

## LOCAL, STATE &amp; REGION

## OREGON ZOO

# When polar bear Nora returns, a vastly upgraded exhibit awaits

BY KALE WILLIAMS

The Oregonian

When Nora, the fan-favorite polar bear who departed the Oregon Zoo in 2017, returns to Portland next month, she'll come back to a very different space than she left.

The new exhibit, called Polar Passage, represents the zoo's commitment to conservation, research and animal welfare, according to Amy Cutting, a curator at the zoo.

"We really wanted to focus on increasing scientific literacy," Cutting said.

Some of the aesthetic upgrades will be obvious to anyone who visited the old exhibit, which was built in the mid-'80s.

Gone are the tall rock walls that surrounded the two public-facing yards in the old habitat. In their place, two open yards will give Nora four times as much space as she previously had. Where before the polar bears walked on concrete, they'll now plant their paws on soft dirt and grass, which was being seeded last week.

Polar Passage features two salt-water pools, one of them 14 feet deep with opportunities for zoo goers to see Nora both above and below the waterline. The new exhibit has hills at the center of each yard so the bears will be able to look out over the surrounding zoo grounds, now able to see the chimps and orangutans that before they could only smell with their powerful noses.

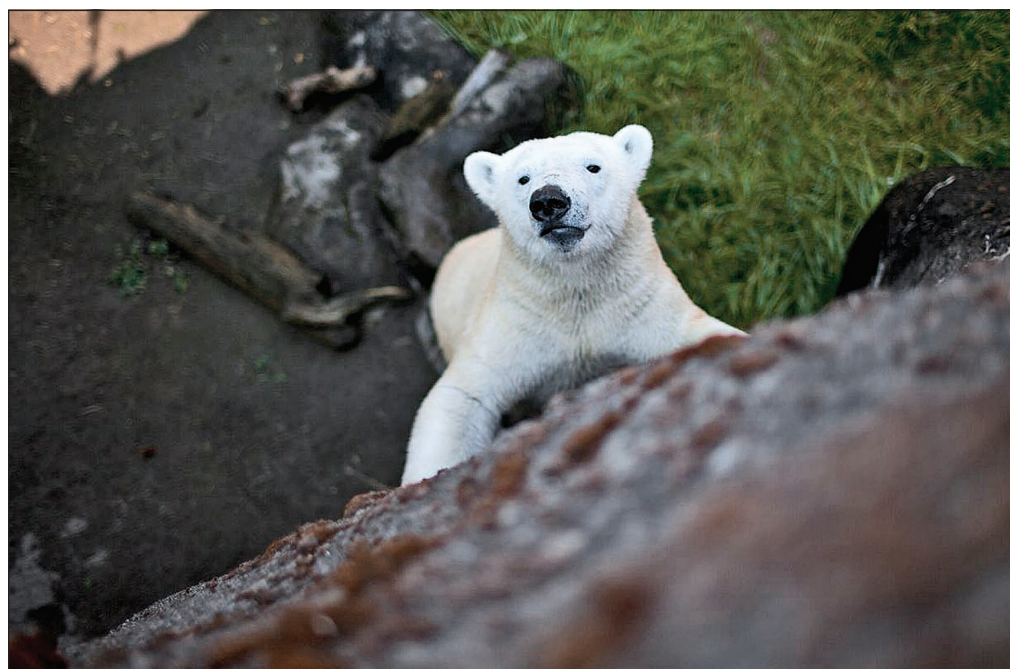
Just as the bears will be able to see out, people will be able to see in. Nora, and any bears that join her in the future, will be viewable from almost all sides as opposed to the few viewing windows where zoo guests clamored for a glimpse of Nora in the previous space.

Construction of Polar Passage is one of the final projects made possible by a \$125 million bond package passed by Portland voters in 2008.

## On the cutting edge

The Oregon Zoo has long been on the cutting edge of conservation science with captive animals, especially polar bears. Working with Conrad and Tasul, the brother-and-sister polar bears that lived at the zoo before Nora's arrival, keepers at the zoo became the first in the world to successfully draw blood from the dangerous beasts without first anesthetizing them.

