

Who Needs Pockets?

Given my fear of frogs, no matter how illogical it is, this video terrified me to the very core. I couldn't even watch the whole thing, and what I did see was watched with my feet picked up off the floor – just too creepy. But I still hope none of the buggers were injured in the filming of this video from youtube called “Who Needs Pockets?”

Biological Treasure Trove

As a change of pace from the usual “the world is falling apart”-type articles about conservation, I decided to share the following article from CNN.com about an area of Asia called the Mekong Delta region. Scientists are calling the place a “biological treasure trove” because of its rich diversity of flora and fauna. 1,068 species were discovered there between 1997 and 2007 alone; including 15 new species of mammals. Fascinating stuff AND something to read that contains *promising* news about the status of the Earth, rather than the usual bad news and negativity. Here is the article – I find the part about the hot pink cyanide-producing dragon millipede particularly interesting – there’s a picture of it on cnn.com, see the link at the bottom of this post.

(CNN) – A rat believed to be extinct for 11 million years, a spider with a foot-long legspan, and a hot pink cyanide-producing “dragon millipede” are among the thousand newly discovered species in the largely unexplored Mekong Delta region.

The “dragon millipede” is among the 1,068 new species discovered in the Mekong Delta region.

more photos » The region, including parts of Vietnam and five other countries, is home to 1,068 species found between 1997 and 2007, according to a World Wildlife Fund report released this week.

Some of the creatures were not lurking in fertile floodplains or tropical foliage.

A scientist visiting an outdoor restaurant was startled to see a Laotian rock rat among the nearby wildlife. The hairy,

nocturnal, thick-tailed rat, which resembles a squirrel, had been thought for centuries to be extinct.

"There is a certain amount of shock because our scientists will sometimes see something that doesn't fit anything they know," said Dekila Chungyalpa, Director of the Fund's Mekong Program. "They run through a catalogue of wildlife in their brain, asking themselves, 'Have I seen this?'"

Perhaps a more startling discovery than the rat was a bright green pit viper scientists spotted slithering through the rafters of a restaurant in Khao Yai National Park in Thailand.

The Fund dubbed the Mekong a "biological treasure trove." The organization's report "First Contact in the Greater Mekong" says 519 plants, 279 fish, 88 frogs, 88 spiders, 46 lizards, 22 snakes, 15 mammals, four birds, four turtles, two salamanders and a toad were found.

Scientists are still trying to determine if they have uncovered thousands of new invertebrate species.

Scientists are discovering new species at a rate of two per week, said Chungyalpa, who said the reason for publishing the report now was twofold.

"We realized that we should highlight these discoveries in part because of the legacy of war and conflict in the region," she said. "There's an urgency with the threat of development in the Mekong countries."

A horned bovine found in 1991 living in the evergreen forests of the Annamite Mountains of Laos and Vietnam has not been found in recent years, she said.

Timber development and mining industries are encroaching. There are 150 large hydropower dams that have been constructed along the Mekong river, and another 150 are slated to be built, according to the Fund. Dams that can trap and kill fish

are at different stages of planning in the Greater Mekong.

High variation in geography and climate zones that enabled species to flourish are now jeopardized by climate change, said Chungyalpa.

War is always a threat in countries touched by the Mekong River, particularly Burma. Also known as Myanmar, the largest country by geographical area in mainland Southeast Asia has been ravaged over the years by conflict, political instability and natural disaster.

This summer, for example, the United Nations reported that as many as 100,000 people were killed by a cyclone that hit Myanmar. The country's ruling military junta blocked the outside world for weeks before allowing aid to flow into the region.

There are cultural obstacles to protecting rare species, too. Many restaurants serve them as food. Restaurants often have rickety bamboo floors that one can look through to see cages filled with exotic animals, Chungyalpa says. The more exotic the animal, the more status it often bestows on the person who consumes it.

"Reports [like the WWF's] are important because these regions can be educated," said Maureen Aung-Thwin, the director of The Burma Project, which is funded by the George Soros Foundation and supports local Indonesian organizations working toward an open society.

"People are taking climate change more seriously and even the ruling junta have a forestry NGO. There are glimpses of hope," said Aung-Thwin. "But it's also a situation where someone could step forward and say 'We don't need this' and cut it all down."

WWF said it is working with governments and industry to plan the conservation of more than 231,000 square miles of forest and freshwater habitats that cross borders with all countries

in the Greater Mekong.

