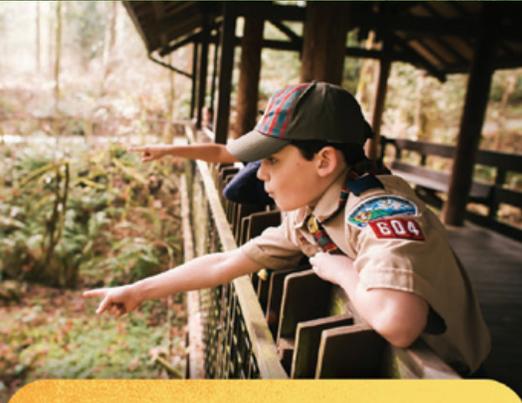


TREK TRACKS

PUBLISHED FOR THE FRIENDS OF NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK



Scout-ing out adventures

Overnight camps offered for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts will get a first-time opportunity to spend the night at Northwest Trek this summer through a series of camps tailored for them.

The Girl Scout camps will begin in July and wrap up in August. Boy Scout camps will be held in mid- to-late July.

Northwest Trek has been building relationships with scouting organizations for years, said Education and Conservation Curator Jessica Moore. Troops have participated in summer Family Camps, but leaders asked for sessions specifically tailored to Scouting.

Continued on page 3



Northwest Trek
Wildlife Park
METRO PARKS TACOMA

Get even closer to nature

Trailside Encounters bring you within a few feet of small animals



Keeper Wendi Mello with opossum; Great Horned Owl



“Wow, look at THAT!”

“AWESOME!”

Around every bend in the trails at Northwest Trek, visitors find animals with amazing stories, from owls to nature’s bug zappers to dam-building beavers and marvelous mollusks that positively ooze charm.

Twice each day, keepers like Wendi Mello bring small animals out for up-close Trailside Encounters that have kids exclaiming with glee.

They provide “aha” moments for visitors of any age. Who wouldn’t want to turn a corner and spy a beaver, its buck-teeth chomping on a tree branch next to a small pond?

Mello and other staff members find great delight in arriving on the small stages near the Woodland Pool and the Picnic Pavilion, critters in hands and an array of interesting and unexpected animal facts on the tips of their tongues.

The animal could be one of the wow species, such as a great horned owl, a beaver or feisty kestrel (think a robin-sized raptor with attitude).

Or it could be one of the often overlooked, but important, members of the animal kingdom. In fact, Mello likes these best. Such as bats. Or snakes. Or how about that banana slug? *Continued on page 4*

'A lot of conservation stories to tell'

New Deputy Director brings deep zoological experience, passion for wildlife to Northwest Trek



Alan Varsik knew as an environmental biology major that he wanted a career fusing his passion for animals with his commitment to conservation.

And for years, he believed Northwest Trek might be the ideal place for him. "I thought if ever there were an opportunity, it would be the perfect fit for me," he said.

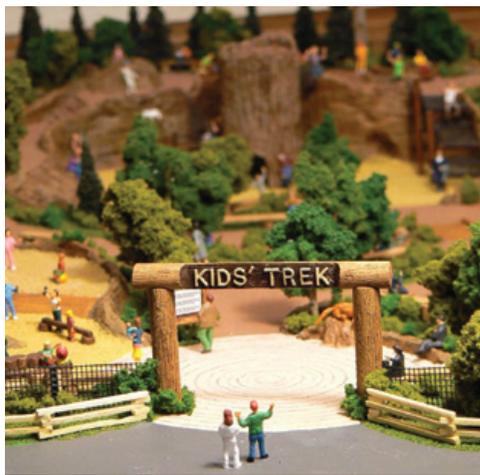
Varsik is the wildlife park's new Deputy Director, and he brings an impressive career of zoological experience – from beginnings as a children's zoo keeper in Oakland to a number of management roles—to the post.

He worked with primates at Brookfield Zoo near Chicago; served as curator at Lincoln Park Zoo; worked as zoological manager in the Tree of Life area at Disney's Animal Kingdom when that park opened; was general curator and assistant director at Santa Barbara Zoo; and most recently served as deputy director and chief operating officer at Oklahoma City Zoo. He's also done conservation work with the California condor and Channel Island Fox.

"Northwest Trek is unique because of the immersive experience visitors have in the Free-Roaming Area," he said.

"It's ever-changing. You're going to see animals in a different way every time you go."

And, he adds, "There are a lot of conservation stories to tell with different species. I'm really excited to be here."



KIDS' TREK coming in 2016

Construction underway on half-acre nature-themed play area

Laughter and shouts of joy ring out and echo through the trees.

Over here, a child clambers across a net. Over there, another climbs a simulated tree-trunk structure. And out yonder, kids exercise creativity in a mini "construction area."

All the while deepening their connection to nature.

This is the future at Northwest Trek, and it's being built right now.

Construction began early this year on Kids' Trek, a half-acre play area that will encourage outdoor play and promote a greater appreciation of the environment among children who visit the wildlife park.

The nature-themed play area will be located to the right of the main entry area as visitors enter Northwest Trek. It's near the Gift Shop and Forest Café.

When completed and opened next year, the \$1.9 million project will include climbing, balance and agility challenges, multi-level play and adventure areas with stairs, bridges, tunnels, overlooks, a slide and lots of interactive play and learning activities.

Kids' Trek also will have a dedicated play area for toddlers and will be ADA accessible.

Funds from a 2014 Metro Parks Tacoma voter-approved bond issue, grants and donations from businesses and individuals will pay the construction costs. The Northwest Trek Foundation is leading the fund-raising effort.