The zoo became home to a



Dave Killen/The Oregonian file

Nora the polar bear cub plays at the Oregon Zoo in this archive photo. In a new exhibit, Nora — and any bears that join her in the future — will be viewable from almost all sides as opposed to the few viewing windows where zoo guests clamored for a glimpse of Nora in the previous space.

one-of-a-kind swim chamber capable of calculating a polar bear's oxygen intake while walking and swimming. Biologists from the U.S. Geological Survey outfitted Tasul with a collar to gather data about the bear's movements to aid in studying wild bears.

That legacy will continue in the new exhibit. One of the few remnants of the old habitat is a small room where the same swim chamber remains. Researchers already have tentative plans to return to work with Nora.

But the work that led to the monumental blood draw in 2011 all happened behind the scenes. Over months, keepers worked with Tasul to get her comfortable putting her paw in a modular box affixed to one of the gates in an area out of public view.

That work in the future will happen out in the open. In an area the zoo is calling the Arctic Science Center, keepers will now do those training exercises in full view of zoo goers under a memorial to Tasul and Conrad.

"I'm excited to bring that back-of-house experience to the public," Cutting said.

That type of research is important for a variety of reasons. Polar bears are extremely difficult to study in the wild, which is where they face the greatest threats.

As climate change warms the Arctic, the sea ice that the bears use to hunt is rapidly diminishing.

Cutting said making that

connection, from polar bears like Nora to the plight her wild counterparts face, will be front and center at the zoo's new exhibit.

"These animals are real, and they are special, and they are important," Cutting said.

Though the new exhibit has enough space for up to five bears, Nora will be alone when she arrives in March. Then, Cutting said, Nora will likely be joined by another bear later this year.

The new exhibit is expected to open to the public in mid-April after Nora undergoes a customary 30-day quarantine.

## TODAY

It's Sunday, Feb. 28, the 59th day of 2021. There are 306 days left in the year.

### Today's Highlight in History:

In 2013, Benedict XVI became the first pope in 600 years to resign, ending an eight-year pontificate. Benedict was succeeded the following month by Pope Francis.

In 1784, John Wesley, the co-founder of Methodism, chartered the first Methodist Church in the United States in Leesburg, Virginia.

In 1849, the California gold rush began in earnest as regular steamship service started bringing gold-seekers to San Francisco.

In 1953, scientists James D. Watson and Francis H.C. Crick announced they had discovered the double-helix structure of DNA.

In 1975, 42 people were killed in London's Underground when a train smashed into the end of a tunnel.

In 1993, a gun battle erupted at a religious compound near Waco, Texas, when Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents tried to arrest Branch Davidian leader David Koresh on weapons charges; four agents and six Davidians were killed as a 51-day standoff began.

In 1996, Britain's Princess Diana agreed to divorce Prince Charles. Their 15-year marriage officially ended in August 1996; Diana died in a car crash in Paris a year after that.

In 2005, in Santa Maria, California, the prosecution and defense gave opening statements in the sexual

molestation trial of Michael Jackson, who was later acquitted.

**Ten years ago:** The United States and European allies intensified efforts to isolate Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, redoubling demands for him to step down, questioning his mental state and warning that those who stayed loyal to him risked losing their wealth and facing prosecution for human rights abuses.

**Five years ago:** "Spotlight" won the Academy Award for best picture of 2015; Brie Larson was recognized as best actress for "Room" while Leonardo DiCaprio was named best actor for "The Revenant."

**One year ago:** The number of countries touched by the coronavirus climbed to nearly 60; Nigerian authorities reported the first case in sub-Saharan Africa, and Mexico said it had two confirmed cases.

**Today's Birthdays:** Architect Frank Gehry is 92. Actor-director-dancer Tommy Tune is 82. Hall of Fame auto racer Mario Andretti is 81. Actor Frank Bonner is 79. Actor Mercedes Ruehl is 73. Actor Bernadette Peters is 73. Former Energy Secretary Steven Chu is 73. Comedian Gilbert Gottfried is 66. Actor John Turturro is 64. Rock singer Cindy Wilson is 64. Actor Rae Dawn Chong is 60. Rock singer Pat Monahan is 52. Actor Rory Cochrane is 49. Actor Ali Larter is 45. Country singer Jason Aldean is 44. Actor Geoffrey Arend is 43. MLB relief pitcher Aroldis Chapman is 33. Actor Quinn Shephard is 26.

— The Associated Press



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