The preceding article was published on CNN.com. To read the entire original article, [click here](#).

These Are A Few Of My Favorite Things...

animals. Animals are my favorite things. If I'm bored – yeah, right, with 4 kids, when does that happen? Ok, if I were ever bored, my activity of choice would be to visit a zoo, wildlife park, pet store, or anyplace I could see animals. Without leaving the house, I can also research animals on the internet. One of my favorite animal sites is the [University of Michigan's Animal Diversity Web](#). It's amazing how much they've changed the taxonomy (classification of animals) from when I first started doing research on the subject not more than 10 years ago, but it's true – this field is one that's ever-changing.

Every now and then, I think I'll choose an animal to share on my blog. Today's animal is the pangolin. What is a pangolin, you ask? Well, it's a mammal, and it's not a marsupial, a group which contains some of the lesser known species. See, in the classification of mammals, you begin by separating them into placental mammals (live birth) and marsupials (young live in the mother's pouch – all but one type live in Australia). Of course, there is also a third category – egg-laying mammals, but we won't go there because I don't want to lose people's interest by getting too complicated.

So anyway, the pangolin is a placental mammal, yet it's scaly. The scales are actually made of a hair-like material,

thereby preserving its status as mammal. Check this out – does this thing look prehistoric or what?



But they're not prehistoric; they still exist today – I wonder how come I've never seen one at a zoo? I guess it's because some animals do better in captivity than others, and I applaud the zoo community for recognizing this.

Interesting tidbits about pangolins, as stated on the Animal Diversity Web:

Pangolins are a small group (seven living species placed in one genus and one family, Manidae) of mammals that feed mostly on ants. They are found in the tropical regions of Africa and Asia. Pangolins are conspicuous and remarkable because their backs are covered with large, overlapping scales made up of agglutinated hairs. But they are strange in other ways as well. Their tongue is extraordinarily long and muscular, arising from the pelvis and the last pair of ribs deep in the animal's chest. As a result, the tongue and associated muscles are longer than the animal's head and body, allowing the tongue to be extruded to an astonishing degree. Pangolins lack teeth. Instead, the the pyloric part of their stomach is thickened and muscular, with odd keratinous spines projecting into its interior. It usually contains pebbles and seems to be used for "chewing" in much the same way as a bird's gizzard. Pangolins have the ability to close their ears and nostrils as well as eyes, presumably to keep ants out.

In short, pangolins are fascinating animals that are closer to you and me on the taxonomy tree than most people would guess – they are mammals, after all. Yet they are a mammal that most people have not heard of, and surprisingly, there are more than a few mammalian species that have this in common – I will try to share little known facts about little known mammals in my blog.

And oh yeah, since there was a complaint in the comments of another tangents.org blog about this – the song I quoted in my title is “My Favorite Things” from The Sound of Music.

Saturday Slobber

Well, school starts on Tuesday, so for one last summery hurrah, we ventured over to the coastal cities in Ohio on Lake Erie for some fun. First stop was the African Safari Park in Port Clinton, which is really more of a drive-thru zoo than anything having to do with Africa. They do have zebras, giraffes, and camels, but most of their animals hail from North America. It's always an extremely fun experience, and we try to go every year. Since this summer was very busy with the new baby and all, it didn't occur to me that we hadn't gone yet until I struck up a conversation with a really nice elderly couple at a restaurant the other day. When I asked where they were from, they replied, “west of Cleveland”, so that got me thinking about the Safari Park in Port Clinton. On the way home from the restaurant that night, I said to my husband, you know, we haven't been to the safari park this year... An idea was hatched, and there we were on Saturday with 6 of our closest friends.

Saturday morning was almost like a one-act play with all of us

standing there on our front porch, trying to figure out who was going to ride with whom; we were trying to find the best way to do things to be as economically (and environmentally) friendly as possible... We ended up taking just 2 cars for the 12 of us, and then once we got to Port Clinton, it was like musical chairs (cars) once again while we tried to figure out how to position everyone to get the most bang for our buck, so to speak, since the safari place charges by carload *and* by individual...

