

# Second Grade Class At Union School Adopts Baboon At North Carolina Zoo

BY SUSAN USHER

Barney. Bobo. Jasper. Bob. Snowflake... Ideas ring out, but not just any name will do when you're choosing a name for a "Beastly Buddy." This will take a little time and thought.

Ginny Pridgen's second grade class at Union Elementary School in Shallotte is looking for the ideal moniker for the distinguished-looking male hamadryas baboon they've just "adopted" at the North Carolina Zoo in Asheboro.

He has close-set eyes under heavy brows, a long heavy, muzzle, powerful jaws, a thick, rope-like tail, and a bushy white mane around his face and neck—a real "Beastly Buddy."

Their baboon friend isn't likely to visit their classroom in person but Pridgen's class will nevertheless be keeping up with him the rest of the school year through a bi-monthly newsletter from the zoo. They also plan to create a hall bulletin board in his honor to keep schoolmates posted on the project. It will feature a color photograph sent from the Zoo Society, fact sheets, newsletters and other material the students may add from time to time.

When Pridgen first suggested raising money to adopt an animal at the state zoo, her students enthusiastically jumped into the project.

"We were studying 10s and 5s and tallying, so I thought this would be a good project," said Pridgen.

The adoption added interest not only to math class, but to future science classes as well. As part of the North Carolina Zoological Society's new Beastly Buddy adoption program, classrooms pay an adoption fee ranging from \$30 to \$1,000, depending upon the animal chosen. (For \$1,000, you can adopt an African elephant.) The program gives students and teachers new ways to learn about wildlife along with the opportunity to contribute to conservation, education and research efforts at the zoo.

Pridgen's class decided a \$50 investment seemed reasonable, while giving a good choice of animals.

"I listed 10 of the animals I thought they would be interested in. We narrowed it down to four, including the baboon, a python and a bat-eared fox. The baboon won hands down," said Pridgen.



BRANDY GRISSETT AND RAY BLAND check out a photograph of their new "Beastly Buddy."

Then the fund raising began, because there could be no adoption until the fee was paid. Students decided their contribution to the zoo would go toward "general maintenance and upkeep," said Pridgen, something they could understand better than the intricacies of research.

Principal Zephia Grissett and Assistant Principal Steve Martin put in handfuls of coins to show their support for the project. Anna Gore went door-to-door collecting money from her neighbors in Lakewood Estates and brought in \$10 in rolled pennies. Tyler Lyons raided his savings, bringing in two miniature cash registers of money transferred from his larger "Garfield" character bank. Pridgen put in \$4 to speed the adoption request on its way.

Meanwhile, students speculated about their "Beastly Buddy," whether it would be a male or female. They decided to name the baboon if it didn't already have a name, as well as creating the bulletin board.

In about a week's time, right in the middle of the before-Christmas

hustle and bustle, their adoption package arrived. It included a color photograph of their newly adopted baboon, shown near a rocky outcrop surrounded by several female baboons, a fact sheet on some of its habits and their first Zoo Society's bimonthly newsletter.

Baboons, it seems, are powerful fighters, successfully battling even their worst enemy, the leopard. They travel in troops, sleep in trees or on rocky outcrops and have cheek pouches for storing food. The hamadryas baboon, the species of their baboon, (Papio hamadryas) is a native of Northeast Africa and Southwest Arabia and was once the sacred baboon of Egypt.

Pridgen also received a booklet

with suggestions for making science and math lessons more fun and exciting and will be invited by the Zoo Society to a special Beastly Buddy's zoo outing this summer that will give more detailed instructions on how to make the zoo a great place to learn, according to Zoo Society spokesman Sally Steele.

While it's certain their baboon buddy won't be coming to Shallotte, Pridgen's students don't know yet if they'll get to visit their new buddy at the zoo as a class this year. The second grade field trip for the year had been set before the adoption, a trip to the Planetarium at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"We're probably not going to be able to," said Pridgen. "The only way we would be able to go would be if the class decided to do it, if the parents undertook it."



THE WHITE-MANED male hamadryas baboon (center) at the North Carolina Zoo at Asheboro has been "adopted" by Ginny Pridgen's second grade class at Union Elementary School.

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