

NEWS RELEASE



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THE ZOO'S "OTHER" ANIMALS

NORFOLK, Va. – Visitors to the Virginia Zoo can see and learn about hundreds of animals in habitats that encourage the animals' natural behaviors, but there's another population of animals at the Zoo that are not on public exhibition.

"We design our habitats and plan our interactions with the exhibit animals to keep them as wild as possible," said Roger Sweeney, the Zoo's assistant director. "In contrast, we condition our program animals to interact more closely with humans."

Program animals have a size and temperament that suits them to close encounters with people – particularly children – and usually possess interesting physical characteristics or occupy a unique ecological niche that makes them valuable for education. They are used by the Zoo for camps, school programs, snoozes, birthday parties or special events. Program animals include screech owls, opossums, Flemish rabbits, chinchillas, snakes, frogs and more.

"In some cases, such as the tenrec, guests can touch the animal as they learn about it," said Allyson Zahm, education manager at the Zoo. "Plus, program participants get the undivided attention of Zoo Education staff, who can answer questions and share interesting information."

Pygmy hedgehog tenrecs are found on the island of Madagascar. Their bodies are covered with bristly spines, which cannot be released like a porcupine's, but still provide an excellent defense. Luckily for their mother, the babies' spines do not harden until after birth. Tenrecs are insectivores and voracious predators, using their keen senses of smell and hearing to locate their prey. More information about educational programs at the Zoo is available at www.virginiazoo.org/education or by calling 757-441-2374 ext. 229.

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OTHER ZOO ANIMALS, 2 OF 2



A two-week old pygmy hedgehog tenrec at the Virginia Zoo July 12, 2013. The litter is the fourth at the Zoo since 2012 and most of this year's young will be travelling to other zoos, where they will likely be used as education animals due to their small size, temperament and unique ecological niche (Virginia Zoo photo by Winfield Danielson).

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As an accredited Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) facility, the Virginia Zoo exhibits more than 400 animals on 53 beautifully landscaped acres. For more than a century, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to education and conservation, and offered a fun-filled day for visitors of any age. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and located at 3500 Granby Street in Norfolk. Daily admission prices are \$11 for adults, \$10 for seniors (age 62 and over) and \$9 for children ages 2-11. Children under 2 are admitted free. Visit www.virginiazoo.org or call (757) 441-2374 for more information.