So anyway, after a stop at Cheese Haven In Port Clinton – and now I have to go off on yet another tangent because Cheese Haven is SOOO good and totally worth a stop if you're in the area. And what I mean by "in the area" is anywhere up to 100 or even 1000 miles, depending on how much you like cheese. They have so many varieties, along with fresh jerkies and beef sticks and other yummy treats. We stopped there to get our lunch of corned beef sandwiches – and they have the **best** corned beef sandwiches, yum. Unfortunately, I was not willing to take 4 kids into the cheese store to run around, so I was stuck in the car with the kids, but my oh-so-thoughtful hubby talked the worker into making me a sample bag (which they're not supposed to do, you only get the free samples if you go into the store, but hey, I was stuck in the car), AND he made my sandwich for me – how sweet ☺

Ok, tangent aside... now we've arrived at the Safari Park, and it is SO crowded... Makes me think twice about going there again next summer unless it's near their last weekend of operation like it was when we went last year... I mean, I just can't stand waiting in line to go to the bathroom, of all things... Waiting in line is not much fun at all, but when you're waiting in line to do something as necessary and as unrewarding as going to the bathroom, it's really annoying. So, because it was so crowded, it took us forever to get through the drive-through zoo part; although not as long as it took the other vehicle in our caravan because they were stuck

behind an obscenely slow white van the whole time... So while we got out of the drive-through section, they had barely just begun... But the whole park is a really cool place; even more so if you don't care about the vanity nor cleanliness of your car since there are some rather huge creatures (including deer, elk, elands, buffalo, zebras, giraffe and longhorns) who drool, head-butt, lick, slobber, and basically invade your car as your drive through *their* habitat. I think you must truly be an animal lover to appreciate the place since you come out filthy... This was the first time we had been there in our new car, but I'm happy to report no major damage, that I know about, at least; but what's this about driving our car through a pond, jamiahsh?!?

We'll get to the bottom of that later... when you come out of the drive-through part, it's time for the walk-through zoo section, and there they have monkeys, macaws (military, not green-winged as the sign said), ocelots, warthogs, alpacas, and tortoises; not to mention rides for the kiddees: ponies and camels. I noticed that they had 2 camels for riding; one was resting while the other gave the rides. But interestingly, one was a Dromedary and the other a Bactrian camel, the difference between the two species being mainly in how many humps they had... My daughters rode the Dromedary (1 hump), and they really seemed to enjoy themselves – I wonder if riding the Bactrian (2 humps) would have been any different? I was envious because I'm no where near the 125 lb. weight limit, so I'll probably never get to ride a camel... After that, we got to check out an animal show, ironically titled "Laugh With the Animals". It was ironic because our host for the show was so dry – she had the audience doing everything *but* laughing... It was a fun show, though, and something that we hadn't yet done at the park in our previous visits. Overall, an interesting day... as it is anytime you have 12 people on an outing together!

If you liked reading my synopsis of the day, check out my

fellow tangents.org blogger and get Jamiahsh's take on the whole thing. I'm going to take a lesson from him and blog this in 2 installments... got to leave the readers craving more, so they say! Check out my next post for a full summary of our visit to a year-round haunted house – Ghostly Manor in Sandusky, Ohio! Until then...

Lookit The Cute Meeses

Two baby moose are called what? Twin baby mooses, I guess... But anyway, check out this really cute video I received via email – a baby moose finds someone's backyard sprinkler, then he goes over and "tells" his mommy and twin brother about it, and they all enjoy themselves tremendously. The mommy moose grooms her babies in it, and the babies play together – it's SO cute!

Sure beats the other baby moose video I saw this week – we won't go into that (you fellow CNN junkies know what I'm talking about), just nature taking its course, I guess... But let's focus on the cute mooses (?) playing in the sprinkler instead:

[Click here](#) for some extremely cute baby animal action.

Crazy Busy

In the past few days, I've been able to catch up a little, but I haven't written much before today and yesterday because we

have been too busy having fun!

It started last Friday when we took the kids out to the [Fun Spot](#) in Angola Indiana. We had a great time, but I think I learned a lesson about taking 3 kids out for a full day of fun in the sun while I'm trying to nurse a full-term pregnancy. It was over 80°, and we ran out of water and I got sick. I think what pushed me over the edge was trying to watch my 20-month-old as she sat at the edge of a pool while my other children and husband went on the water slide. It's hard to explain to someone who doesn't know, but being this hugely pregnant is basically like being incapacitated – if my toddler had fallen into the water, it would have taken me way too long to get over to her. There was a lifeguard present, but still I was a nervous wreck and the stress of the situation was too much, so I picked her up and took her away from the pool. This of course made her cry, and so the exhaustion came from trying to redirect her and do something else in the heat... it was all just too much for me when all I wanted was a seat in the air conditioned arcade. And for his part, my husband only got to go down the waterslide once which also made me feel badly because he had so much fun, but I just couldn't handle our toddler any longer in the heat alone.

