

-Up front

It's an animal lover's haven! A 1,400-acre zoological park

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Lions and tigers and bears — Oh my!

And giraffes, and ostriches, and rhinoceroses, and elephants, and baboons, and antelope and exotic birds . . . and they're all only about an hour's drive from Chapel Hill.

More than 700 animals reside in natural habitats at the North Carolina Zoological Park near Asheboro. So, take a road trip. A safari, if you will. You don't have to be Dr. Doolittle to go and talk to the animals.

The zoo occupies 1,400 acres in the Uwharrie Mountain range in Randolph County. There are no bars — just rocks, gullies, moats, vegetation and clear glass separating you from the animals in one of the largest land-area zoos on earth.

Plan to wear your hiking boots if you opt to take the approximately 2-mile trek around the zoo's perimeter. Or, if your feet are just too tender for all that walking (or you're simply too lazy), a tram ride is available for \$1.

Once you're there, prepare for the journey into Africa, the first completed continent of the seven continents planned for the zoo.

The first habitat you'll come to is the Forest Edge, where, if you're lucky, you'll see giraffes, zebras and

ostriches roaming the grassy veldt.

"On the 40-acre plains, you'll see gazelles, impalas, kudu and other hooved African species running freely. Nearby, the African elephants relax, and sometimes play, in a 3.5-acre, grassy, tree-dotted area. There is also a pond where the animals can sometimes be found trying to cool off in hot weather. In the adjacent area you will find the elephants' huge counterparts, two 3,000 pound Southern white rhinos."

For bird lovers, the R.J. Reynolds Forest Aviary consists of a glittering plexiglass dome that encloses 18,000 square feet and houses over 150 brilliantly colored birds and 2,300 exotic plants.

Gary Hanson, keeper at the aviary, said the birds are slowly introduced into the environment of the aviary. He said the cage is put out into the aviary for a few days. "The bird is put out with the others when it is ready," Hanson said.

While you're wandering through the pavilion's exotic plants, look for the bright scarlet ibis, African spoonbills and Mandarin duck wading through shallow pools, and the Victoria crowned pigeon or Palawan peacock pheasant waddling through the undergrowth. Then look up to catch the rainbow-colored canopy birds in flight as they ascend to the lofty treetops.

If you still want to monkey around, visit the baboon island, where a family of Hamadryas baboons frolic on a rocky mound surrounded by a moat. The inhabitants, especially the young ones, may run, jump, and scream at you, but they'll seldom be still. And there's also a watchful adult male who, with his huge size and gray mane, regally surveys his domain.

Next, you can enter into the lion and chimpanzee habitats. In the shade of realistic-looking, towering rock walls, you may catch a pride of lions napping. Nearby, nine chimpanzees make their home in a habitat designed to resemble the hilly, deciduous forests from which they come.

Director Robert Fry says the zoo's purpose is to provide education, recreation, research and the conservation, preservation, and propagation of animal life. But that's not all. The park is still expanding. Habitats encompassing the entire continent of North America will soon be visible in North Carolina.

Visitor relations coordinator Greta Lint said that Project North America is the zoo's second expansion since the African Plains Exhibits. The zoo hopes to have animal habitats from seven continents within the next 20 years.

Lint said that although the zoo is just starting to grow in size, it employs over 250 full-time

African plains because the animals were all up close, and there were explanations on the walls that told about all the animals and their habitats," sophomore Kirsten Kalkurst said.

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Hope the gorilla

employees, and, in peak months, 150 volunteers help out.

The staff will certainly grow in the future as the North American exhibits become a reality. Public Information Coordinator Rod Hackney said seven major habitat areas in the North American project have been set for completion by 1991. The 200-acre, \$30-million project will include 40 exhibits containing 95 species of animals and as many as 200 species of plant life.

The seven planned habitat areas are:

- The Rocky Coast, which will feature animals and plants native to the Arctic, west coast and north Atlantic shorelines. Polar bears, Arctic foxes, California sea lions and snowy owls will inhabit a man-made northwestern America landscape.

- The Desert Pavilion — a two-story, climate-controlled structure that will house creatures such as roadrunners, kangaroo rats, kit foxes, gila monsters and rattlesnakes in sand dunes and gypsum hills. Vegetation will include sage, yucca and mesquite, and a lava cave will be created for nocturnal animals and

