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Stingray Bay Opens Today

Renovated exhibit part of \$7 million Australian Adventure makeover

Guests at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo can now explore Stingray Bay when they visit the Australian Adventure.

The exhibit, which features a 20,000-gallon saltwater tank depicting a fishing village and Australian mangrove swamp filled with stingrays, opens today, September 3.

"We're thrilled to introduce our guests to these awesome animals," said Zoo Director Jim Anderson.

Two species of stingray inhabit the tank – southern stingrays and cownose rays – for a total of 20 stingrays in the exhibit. Southern stingrays can grow up to five feet wide from fin to fin. Cownose rays are smaller at 24-30 inches wide.

Guests can view the stingrays through the chest-high, clear acrylic walls of the tank. Or, guests can choose to reach over the walls in hopes of touching a stingray as it swims past.

Stingrays have barbed venomous spines at the bases of their tails, which are used for defense against predators. At the zoo, these spines have been trimmed and removed, so there is no danger to guests.

Closely related to sharks, stingrays are a type of fish with skeletons made of cartilage rather than bone. They breathe by taking in water and passing it over their gills to extract oxygen. Stingrays' downward-facing mouths are filled with stubby teeth that crush clam and snail shells. After the flesh is eaten, shell fragments are spit out. At the zoo, keepers feed whole fish to the stingrays by hand. They also scatter food in the tank, allowing the rays to forage.

Stingray Bay occupies the former Nocturnal Building, which once housed bats, echidnas (spiny anteaters), and other creatures active at night.

The new exhibit will emphasize ocean conservation. “We want to empower our guests to make choices that help our oceans,” said Anderson. Staff at Stingray Bay will distribute information to help guests choose sustainable seafood at grocery stores and restaurants.

Stingray Bay is part of a \$7 million, three-phase renovation of the Australian Adventure, which was originally built in 1987 at a cost of \$2.5 million. All funds for the current project, as well as the 1987 project, were donated by individuals, foundations, and businesses. The zoo is especially grateful to the Gary Probst Family, sponsor of Stingray Bay.

“Stingray Bay was made possible with the generous support of the Gary Probst Family. Mr. Probst also donates his time and talents as a zoo board member. Everything you see at the zoo is built with the support of our community,” Anderson shared.

Phase 1 of the Australian Adventure renovation opened in 2014 and included visitor amenities such as expanded restaurant seating, additional restrooms, and improvements to the train station, which was renamed the Z.O.&O. Railroad.

Phase 2 of the Australian Adventure renovation includes Stingray Bay and The Reef, which opened in May and features a 17,000-gallon tank filled with tropical fish, and a 50,000-gallon tank housing 2,000 schooling fish and five sharks.

The Outback in the Australian Adventure closed on August 11 so construction could begin on Phase 3 of the Australian Adventure. Scheduled to open in 2016, Phase 3 of the Australian Adventure will include a play stream called Crocodile Creek, new bird aviaries, a new reptile exhibit, and renovations to the River Ride, kangaroo yard, and dingo exhibit. The zoo is also scheduled to receive Tasmanian devils from Australia as part of an Australian government program aimed at protecting this species. Wild Tasmanian devils are under severe threat from a deadly transmissible cancer.

Donations to the Australian Adventure Capital Campaign are welcome. For \$400, a Recognition Tile can be engraved with the names of individuals, families, and businesses and displayed on a decorative wall at the Australian Adventure entrance. For donation information, visit kidszoo.org or contact the zoo at 260-427-6800.

Stingray Bay Facts:

- Tank volume: 20,000 gallons of artificial seawater
- Species: Southern Stingrays and Cownose Rays
- Location: Australian Adventure exhibit

Stingray Facts

- Stingrays are closely related to sharks.
- Stingrays breathe underwater with gills. Water enters through the spiracles and as it passes over the gills, oxygen seeps through the walls of tiny blood vessels and into the blood. Gills perform the same function as our lungs, except that our lungs remove oxygen from the air.
- Stingrays have flat bodies, which allow them to lie flat on the sea floor, hidden in the sand. With eyes on top of their heads, they can watch for predators while remaining partially buried.
- Spines are used for defense. When rays feel threatened, they may raise their powerful tails and slam their barbed spines into attackers.
- Stingrays' spines are covered in venomous mucus. When the spines pierce flesh, the venom is released, causing severe pain.
- Stingrays flap their fins on the sea floor to uncover buried clams, snails, and fish.
- Stingrays' downward-facing mouths are filled with stubby teeth that crush clam and snail shells. After the flesh is eaten, shell fragments are spit out.
- Because stingrays' eyes are on top of their heads, they can't see food on the sea floor. Instead, rays find food by smelling, touching, and detecting tiny electrical fields emitted by every animal.

Mangrove Facts

- Mangrove trees grow where the freshwater of rivers and lagoons meets the saltwater of the ocean. Because of this the salinity of the water in a mangrove ecosystem can vary as the tides go in and out. Branching roots (called "prop roots") form underwater "forests" that shelter thousands of species, including stingrays, crabs, worms, and mollusks. These areas also serve as breeding grounds for many seagoing fish—the young fish grow up in the shelter of the mangrove roots until they are large enough to survive in the open ocean.
- Where mangroves are present, shorelines are protected from powerful ocean waves. On riverbanks, mangroves trap sediments before they flow into the ocean.
- Mangroves shed excess salt through leaves and bark. Special "breathing roots" poke up through the water to take in air.
- Bats, snakes, lizards, and insects live in mangrove treetops.
- Australia has the 3rd largest mangrove area of all countries in the world, after Indonesia and Brazil.

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About the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo: The Fort Wayne Children's Zoo's mission is to connect kids and animals, strengthen families, and inspire people to care. The zoo is northeast Indiana's largest tourist attraction, hosting more than 500,000 guests annually. The zoo was named the **#7 zoo in the United States** and the **#20 zoo in the**

world by TripAdvisor, received the 2014 and 2015 **TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Award**, was voted **Indiana's #1 "Gotta-Do Summer Attraction,"** and is consistently named one of the nation's **Top Ten Zoos for Kids** by national media outlets.

The zoo is a conservation leader, contributing more than \$80,000 annually to local, regional, and international efforts to protect wild animals and habitats, and participating in cooperative management programs for 91 endangered species and taxa. The zoo was named Northeast Indiana's **Sustainable Business of the Year** in 2014.

As a self-supporting facility, the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo receives no tax dollars for operations. The zoo's operations are funded entirely by earned revenue and donations.

The zoo is open 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM daily; last admission 5:00 PM; exhibits, rides, & buildings close at 5:30 PM; grounds close at 6:00 PM. The zoo is open seven days a week through October 11, 2015. Admission is \$14.00 for adults; \$10.50 for seniors age 60+; and \$9.00 for children ages 2-18. Babies age 1 and under and Zoo Society Members are admitted free.

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