After the water slide fiasco, we made our way to the animal area – they have a macaw parrot and a few baby deer and some big cats. They are rescue cats; lions and tigers and a cougar, and I'm not sure where they were rescued from. I was a little disenchanted with how small the animals' enclosures were, but since they are large cats and spend roughly 20 hours a day sleeping, I think it's a good thing that they've been rescued at all and get food and shelter every day.

Then it was time for more rides, and this place is built for kids my daughters' ages! They have about 10 kiddie rides which all 3 of them could ride, and my 8-year-old still really enjoys these since she's not ready for big rides yet. Her little sister, on the other hand, cannot wait until she is a

little taller and gets to ride the 4 roller coasters the Fun Spot also has. Then they have several middle-of-the-road rides for everyone, like flying boats, a scrambler, a tilt-a-whirl, and even more I'm not mentioning. Compared to the carnival that just left our town, admission into the Fun Spot is a steal – it was \$4 for me, a non-rider who just wanted to visit the zoo. Our little toddler cost only \$4, and she was able to ride about 10 rides. Our 4-year-old was \$8, and my husband and our oldest were \$16 each. So for a grand total of \$48, it was a full day of family fun and much cheaper than the traveling carnival or even the county fair, based on what you get for your money. And I have to add that in June – too bad it's over now – but in June they had a special promotion where if you bring in a report card with A's and B's on it, the kid that earned them gets in free! So subtract \$16 from our \$48, and our day of fun was only \$32 – we were really pleased. The only problem with the place is that they are at the mercy of the weather always, and with all the rain and storms we've been getting, our day of fun was no exception and was cut short when a sudden storm moved in. But it was only an hour and a half away from closing anyway. Also, we had been about to leave as it was, and the staff handed out half-price admission coupons, so we will definitely be back when I can enjoy some of the rides myself after the baby is born. And I will be able to give hubby another few rounds on the water slide! We were so pleased with the place that we tried to go back Sunday since we wanted to take advantage of the report card promotion one more time before June was over, but alas, the weather foiled our plans and we ended up at [Crazy Pinz](#) in Fort Wayne, Indiana instead. Still a fun day, but no where near the value of Fun Spot. Crazy Pinz is an indoor entertainment place, and they have an arcade, mini-golf, bowling, and a 3-story play area for the kids. We've been there before and really liked it, but this time, everything had changed and was MUCH more expensive. But, we had 4 little kids (brought a friend along) who really thought we were doing something really fun that day, so what could we do but spend

the day at Crazy Pinz regardless. I have to mention that somehow, on the way to Fun Spot on Sunday, my husband and I got to talking I guess and somehow missed the exit and overshot the place by about 20 miles. (Sorry for not using you, Mr. GPS, I thought I knew where we were going!) Then Fun Spot was closed for rain, so we had to head down to Fort Wayne, and overall we ended up spending an extra \$20-30 on gas... Kind of a big oopsie with gas prices being so high in this day and age. It was a bad luck kind of day, but we did end up salvaging it, and overall, it was an AWESOME weekend.

Saturday we went with friends to see the movie [Wall-E](#) and then visited a friend who is recovering from heart surgery. He is doing well thankfully, and we all enjoyed our visit together – even the kids, who played with cats and bugs and other creatures found around their house in the country. We ran up to their church which was having an ice cream social and enjoyed delicious food and homeade ice cream – a dream for a pregnant lady – YUM! Wall-E was pretty good and as it turns out, the Pixar people had a brainstorming meeting years ago, and this is the last film to be made from ideas presented at that meeting. Others are [A Bug's Life](#), [Monster's Inc.](#), and [Finding Nemo](#), so needless to say, that brainstorming lunch should go down in history! I have to say I was a little taken aback by the lack of human dialogue in Wall-E. Even after seeing the previews, I wasn't prepared for it. I think this is what may have finished off my 4-year-old since she had to leave the movie theater with dad before the movie was even half over. She's been able to make it through the last 5-10 movies we've been to in a theater, so that's why I think it was the lack of dialogue in this one that did her in. It was a cute movie though, but not on par with Pixar's latest features like Monsters Inc. or especially Finding Nemo, at least in my opinion. Then again, it was SO different, mostly because it was so futuristic that I suppose it's hard to compare to the others.