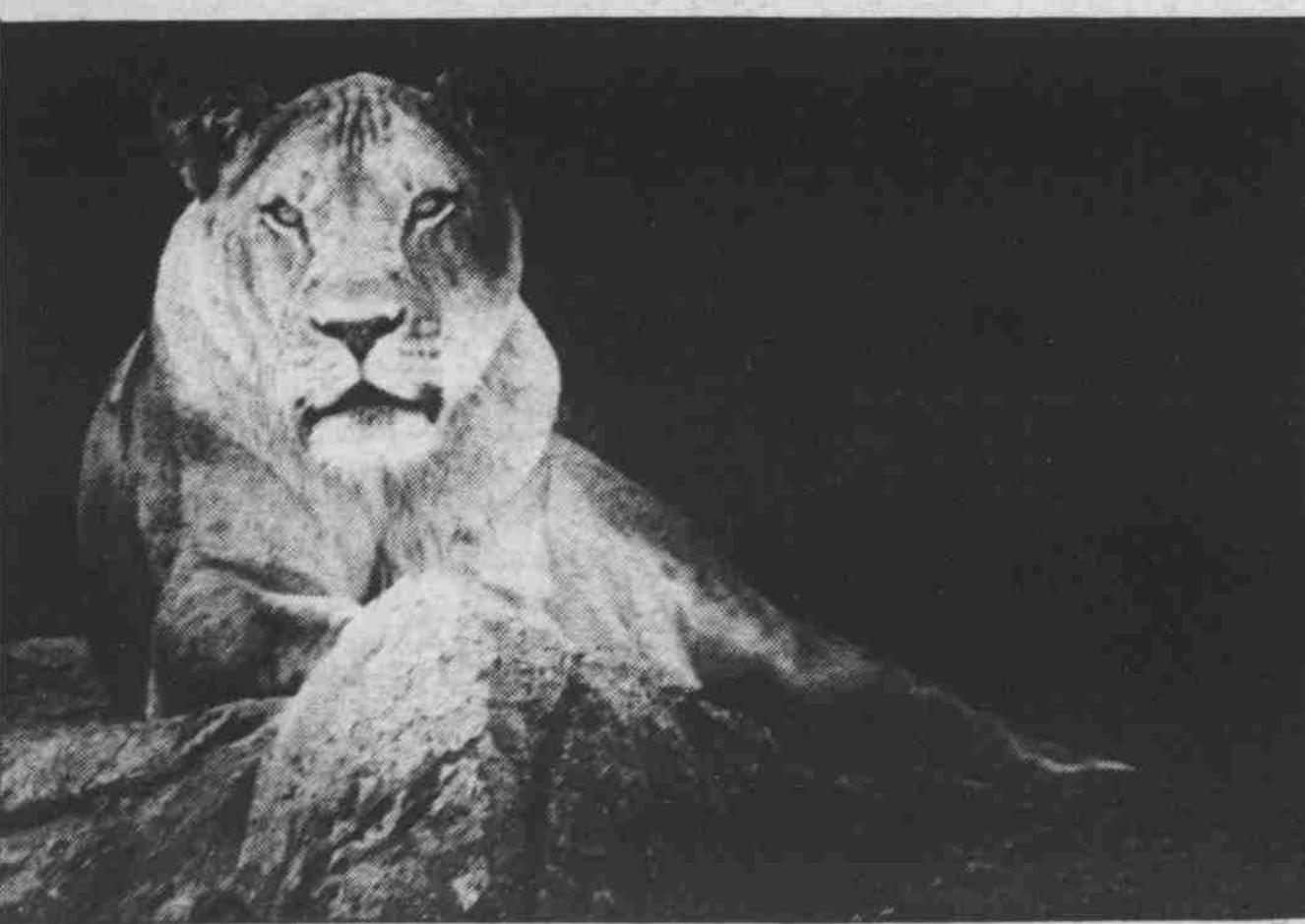
- The Marsh — an acre of marshland complete with lagoon and dunes



Young giraffe



Pink flamingo



Lioness

that will draw native and migrant birds to the exhibit. Plants will include wild rice, cattails, bulrushes, and water lilies.

Hackney said that in addition to the exhibits, Project North America will have an educational center and a medical complex. "This project will continue the growth and progress of the world's first zoo planned completely around the natural habitat concept," Hackney said.

Sara Ryan, the park's curator of education, said that the zoo officials try to instill in their visitors a sense of wonder of the animals. "It's basically a living classroom," she said.

More than 60,000 schoolchildren attend the outdoor classroom, and a total of 500,000 people visit the exhibits every year.

While you're learning, you may get lucky and witness an animal give birth or perhaps watch the animal clean and nurse the young for the first time — but only if you're patient, Schobert said.

Staff officials say they hope their dedication to conserving animal life will rub off on visitors. "We only conserve what we love," Ryan said. She said she hopes everyone who visits will leave with this love.

Even the budget-conscious student can afford the luxury of a trip to the zoo to talk to the animals. Admission is \$3 for adults and \$1 for senior citizens and children under 15. The park is located six miles southeast of Asheboro, and visitors are welcome from 9 to 5 every day Oct. 16 to March 31. From April 1 to Oct. 15, the hours are 9 to 5 weekdays, and 10 to 6 Sundays and holidays.

Photos by
Charlotte Cannon