



## Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo

***Celebrating 20 Years – 2,000 Animals -- # 1 Zoo in America***

### **ABOUT THE ZOO:**

Recognized as the #1 zoo in the United States by *Parents* magazine (2009) and *Child* magazine (2004), Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo features 2,000 animals on 56 acres of natural habitats comprising seven main exhibit areas: Asian Gardens, Primate World, Free-Flight Aviaries, Native Florida Wildlife Center, Manatee and Aquatic Center, Wallaroo Station children's zoo, and Safari Africa.

Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo is operated by the Lowry Park Zoological Society, an independent 501(c)(3) charitable organization committed to providing exemplary programs in education, recreation, conservation and research to benefit the general public and to enhance the quality of life in Tampa Bay. Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo also exists as a center for conservation of endangered wildlife both locally and around the globe.

### **MISSION:**

The Zoo's mission is "to connect people with the living earth." All of the Zoo's exhibits and programs are designed to engage and inspire visitors to treasure the natural world and act wisely on its behalf. The Zoo is also dedicated to serving as an educational resource for the community and providing an exciting, nature-based entertainment destination for families, schools, organizations and visitors. Up-close experiences with living animals at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo help teach the value of the living world firsthand and reconnect us with our natural heritage.

The Zoo's primary objectives are:

- To be widely accessible to our diverse community,
- To play an active role in conservation and environmental issues affecting animals and habitats throughout Florida and the world,
- To be an educational resource for our community, and
- To provide a safe and exciting attraction for families and guests.

**ZOO HISTORY:**

Tampa's first zoo was established in the late 1930s on the banks of the Hillsborough River in Plant Park. It consisted of a small collection of indigenous animals such as raccoons, alligators and an aviary with a variety of exotic birds. As the collection grew, the animals were moved to the more centrally located Lowry Park in 1957, by Mayor Nick Nuccio, where it was maintained by Tampa's Parks Department.

In 1961, General Sumter L. Lowry, Jr. gave the zoo its most prominent exotic animal, Sheena, an 18-month-old Asian elephant. This event provided the impetus for expanding and diversifying the animal collection. As the collection continued to grow through the 1970s, the need to upgrade the habitats and present the animals in natural settings became an issue fully embraced by the Tampa Bay community, which resulted in the formation of an organization dedicated to building a first-class zoological garden.

The Lowry Park Zoo Association was formed in 1982, at the suggestion of the Tampa Parks Department, Mayor Bob Martinez, and private citizens who shared a common vision. Its mission was to raise awareness of Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo and promote a public-private partnership to fund the renaissance of Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo. The zoo architectural firm, Design Consortium, Ltd., was hired in 1984, to develop a 24-acre master plan.

While the Zoo Association embarked on a \$20 million capital campaign, the City of Tampa committed \$8 million to build the first phase, which consisted of the entrance, administrative offices, clinic commissary units, Free-Flight Aviary, Asian Domain, Primate World, and the Children's Village/Petting Zoo.

As the first phase neared completion in February 1988, the zoo Association became the Lowry Park Zoological Society, a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to the management and ongoing development of a superior zoological garden. Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo is situated on land owned by the City of Tampa and is independently operated by the Tampa's Lowry Park Zoological Society for charitable and educational purposes.

The rejuvenated Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo formally opened to the public on March 5, 1988, with more than 614,000 people visiting the facility during its first 12 months.

Construction began on the second phase of the zoo, the Florida Wildlife Center, in 1988, and Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo was accredited by the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums in 1989.

The northern portion of the Florida Wildlife Center opened February 5, 1990, and the southern part opened January of 1991, featuring a world-renowned Manatee Aquatic Center and Rehabilitation Hospital. The exhibit is known today as the Mason M. and Charles P. Lykes Florida Wildlife Center and houses the David A. Straz, Jr. Manatee Hospital.

After the phases were completed, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo featured several acres of lush, natural habitats comprising five main exhibit areas: The Florida Manatee and Aquatic Center, Native Florida Wildlife Center, Asian Domain, Primate World and Children's Petting Zoo. Two free-flight aviaries were also constructed for visitors to enjoy. In 1995, a 10,000-square-foot pavilion was constructed to provide an area for meeting and banquet facilities, educational programs and special exhibitions.

In 1997, a 1,500-square-foot interactive area was built featuring hands-on displays, exhibits, artifacts, videos and a small insect zoo. An adjoining amphitheater was later added for the zoo's "Reptile Encounter" programs; and a "Birds of Prey" amphitheater was constructed to allow visitors to soar with a variety of owls, hawks, eagles and falcons. In 1998, the zoo added a Jungle Carousel featuring 33 handcrafted figures of animals that take kids on a whimsical, wildlife adventure.

The summer of 1999 brought a number of new creature comforts for zoo visitors, including the fully air-conditioned Paradise Cafe featuring an extended Key West Deck with an exciting new view of the manatees. Visitors have it made in the shade thanks to shade canopies over the Reptile Encounter and Birds of Prey amphitheaters. Construction work was also completed on the zoo's "no hassle" entry and parking lot, featuring spaces for more than 400 additional vehicles.