So yeah, fun extended weekend, even though piles of laundry await my folding. If you're anywhere nearby, head out to Angola, Indiana and visit the Fun Spot, it's well worth it especially if you have really little ones – it totally trumps a place like Six Flags with their high admission prices and long lines.

Fun in South Bend Indiana

Of all the places to find fun, who would have thought that middle of nowhere, IN would be such a sight? Every summer, we meet my mom there about 4 times to swap the kids. She'll take them for a week, twice a summer, so because South Bend just happens to be about as close to halfway for each of us to drive, that is where we meet. We used to meet at a Wendy's just off the expressway, but our horizons have broadened, and my husband and I have been venturing off the beaten path to discover new things to see and do in the area. We found a good restaurant called Eleni's with amazing gyros and saganaki, two of our favorite dishes. We also found an authentic Greek restaurant called Elia's right down the street, but oddly enough, they are almost never open. They have more exotic Greek food like stuffed grape leaves, moussaka, and baklava, YUM! Their food is excellent, though we've only been able to eat there once because of their strange hours and seemingly constant family vacations. After eating and getting the kids back from my mom, we headed to the [Potawatomi Zoo](#). The zoo is a really cool size, perfect for our family of 3 small children and a now VERY pregnant woman. Not much walking to do at all, yet it has a good amount of animals, native and exotic, all types and sizes from lions, tigers, and bears, to monkeys, bison, alligators, parrots, and red pandas. I will have to mention that the Potawatomi Zoo did

not seem very well-kept. A gardener in that place could have done wonders as there were many overgrown weeds, trees, and shrubbery, some even blocking what could have been better views of the animals! One tree was so untrimmed it was blocking a drinking fountain! But as I said, it's a very cute little zoo, and they reciprocate with our home zoo, the Toledo Zoo, so our admission price was free and they don't charge for parking. I was surprised to see that the zoo wasn't very crowded seeing as how it was a Saturday in June under 90°... That zoo could really use a Jack Hanna to fix it up and get the publicity rolling – I see a lot of potential for it, but it does need some work.

After the zoo, we had kids begging for 'one more fun thing' (remember, they had been used to the fun of Grandma's for just short of a week!), my husband whips out Mr. GPS, and apparently he has a phone book feature on him, so from your car, you can find gas stations, restaurants, and most importantly, fun places and attractions to visit!

So KUDOS belong to Mr. GPS this time! Instead of getting us lost and chuckling at us electronically, he led us right to this strip mall that was like a step back in time, it was really strange. It looked like it was right out of 1983. I don't know how to explain it – we should have taken pictures. It would have been a great place to film a movie set in the early '80's, took me right back to my childhood. Anyway, in this strip mall was a place called Mega Play. From the outside, it looked closed down – they really need to get themselves a big bright 'open' sign. But once inside, it was a huge space where they had tons of video games, pinball machines, indoor minigolf, bouncy castles and tunnels for the kids, lots of ride-ons for toddlers, and right out of 1983 – a ball pit! The ball pit had a pyramid in the middle of it that the kids climb up with ropes and once they got the hang of it, they had a ball – cheesy pun intended. That pyramid gave me a flashback of playing on the same thing when I was little. I

think they used to have them in KMarts, and my husband agreed. It was neat to see vintage video games and pinball machines also. The arcade ATARI games they had in one bouncy castle area were free to play – they had Kangaroo, Pole Position, Asteroids, and some shooting game I hadn't heard of. I walked over to the pinball machine area because days earlier, we visited this cool pinball shop in a suburb of Toledo. The guy started it as a hobby, but it grew into a store, and he had all kinds of pinball machines, new and mostly vintage. He had titles on display like Demolition Man, Star Wars, The Shadow, and Hercules (an older game – it was HUGE!). He even had this Looney Tunes racing game (not pinball) that was really vintage and one-of-a-kind... it was cool to see. I wonder if the pinball guy outside of Toledo is familiar with Mega Play? But anyway, back to Mega Play... it was a huge, wide-open strip mall space that had tons of games, ride-ons, and bouncy castles packed into it – lots of fun there, but still spacey so you didn't feel closed in. It was the exact concept my husband and I had in mind for our own business of the same type we started a few years ago. We ended up having to sell the business because it was too labor intensive for the time and staff we had however. Too bad Mega Play is all the way in South Bend, or we could challenge our putt-putt-ing friends to the mini-golf course ☐

