

Kids Korner

Kids Meet Real-Life Animals From Rain Forest

LOU ANN GOOD
Food And Family
Features Editor

LITITZ (Lancaster Co.) — Sure, the rain forest is located in places near the equator, and Lititz is far from the countries famous for rain forests.

But on Tuesday, kids gathered at Esbenshade's Greenhouses, 546 E. Division Highway, to meet some animals that come from the rain forest and to learn about the tropical place where trees grow 20-25 stories high.

Claire and Brian from the Philadelphia Zoo presented a rain forest program that intrigued kids of all ages despite the humidity and heat inside the greenhouse structure.

The rain forest can be divided into three sections. The bottom layer is called the rain forest floor, where it is muddy, dark, and covered with rotting leaves, and other decay. The middle level is where bushes and flowers grow, and where monkeys and snakes live in the trees. The top level is where the tree tops end and birds such as parrots watch to capture food below them.

Living on the rain forest floor are red-footed tortoises. Claire brought along a red-footed tortoise to show the children what they look like.

To determine whether a tortoise or turtle is a girl or a boy is very simple according to Claire. Turn it upside down. Girls have flat shells on the bottom and boys have a curved bottom shell.

"The tortoise doesn't move

fast, so how do you think it can get its food?" Claire asked the children at the greenhouse event.

Some children answered correctly that the tortoise waits until food falls off a tree.

"Perhaps a messy monkey will drop its food, and the tortoise is glad to claim it. The tortoise eats meat and food that rots. It is like the garbage man of the rain forest floor," Claire said.

The tortoise doesn't need to be fast to escape from its enemies. Whenever the tortoise is frightened, it simply needs to tuck its head, arms, and legs inside its hard shell. Then it is hard as a rock and very unappealing for dinner.

Thirteen children volunteered to help introduce an Asian rain forest visitor — a 15-foot long Burmese python.

"If Tony was walking in the forest, he wouldn't see this snake because it blends in with the forest floor. The snake would jump out and wrap around him more and more until Tony couldn't breathe and then swallow him in one gulp," Claire said.

She also introduced the children to a Rainbow Boa Constrictor that lives in the trees. The snake's tail helps him hang from a tree and catch food such as birds, mice, tree frogs, and lizards passing by. It is difficult to see the snake when he is in a tree because his body looks like a vine attached to the tree.

Another interesting animal from the middle level of the rain forest was the kinkojou often called honey bear.



Claire from the Philadelphia Zoo introduces a red-footed tortoise to attendees at the Kid's Day sponsored by Esbenshade's Greenhouses, Lititz.

The kinkojou is a good climber, which looks like a monkey but isn't. The honey bear has a long tongue so that he can stick it into a honey nest and eat honey. His thick hair protects him from bee stings when he is stealing honey.

The final visitor was from the upper level of the rain forest. The Macaw is the largest parrot. It uses its beak and feet like a hand to peel apples, crack peanuts, and other things.

"It could crack my finger, so that's why I always use a pole to handle the Macaw," Claire said.

The parrot's wings are clipped so that he can not fly away and be exposed to harsh winter weather where he couldn't survive.

"Clipping his wings is just like clipping your fingernails," Claire said. "It doesn't hurt a bit."

The Macaw imitated some of the actions of Claire such as spreading his wings when she stretched out her arms.

The Macaw can live to be 80 years old so it can be a lifetime pet.

Rain forests in Africa, South America, Asia, and Australia are often in the news. Some people are concerned that the rain forests will disappear because too many trees are being chopped down. Although trees will grow again, Claire said that whenever a tree is chopped down, animals, insects, and bugs that live there lose their homes.

The rain forest is important because it provides Brazilian nuts, vanilla, chocolate, bananas, and rubber to make tires. Also one-fourth of today's medicine is

made from plants growing in the rain forest.

The annual kid's day event

sponsored by Esbenshades included snacks and other kid-related workshops.



This chart shows that the rain forest has three different levels where many kinds of animals, insects, birds, and reptiles live.

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick

Dear Twig: Sometimes when we watch a movie my mother will say, "That's not right. There aren't any loons in the jungle." What's up with that?

We I, what's up with your mother is she's able to spot nature mistakes in movies. And what's up with movies is they make these kinds of mistakes a lot. Here's an example: the yodel of the common loon is a common sound effect. It's haunting and pretty. But it's often used in the wrong setting — like the jungle. Common loons are water birds. They breed and yodel in northern North America. Your mother was right. There aren't any loons in jungles!

Another example is the cry of the red-tailed hawk. Movies employ it for eagles, vultures, even prehistoric pterosaurs!

Similar boo boos abound. In "Dances With Wolves," Kevin Costner sees geese that in fact are sandhill cranes. In "Fading Frontier," Sean Connery spots a Connecticut warbler that's actually a yellow warbler. And in "Jurassic Park II," a wood thrush sings in the Montana badlands even though wood thrushes live in forests and don't live in Montana anyway.

My point? Simply, that nature has great nuance and detail. And movies don't always know how to show it. Keep your eyes open!

Twig