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Zoo programs let kids peek into animal world



Courtesy photo

Children participate in a Saturday Safaris class on "Your Big Backyard." An upcoming Saturday Safaris program focuses on animals in winter.

By Amy Clarke
STAFF WRITER
arclarke@greenvillenews.com

The world animals can offer is often a source of boundless interest for kids. The Greenville Zoo looks to tap into that natural curiosity with a series of children's educational programs.

"It's good to be able to introduce them to animals at such a young age. They get to appreciate things," said zoo curator of education Leanne White. "You see things on TV now; you've got Animal Planet and Discovery Channel. It's nice to see things right in front of you and be able to touch."

The long-popular Zoo Tots and Saturday Safaris programs invite kids 2 to 8 to explore through hands-on activities, crafts, animal interaction, zookeeper talks and more, all based around changing themes.

Upcoming Zoo Tots programs, scheduled for Dec. 5, 9 and 12, feature a Winter Wonderland theme – how the season affects our environment and the animals in it. This class is intended for 2 and 3 year olds and their parents.

The Dec. 19 Saturday Safaris, this one for ages 4-5, features the "Animal Winter Olympics," highlighting polar bears and red pandas and others that set wintertime records for survival.

White said that for many of the kids, the classes are an early stepping stone.

"A lot of them just have that interest in animals and would like to do something with animals as a career. This is just one way of getting their foot in there, taking that extra step," she said.

The classes – $15 for zoo members, $25 for non-members – tend to fill up quickly. Head to the Greenville Zoo Web site (www.greenvillezoo.com) for registration information.

Can't make it to the December classes? The schedule and themes for January-March programs will be posted online Dec. 16.