After Mega Play, it was time to find something to eat, and before we knew it, we were out of South Bend and into the country. The kids started getting crazier and crazier, and we vowed to stop at the very next restaurant we found before someone passed out or went insane – and some of us were close to either condition! So, we stopped at a restaurant called Dakota's in Elkhart IN, and I highly recommend it if you're ever out that way. They had the best cornbread, and their steak and cheese sandwich was simply AWESOME! They also have barbecue items, and they happened to have karaoke the night we went... it wasn't too intrusive though. They were in another room and we didn't even know it was karaoke at first until the

audience began applauding. The DJ hosting the karaoke was singing a few songs also, and he was pretty good, so he actually sounded like a recording with a live quality. I don't how often they have karaoke there, but their food is great, prices reasonable, nice atmosphere, and the staff is amazingly friendly. Keep in mind I say this coming from a super-friendly town myself, so we're used to the usual chit-chat when we go out to eat – but people in Elkhart were *exceptionally* friendly.

Overall, not a bad place to spend a day – fun and very inexpensive to boot. Too bad with gas prices the way they are we can't consider South Bend for a normal day trip for our family – there is plenty to do! Maybe we'll wander around some more the next time we meet Grandma there in July...

I Never Thought About the Crate Being Square and the Turnstile Being Round...

In case you've missed my previous posts about animals and Jack Hanna, let me explain that Jack Hanna is my favorite celebrity and how much I really enjoy following his adventures through zoo life. In case you don't know who Jack is, he is the man who gave Columbus, Ohio a zoo. They did have one before, even though many residents weren't even aware of it, but with Jack's brilliance in zoo management and marketing, the [Columbus Zoo](#) has become one of the most renowned zoos in the world today. These days, Jack spends his time filming tv shows of his own, and also bringing animals around the country for appearances in theaters and on other tv shows, such as

David Letterman, Maury Povich, and Good Morning America in order to educate people about respecting animals. Whenever animals are involved, situations can easily become unpredictable. Throw Jack into the mix, and these situations now become hilariously entertaining *and* unpredictable. Things seem to happen to Jack, and if you'd like an example of what I mean, check out the following article detailing an animal mishap Jack encountered at the airport last September:

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) – Animal expert Jack Hanna and an 11-month-old flamingo became trapped while trying to squeeze through an airport security turnstile. It took firefighters to finally get the flamingo out. Animal expert Jack Hanna had a close encounter with a flamingo Sunday. Hanna, the director emeritus of the Columbus Zoo and a frequent guest on nationally televised talk shows, was returning from a zoo fundraiser with a mongoose, a small leopard and the flamingo. Three other people were with them. The entourage arrived at the Ohio State University Airport just after midnight Sunday to find the terminal closed. The only way to leave the tarmac was through a 10-foot-tall metal turnstile with several horizontal bars – not the easiest exit to squeeze through when you're traveling with boxed-up animals, Hanna said. **"I never thought about the crate being square and the turnstile being round,"** he said. Hanna, 60, pushed the flamingo's 2-foot-by-3-foot compartment into the turnstile, then continued pushing while straddling the crate. "I was stuck like a worm. My eyes were as big as grapefruits," he said. "I can't describe the feeling in my stomach. I can't move up or down. The bars are on your face." Hanna said he eventually squirmed free, leaving the flamingo still wedged inside and everyone else trapped on the tarmac. He then walked to a nearby fire station for help. It took three firefighters to hoist the flamingo's crate up and out of the turnstile, he said. Columbus fire department logs show the firefighters arrived at the airport at 12:30 a.m. for a "flamingo rescue," spokeswoman Kelly McGuire said. Hanna joked that the next time he flies

through the airport, the biggest animal he'll bring is a gerbil.

If you were entertained by the preceding article, I highly recommend Jack's book [Monkeys on the Interstate](#) which details his life before and during his days at the Columbus Zoo – it's a VERY entertaining and funny read, especially for animal lovers and zoo enthusiasts. I really hope I can schedule some time to catch Jack at one of his appearances soon, but until then, I will keep checking for him on Letterman and will probably check out the book for a fourth time!

