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PAW PRINTS - Winter 2005

The Voice of Fellow Earthlings' Wildlife Center, Inc.



Love is in the air! Remi gives her "other" beau a little Valentine kiss
Credit: Yolande Dolman

Just as Valentine's Day arrived in the desert, so did unseasonably warm weather. The meerkats, being little sun worshipers, were in their element and reveled in the warm rays that gilded their fur. Standing tall, little bellies aligned toward the sun, each meerkat enjoyed this glimmer of early spring as witnessed by their rowdy bouts of play. "Hide and Go Seek" is a favorite. One meerkat burrowed under a fuzzy blanket while another one jumped up and down on the "bump" below. In the next enclosure, two meerkats tumbled, end over end, as one "ambushed" the other and landed on the back of his surprised room-mate. Finally, after some non-stop play, everyone nestled into their baskets for a little nuzzling, grooming, and finally a nap.

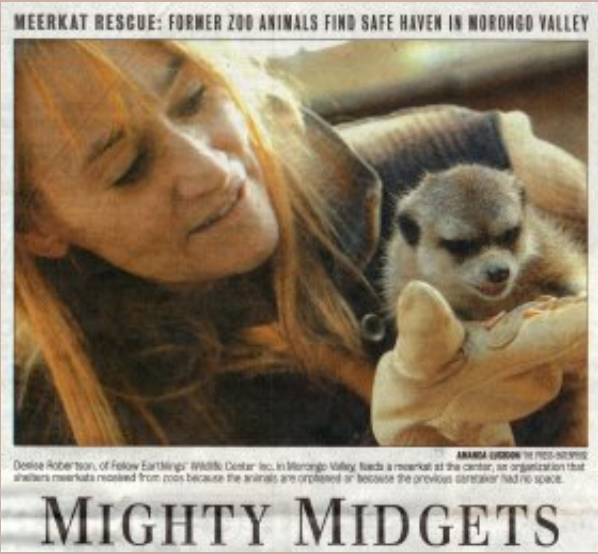
These antics made us laugh and reminded us just how important play is to everyone. It's something we frequently neglect in our busy, high tech world. It's just another lesson learned from these engaging and winsome creatures that grace our lives.

We hope everyone in our extended family remembers to relax, play, and spend happy times with their own "mob."

So many good things are happening at the Center! As we continue to grow and thrive, we again acknowledge that it is you, our adoptive parents, who make so much of this possible. We remain enormously grateful for all you do!

Getting the Word Out

- The Press Enterprise newspaper (southern California) published an excellent article about the Center's meerkats. We continue to receive many inquiries about our "Adopt a Meerkat Program" from people who read the article and didn't know we are right in their own backyard!



- Fellow Earthlings' was chosen #2 in the TOP TEN LIST of places to visit in the desert by the Hi-Desert Star newspaper. We were thrilled to be in the company of such prestigious sites as Joshua Tree National Park and the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve!
- A photograph of Denise Robertson, volunteer Development

Director, and Pam Bennett-Wallberg was featured in the magnificent, philanthropic 111 MAGAZINE. We participated in the annual fund-raiser for Animal Samaritans SPCA and Pegasus Riding Academy for the Handicapped. We thank the magazine for highlighting the Center.

- Denise Robertson, our volunteer Development Director and keeper, recently submitted her first story, garnered from her many African Adventures, to the well-known publisher Travelers' Tales. We are proud to announce her story was chosen from the thousands that were submitted to be included in "The Best Travel Writing of 2006." This book of 33 true stores from around the world was compiled from a wide range of writers: A Nobel Prize winning author, other previously published authors, and a few "emerging" authors such as our own Denise. You can preview the book on the Travelers' Tales website <http://www.travelerstories.com> , purchase the book online from [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), or at your local book store. Look for her story titled "Sahara Unveiled" under her pseudonym - Dar Robertson. (P.S. note the postscript on Denise at the end of the story which mentions her work with the meerkats at Fellow Earthlings'.) You make us proud, Denise!!
- Denise was also the guest speaker at the Sunset Rotary Club meeting. We thank them for their interest in our work! Denise is a skilled and accomplished speaker. Her enthusiasm for her work at the Center coupled with her experience as a professional speaker delivers our "message" with style, flair, and fun.

Fur, Feathers, Paws and Claws

- Again, we thank our wonderfully talented adoptive parent, Kristen Perry, for designing our Christmas card. The card depicted Santa Claus kneeling next to a Christmas tree as three meerkats scampered out of his oversized pockets. Another meerkat looked up, in wonder, as Santa chuckled him under the chin. Our donors and adoptive parents delighted in the emailed card and have encouraged us to carry on the tradition every year.
- We hosted three birdwatchers in December for the 106th annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Although the day was cold and blustery, the birders spotted many different species on the Center's acreage.
- The new meerkat enclosures are back on track! We hired a very talented builder to help us complete the two new habitats. (AKA the meerkats' new "digs.") We're thrilled with the progress we've made. Glen Shepherd is the talent behind the construction and we're so happy to have him as the newest member of our Fellow Earthlings' family.