"We're pleased that work has begun on this exciting, hands-on experience for children who visit the wildlife park," said Gary Geddes, director of the Zoological and Environmental Education Division of Metro Parks Tacoma. "We're certain it will help them establish new and stronger connections with the world around them and add even more value to the memorable experience that is a day at Northwest Trek."

KIDS' TREK Champions Campaign kicks off May 30

You can help build the future. Construction has begun on Kids' Trek, but additional funds are needed to complete the project. The Northwest Trek Foundation's exciting Kids' Trek Champions Campaign begins May 30. The plan: Raise \$40,000-plus in 40 days to celebrate Northwest Trek's 40th Birthday. Piece of cake. But volunteer fund-raisers are needed. And best of all, you can "champion" the project in your own way. Do a run or a walk and have friends donate per step - or per mile. Hold a bake sale at work. Hop on a swing and do a swing-a-thon at your local park. Recruit friends, coworkers, fellow club members to join you. And let everyone know it's all about kids. Pledge now to join the fun or make a donation by contacting Tyra Larson at 360-832-7165 or tyra.larson@nwtrek.org.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Super Scouts Day

April 25

Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts can work on a variety of badge components while exploring Northwest Trek—all at a special \$11 discounted admission price.

Zip Wild zip line/ challenge courses

May 2-Sept. 27

Get an adrenaline rush and conquer a series of aerial obstacles on Zip Wild's courses for ages 5 to adult. Open weekends: May 2-June 7; Sept. 12-27. Daily: June 13-Sept. 7. Reservations required: nwtrek.org/zipwild

Bear Camp

May 16-17

Can our bears defeat "bear-proof" containers? Come and see. And learn about living with bears and other Northwest wildlife.



Get the Picture! Make the Rounds! Camp Out With the Animals!

Photo Tours

April 11, May 9, June 6

Keeper Tours

May 24, May 30, June 13

Family Camps

July 11-12; July 18-19;
July 25-26; Aug. 1-2; Aug. 8-9

Get details and make reservations at nwtrek.org/programs



SSSSSilly. SSSSSlimy. SSSSSSSlug Fest!

June 27-28

It's a sensational summer celebration of the banana slug with crafts, games, slug races and old-fashioned family fun.

COMING THIS SUMMER:
40 and Fabulous!
Celebrate Northwest
Trek's 40th birthday
July 17-19

Scouting out adventures *Continued from page 1*



Scouts will practice their camping skills, including tent setup and cooking over an open fire, plus "scout" out wildlife on special tours around Northwest Trek.

"It's a wilderness experience with the safety of being close by," Moore said. "The camps will focus on practicing basic camping skills and learning about native Pacific Northwest wildlife."

There is a limit of 30 people per camp, and Moore noted that individuals or troops can sign up for the camps. She encourages

interested participants to sign up soon at nwtrek.org/scoutcamps.

"They will fill up very quickly," she said.

Girl Scout Camps

- **July 17-18:** Mommy, Me & Moose for Daisies and Brownies (Kindergarten-3rd grade)
- **July 31-Aug. 1:** The Junior Moose Adventure for Juniors (4th-5th grades)
- **Aug. 7-8:** Hanging Loose with a Moose for Cadettes, Seniors and Ambassadors (6th-12th grades)

Boy Scout Camps (all ages)

- July 10-11
- July 24-25

Northwest Trek Wildlife Park
11610 Trek Drive East
Eatonville, WA 98328-9502

General Information:
360-832-6117 | nwtrek.org

Spring/Summer Hours
March 13 - June 26
Monday - Friday: 9:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday: 9:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

June 27 - Sept. 7
Daily: 9:30 a.m. - 6 p.m.

JEANNIE CLAY, *Membership Coordinator*
360-832-7170 | Jeannie.Clay@nwtrek.org

Northwest Trek, accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, is a 725-acre zoological park devoted to the display, interpretation, research and conservation of North American native wildlife.

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Get even closer to nature *Continued from page 1*

Yes, a banana slug.

Mello readily admits the yellow-and-brown-striped mollusk isn't everyone's idea of an interesting creature. Then she deftly tells her audience that these slime-excreting critters are the forest's garbage men, happily eating the detritus (including animal poop), that accumulates on the forest floor. Oh, and strictly speaking, slugs can't be called garbage "men." As hermaphrodites, they carry both male and female reproductive organs.



She'll eagerly tell her audience that bats - which she adores - are winged bug zappers. One can eat 1,000 bugs a night. Opossums are nomadic, solitary creatures more interested in finding a meal than bothering humans.

Some provide what Mello calls "thunderbolt" connections with people,

those moments when the oohs and ahhs from visitors grow in intensity. Who. Who. Who doesn't identify in some way with an owl?

"People already think owls are cool," she says in a spare moment during a busy day of caring for a variety of animals. "But with slugs you try to get tolerance and then work your way up to respect."

Trailside Encounters teach visitors the importance of each small creature. And keepers hope people leave inspired to make changes in their lives to help animals in the wild. It might be buying or making a bat box as a home for those bug zappers, creating a wildlife habitat in a suburban backyard, using organic products or recycling more.

"Every small action matters," Mello says.



Look for Trailside Encounters daily at 11:30 a.m. at the Wetland Stage and 1:30 p.m. at the Backyard Stage near the Picnic Pavilion. Animals you might see include:

- Great horned owl
- Skunk
- Opossum
- Beaver
- Kestrel
- Painted turtle
- Banana slug
- Rubber boa
- Mallard duck
- Myotis bat