Lions and Tigers and Bears Oh My

I am greatly anticipating our scheduled visit to the Toledo Zoo next week. My daughter needs a specialty dentist in the big city, so we've decided to throw some fun in there as well with a trip to the zoo. It will probably be my last one until after I have the baby, unless they have a wagon available for rental that's big enough for very pregnant me AND the 3 kids. Since it's only March and I'm not due until July, I think I can still handle the large amount of walking it takes to get around the zoo – we'll see anyway. I naively thought that pregnancies would get easier with experience, but it seems that I forgot to factor in my increasing age – I am almost 10 years older than I was the first time I was with child – and I feel it!

Toledo Zoo is very large. It's a very nice zoo, but there is lots of walking. It remains one of my favorite zoos in the country however, and I've visited at least 20. Toledo has

lots of animals, but they are pretty spread out. Also, because the zoo straddles a major road, you have to trek up and down a ramp and across a long pedestrian bridge; all of which is not so much fun if pregnant or in the heat of the summer. But overall, it is one of my favorite zoos. Even though the gorilla's indoor exhibit is pretty small, I really enjoy how close you can see them, and they don't seem unhappy being in a small exhibit... unlike a gorilla at the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Nebraska. He had a really small indoor enclosure, and we witnessed him charge at a little boy – it was very scary and thank goodness that glass was thick! This was years ago, and I think Henry Doorly has since re-built their gorilla exhibit. Another zoo with a lot of walking is the Brookfield Zoo near Chicago, Illinois. Brookfield has lots of walking, but unlike Toledo, the animals are spaced further apart, so much of the walking is without seeing animals. It's been a few years since I've been there, so maybe they've changed this, but it's not one of my favorite zoos, unless we're talking about sentimental reasons – it was the site of my husband's and my first “unofficial” date. One zoo that sticks out in my memory as one of my favorites is the Folsom Children's Zoo in Lincoln, Nebraska. The name is misleading, they had quite an array of animals there; including red pandas, camels, reindeer, leopards, monkeys, a variety of reptiles, seals, sloths, emus that like to be pet, and there are still many more I haven't named. All in only 19 acres, nestled right in the city. Which sounds large, but once you get in there, it was really the perfect size. Not much walking at all, lots of animals who all had lots of room in their environments, and it was very nicely landscaped with mature trees and such so that you forgot you were in the middle of the city. We used to live close enough to walk there, but the only problem with this great little zoo is that it was only open from April – October. If you are ever in Nebraska, the Folsom Children's Zoo is a must-see. Being a native Chicagoan, it's strange that I've never visited the Lincoln Park Zoo, which is also in the middle of a city,

albeit a much larger one than Lincoln. But I've heard good things about it, and maybe one of these days, during one of our bi-yearly visits to the area, we will give Lincoln Park a whirl so I can add it to my zoo resume.

Before our trips to the zoo, I like to visit a really cool website to brush up on my animal facts. It really makes zoo trips more interesting if you know a little more about what you're looking at. Check out this online database that is maintained by the University of Michigan:
<https://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/index.html>

And finally, if you are still reading this, you must be an animal lover like me. If you also like to read, I highly recommend my favorite book written by my favorite celebrity: Jack Hanna, called "Monkeys on the Interstate". If you ever watch The Late Show with David Letterman, you know that poor Jack often comes across as a bumbling fool when he's on the show. He is an animal expert however, and he is much more entertaining to watch than most animal experts. He and Letterman tease each other mercilessly, and there is almost always some sort of animal mishap that occurs when Jack is involved, always with hilarious results. His book is a narrative of the same sort of episodes, all taken from his life as he was growing up and also from when he went on to become the director of the Columbus Zoo. By the way, being an Ohioan, I've had the opportunity to visit the Columbus Zoo, and I will say that it did not disappoint. If you read Jack's book, you will read about how he brought the zoo from anonymity (he notes in his book that when he first arrived in Ohio, people would always ask him, "there's a zoo in Columbus?!?") to one of the most renowned facilities in the world. There was a lot of trial and error involved in achieving this, and again, many hilarious hijinks, all of which are detailed in the book – it is really entertaining reading. And it's not just a clever title – there really were Monkeys on the Interstate, thanks to Jack and one of his hare-

brained ideas! Maybe I will take another look at it on the long ride to Toledo next week...