aggression between pack members because the pack approach allows them to build strong bonds. Keepers provide team enrichment for these animals, which encourages them to work together and helps strengthen the bond in the pack.

- Are the dogs together? Why do you think they stay close together?
- Do you see any enrichment?
- Do you see any of the dogs interacting with one another?



3. Asian Elephants



Elephants have adaptations that allow them to utilize their habitat to meet their needs. Elephants use their muscular trunks to forage for food or to suck up water and pour it into their mouths. Elephants spend 12-18 hours a day feeding so they need a lot of food! Female and young elephants live together in family groups. We have several habitats that the Zoo's three-generation Asian elephant family can explore.

- Do you see members of the Zoo's elephant family in a habitat? Can you tell which of elephants are the youngest? How can you tell?
- Do you see any enrichment in the habitat for the elephants?
- What do you think would be tricky about making a habitat for an elephant?

4. Malayan Sun Bears



Sun bears have amazing adaptations for climbing and digging. Although they are one of the smallest bear species they are strong and mighty. These adaptations can be tricky when creating a new habitat for them.

- Can you see any adaptations on the bear for climbing or digging?
- Can you see areas in their Zoo habitat that allow them to climb?
- What do you think would be tricky about building a habitat for these animals?