



Photos by Anthony Forney

Bob Tenwinkel and Deanna Gardiner, of Seattle, are stopped by three bears. The bears, native to Alaska and Canada, have been known to pull things from cars with open windows.

## Endangered species find homes at Wildlife Safari

By Rebecca Merritt  
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A little more than an hour south of Eugene, bengal tigers, African elephants and wild zebras roam more than 600 acres that have been dedicated to preserving the world's endangered species.

During the past 21 years, the same 600 acres have become internationally famous for their unique ability to successfully breed cheetahs. About 108 cheetah cubs have been brought to life at Wildlife Safari in Winston, more than anywhere else in the Western Hemisphere.

"It's a lot of luck really," said Kassie McLellen, public relations assistant at Wildlife Safari.

Cheetahs, like most of the safari's 100 wildlife species, are losing their habitat in the wild and are facing a decreased chance of survival. Wildlife Safari, said McLellen, offers these endangered animals a chance to survive, as well as reproduce, in a healthy, wildlife environment.

Wildlife Safari first opened in 1972 due to the efforts of Frank Hart, managing director and president of the Safari Game Search Foundation. After taking numerous trips to Africa, Hart noticed the depleting numbers of wildlife and wanted to create a wildlife reserve. While allowing its visitors to view rare, endangered species, Hart's park was created for wildlife research, public education and breeding endangered species.

Hart, McLellen said, chose to build his wildlife park in Southern Oregon because the area reminded him of Africa. Operating year round, Wildlife Safari is the only drive-through wildlife park in Oregon.

The park was reorganized in 1980 by a non-profit organization, the Safari Game Search Foundation Inc. Wildlife Safari operates on visitor fees, membership fees, grants and donations.

Wildlife Safari attracts about 175,000 visitors yearly and offers educational programs to a number of schools

in Oregon and Northern California.

"People just feel a bond with animals and like to see animals in their natural setting," McLellen said. "We work hard to keep our animals healthy. I think that really shows to our visitors."

Although the animals at Wildlife Safari maintain their wild instincts, the animals aren't taken directly from their wild environments of Africa and Asia. Wildlife Safari obtains its animals through the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

The park buys, sells or trades animals with a network of zoos. This summer, McLellen said, the wildlife reserve plans to add giraffes to its growing animal collection.

Animals are looked after by trained wildlife rangers, and a curator is responsible for the buying, selling and mixing of animals. The park has to conduct extensive research and experimentation to determine which animals could most easily adapt to the Oregon environment.

Most animals at the safari, however, do not mix with other species, so the park maintains separate areas for different species. The more dangerous species, lion and tiger species, are fenced off from the other animals for safety reasons.

Sixteen species of wildlife animals at the safari, McLellen said, are listed on the endangered species list and are part of the safari's species survival plan. The program matches by computer animals with the most diverse gene pools that could successfully breed together to ensure reproduction.

A visit to Wildlife Safari includes a drive through Africa, Asia and North America, the park's three divisions. In Africa, visitors view the hippopotamus, Damarra zebras, the southern white rhinoceros and the African lion. Barbary sheep, watusi cattle and ostriches also roam Africa.

Main attractions in Asia include the bengal tiger, cheetahs, bactrian camels, nilgai and white fallow deer. In North America, visitors drive past bison, Alaskan brown bears, bald eagles and elk.

Wildlife Safari plans to add an Oregon territories section that would feature animals native to Oregon. Wolves, coyotes and elk would be included in the new addition. The park has also purchased cougars that will be put in the park as soon as an appropriate structure is built to house the animals.

McLellen said the safari tries to keep animals wild for the safety of both the animals and visitors. While some animals are hand-raised, most are kept in their natural, wild environment.

"When they are wild they are more predictable,"

McLellen said. It is also safer that animals not get used to people, so they don't tip over any cars, she said.

Carnivores are locked up at night, also for safety precautions. Because most animals at the safari were born in zoos, she said, the park generally does not have any problems.

"They are all born and raised in captivity so they really don't know anything else," McLellen said.

Once the drive-through tour is completed, visitors can wander through Safari Village and visit the park's petting

zoo. A hand-raised cheetah is displayed in the village that is used for educational programs. Tourists can also visit the Education Center and new safari theater and can view one of seven of the safari's animal education programs.

As well as organizing about 100 school assemblies each year, the safari also offers special programs throughout the year. Saturday is Conservation Day, kicking off Zoo and Aquarium Month. The safari will try to build a giant recycling ball of tin foil.

Those who bring a ball of tin foil the size of a softball will receive a dollar of regular admission.

People interested in the Wildlife Safari could either volunteer to help with the maintenance of the park or adopt an animal. Currently, about 50 volunteers assist the park ranger and help guide tourists. Safari enthusiasts could also purchase a membership in the Safari Game Search Foundation.

Located just off Interstate 5 Exit 119, Wildlife Safari is open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. McLellen suggests that people visit the park in the morning or evening because that is when most animals are at their best.

Admission costs are \$8.95 for adults, \$7.50 for senior citizens and \$5.75 for children. Children three and under are free. For more information, call 679-6761.



Three sika deer examine passing tourists.



A white-handed gibbon swings around its habitat.