



TOUCAN TALK

A Trip To The Zoo That Comes To You!



T

hree tips for a longer life: eat well, exercise regularly and live at Metrozoo! Did you know that several of our animals have broken longevity records for their species in captivity? South Florida would seem to be as favorable a setting for senior animals as it is for senior citizens.

Take "Fang" — a white-handed gibbon. He was born on April 16, 1956. Nine years later, he arrived at Crandon Park Zoo. Today, he swings from branch to branch at Metrozoo and his distinctive whooping call is as strong as ever. Fang now holds the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) longevity record for gibbons in North American zoos. At 38, his age has surpassed by almost a decade the wild gibbons' life expectancy of 24 to 30 years.

According to General Curator Bill Zeigler, life expectancies can vary greatly between wild and captive animals of the same species. Zoo animals may tend to live longer because, compared to wild animals, they live a more leisurely life.

At Metrozoo, the animals are fed a balanced diet prepared by Patty Leon-Singer, John Hale, and Freddie Cohen in the zoo kitchen. The animals are skillfully attended by dedicated keepers who work diligently to assure their health and safety. Keepers develop very close relationships with their animals and can assess their health status by subtle changes in behavior or eating pattern. Comprehensive veterinary care, for prevention as well as treatment of illnesses, is provided by Dr. Chriss Miller and her staff, who work with animals in the paddocks and at the Christopher A. Weeks Animal Clinic.

In Metrozoo's African plains, you can see another of our elder specimens. Among our growing herd of reticulated giraffes (including three youngsters born this year), you will notice a stately female whose markings are not as bright as the other giraffes', and whose hide is a bit wrinkled. Her name is "Sexta" and she was born in May, 1956. (continued on next page)



"Fang" is a record holder for gibbon longevity.

— photos this page by Alex Worden

Fit For Life At Metrozoo

(continued from the cover)

Sexta came to Crandon Park in 1958 when she was two. In 1981, when Crandon Park animals were transferred to this location, moving Sexta proved to be a real challenge. She was 22 years old and approximately 14 feet tall. So curators accompanied Sexta, riding in an open truck through the Miami streets. At every traffic light or highway sign, they presented special treats so that she would lower her head, thus ducking under wires and overhangs.

At 38, Sexta is as strong as ever. Our male giraffe still finds her quite attractive and chases her around the exhibit, although she refuses to pay much attention to him.

It is impressive to realize that our older animals have experienced moving from Crandon Park in 1981, plus catastrophic natural events like Hurricane Andrew, with healthy spirits and bodies intact. This is a tribute to the

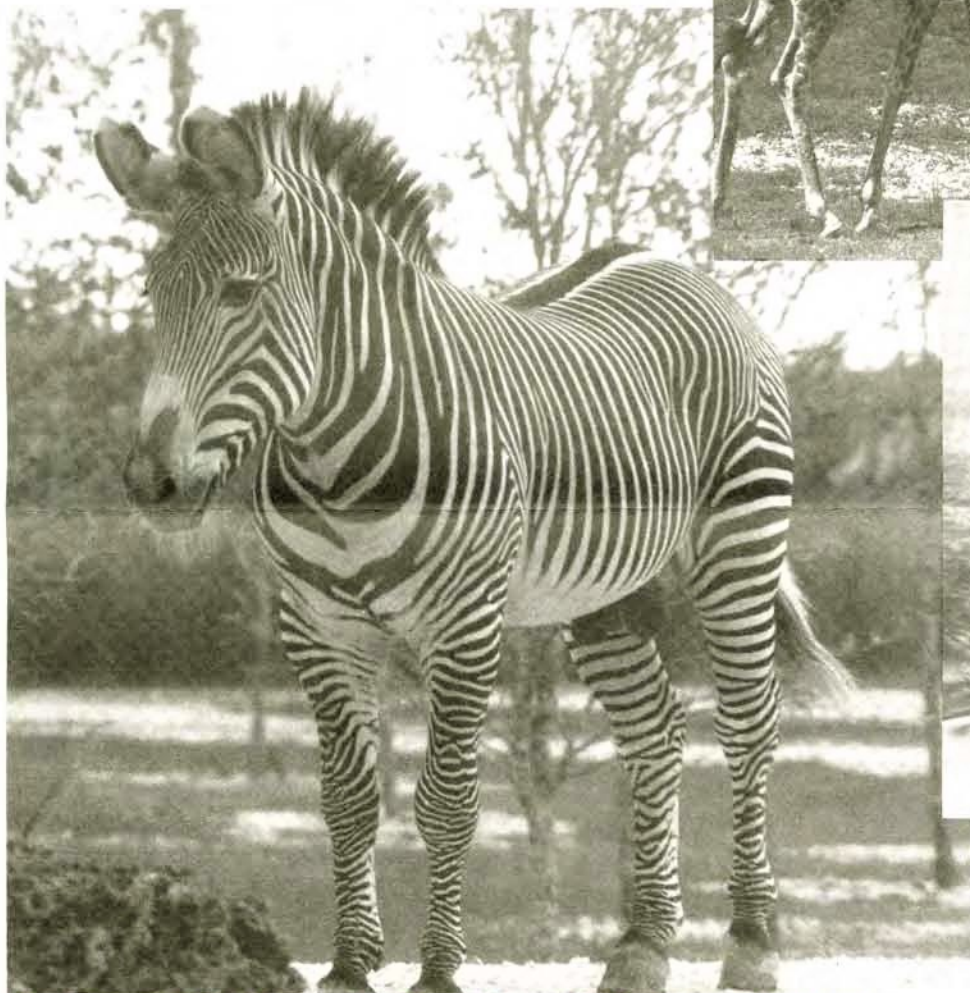
efforts of all our dedicated staff over the years as well as to the resilience of the animals and their adaptability to our climate.

Some of our other venerable old specimens (although not record-holders) are "Honey," a 28-year-old pygmy hippo; the appropriately named "Pops," our 24-year-old Grevy's zebra who has fathered 13 babies; and our Indian rhinoceros "Mohan," whose 25th birthday is coming up in June.

Animals don't show age gradually, like people do. They tend to develop observable signs of age very

late and then deteriorate rapidly. In the wild, overt signs of aging are a flag to predators. And this brings us to the last, and probably not least, factor in the longer life span of zoo animals: low stress. Not being the prey of a big cat does wonders for the blood pressure!

The next time you and your family visit the zoo, ask our volunteers or staff to introduce you to some of these long-lived Metrozoo residents. ■



Top: Sexta is our senior female reticulated giraffe.

Bottom: Pygmy hippo "Honey" is still feisty at 28.

As a father of 13, 24-year-old "Pops" is patriarch of our zebra herd.

On the cover, Mohan, an Indian rhino, turns 25 this June.

— cover photo by Alex Worden