Classes began in fall 2000, at the new Florida Environmental Education Center, nicknamed "The Zoo School," which features 11 classrooms, a library and the Frank E. Duckwall Foundation exhibit/lecture hall. This state-of-the-art education center was designed to offer exciting programs for everyone from tots to teens, adults, families, school age groups and more.

The TECO Energy Manatee Amphitheater opened in March 2001, and provides enhanced public education programming. A boardwalk was also constructed allowing visitors to walk up and see into the manatee hospital – the only nonprofit facility of its kind in the world.

In September 2001, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo opened Stingray Bay where visitors can pet and feed stingrays in a 16,000-gallon touch pool. In May 2002, the Zoo opened Wallaroo Station – a 4.5-acre Australian-themed family zoo that includes a wide variety of Australian animals.

#### **RECENT YEARS:**

In May 2004, the Zoo opened the first phase of "Safari Africa" – the largest exhibit opening since Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo reopened its doors in 1988. Safari Africa features elephants, giraffes, zebras and many other African animal species on several acres of natural habitats. Phase I also included giraffe feeding opportunities and camel safari rides.

White rhinoceros from South Africa made their debut in March 2005 as part of Safari Africa's Phase II featuring a special "rhino encounter," an opportunity for visitors to touch and feed a rhino. Visitors can also experience a bird's-eye view of the Zoo on "Treetop Skyfari," a 45-foot-high aerial ride that travels over several acres of the Zoo's animal habitats.

In September 2005, the zoo added a meerkat exhibit, the first new structure in a series of planned buildings in Safari Africa to be known as the "African Village." Additional plans for the complex include a centralized safari lodge with air-conditioned dining decorated with high-end finishes and museum-quality artifacts, and additional animal exhibits.

In the fall of 2005, the Zoo welcomed the birth of the first African elephant calf in the Zoo's history – and in the Greater Tampa Bay area. The male calf, "Tamani," was born to first-time mother "Ellie" on October 17 before dawn. On November 11, 2005, mother and calf made their public debut in the large outdoor yard within the zoo's 2.5-acre elephant savannah.

In March 2006, the Zoo introduced a new behind-the-scenes Safari Ride, a guided tour of the Safari Africa habitat area. Guests can climb aboard a custom-made safari tram for a 15-minute narrated ride offering views of dozens of unique and endangered species. The ride includes an exciting trek between the zoo's two elephant yards where passengers can see and photograph the elephant herd, including baby Tamani.

For the fiscal year ending September 2006, and for the first time in the Zoo's history, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo exceeded one million visitors.

In 2007, the Zoo made several notable additions to better serve the record numbers of visitors: a collection of five new exhibits

known as the “Ituri Forest” within Safari Africa; a colony of African penguins in a new year-round outdoor habitat called Penguin Beach; and a newly remodeled Asian Gardens exhibit area.

At the close of fiscal year 2007, the Zoo again celebrated record attendance of more than 1.1 million visitors – an increase of nine percent and the fifth consecutive year of sustained attendance growth.

In 2008, the Zoo grew again with the addition of a white “albino” alligator exhibit and “Gator Falls,” a water flume ride. The new ride allows guests to enhance their outdoor adventure by hopping on a log and exploring Florida’s native wildlife by water with a 30-foot drop over an albino alligator exhibit. The newest attractions represent two of many exciting opportunities that guests can enjoy as they help to celebrate the Zoo’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008.

**RIVER ODESSEY  
ECOTOUR:**

The Zoo offers an ecotour down the beautiful Hillsborough River. It’s a terrific opportunity for nature lovers of all ages to explore various wildlife species in their natural habitat in and along the Hillsborough River. The “Sirenia,” named after the Order that manatees come from, will take wildlife enthusiasts on a boat ride adventure where they can see gopher tortoises, hawks, herons, manatees and dozens of other animals that call the Hillsborough River home. The boat captain is a naturalist leader who is knowledgeable about the surrounding environment. The boat ride runs on select days, and tickets can be purchased at the front gate of the Zoo. Prices are \$14 for adults, \$13 for seniors (50+) and \$10 for children. Annual Zoo Pass Holders receive \$1 off. Those who would like to purchase a combo pass (zoo admission and boat ride) receive \$4 off.

**ZOO HOURS OF  
OPERATION:**

Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo is open seven days a week from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas days.

**SMOKING  
POLICY:**

Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo is a nonsmoking facility with smoking allowed in limited, designated areas as marked by visitor information signs.

**ADMISSION  
PRICES:**

\$19.95 for adults  
\$17.95 for seniors (60+)  
\$14.95 for children age 3-11  
FREE for children 2 and under

**DIRECTIONS:**

The Zoo is located at 1101 W. Sligh Avenue, approximately 5 ½ miles north of downtown Tampa. From I-275, exit at Sligh Avenue (exit 48), turn west, and drive approximately 1 mile down to the Zoo’s main entrance on the right side of the road.

**CONTACT:** The Zoo's main telephone line is (813) 935-8552. Information about the Zoo can also be found at [LowryParkZoo.com](http://LowryParkZoo.com).

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