One of our newest enclosures under construction
Photo credit: Denise Robertson

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Parisian Meerkat

All our visitors are unique and special, but one group was especially memorable.

The visitors from this group hailed from four different countries. One man was from France, one from Finland, another from Canada, and the last from the United States. They each flew to Los Angeles where they met at the airport and rented two vans. Each vehicle carried large, mysterious boxes in the back. These men, it turns out, have a delightful hobby. They all have chosen a special animal as their "alternate" personality and designed elaborate, custom costumes for their individual characters; much like the ones you see at Disneyland

or other theme parks. The man from France told us he had a meerkat costume and he wanted to have an "up close and personal" encounter with our critters dressed as his favorite animal. Shortly after the visitors arrived, our guest from Paris disappeared into the visitor's cottage with an enormous box. Soon, the biggest "meerkat" that has every graced Fellow Earthlings' Wildlife Center emerged from the cottage.



Damien "Timduru" Coquelle emerges from the Visitor's cottage
Credit: Michelle Willey

The Hi Desert Star newspaper in Yucca Valley, California sent a photographer and reporter to capture our meerkats' reaction to this "giant sized" meerkat! As our guest exited the cottage in his costume, a hush fell over the Center. The meerkats were literally stunned into silence by the enormous meerkat in their midst! It was immediately apparent they recognized this was a "strange" type of animal as witnessed by their reaction. Most went underground in alarm or scurried into their den boxes. However, being meerkats, their intense curiosity eventually won out and we began to see fuzzy heads poking out in wonder and amazement. Our French visitor, who embodied all the mannerisms of a real meerkat, entered the enclosures, sat quietly, moved slowly, and eventually won the confidence of the meerkats. Although most of the critters remained a little wary, by the end of the visit, our two most gregarious meerkats, Kendi and Rafiki, were climbing all over the man from Paris. The meerkats perched on his shoulder, foraged for worms in his "fur," and even allowed him to pat their heads with his massive "paw." Soon, Rafiki nestled in the crook of our visitor's arm and didn't want to leave!

It was a special day full of laughter and delight!



Kendi and Rafiki enjoy treats from their new friend
Credit: Michelle Willey



Rafiki gets cozy with his new buddy
Credit: Michelle Willey

Special Donations

- Our littlest Angel. Every month a five year old girl from Oklahoma asks her parents to send her allowance to the meerkats. The words written on the bottom of the check read, "From a five year old meerkat fan." We send heart-felt thanks to our wee benefactor.
- We received a donation from Edison International in honor of one of their employees. For every 40, 80, and 200 hours an employee volunteers, Edison donates \$100 to a nonprofit organization of the employee's choice. The meerkats have certainly benefited from this exceedingly generous program. Many thanks!
- Thanks to one of our new adoptive parents, we received a very generous donation from the Charles Schwab Fund for Charitable Giving. We couldn't be more grateful. Thank you!
- Another one of our adoptive parents who re-adopts every year (Bless her!) had her donation matched by Pfizer Foundation Matching Gifts Program. How fabulous! (Our Re-adoption

Program is the very foundation which enables us to provide excellent care for the meerkats and allows us to grow. Those who choose to re-adopt hold a very special place in our hearts.) [Adopt here.](#)

- More and more of our adoptive parents are spreading the word about the ["VITTLES FOR YOU AND THE CRITTERS" grocery program](#) with Ralph's and Food 4 Less. It is such a wonderful and "user friendly" program. All it takes is a mere swipe of a card and 4% of your grocery bill is automatically donated to Fellow Earthlings! The quarterly statement we receive from Ralph's and Food 4 Less lists the names of the angelic participants who are benefiting the animals enormously. The dollars add up and certainly help us pay for the meerkat's "Bug Bills." One of our new adoptive parents (and their children) actually chose to drive quite a distance to a Ralph's store so they can benefit the meerkats. Now, that's commitment!
- Another of our angelic adoptive parents increased her donation to the meerkats by having it matched by MicroSoft Matching Gifts Program. And, yet another one of our angels had her donation matched by Union Bank of California. Thank you so very much!
- Due to many requests, we are creating a special "Sponsor Program" to offer to our adoptive parents. This program will have a higher level of sponsorship which will greatly benefit the animals and it will also offer some unique privileges for those who wish to participate. Big thanks to our adoptive parents who suggested this innovative program. Stay tuned for details later this year!

And now, it's time to introduce you to another meerkat that lives at Fellow Earthlings' Wildlife Center: Focus on Bara



Bara

Credit: Denise Robertson

You've all heard of Half Dome in Yosemite, that imposing and challenging climb that is famous throughout the world. Well, we have our own version at the Center. And, only one intrepid meerkat has mastered scaling what we fondly call "Half Wall." Meet Bara, our mighty little meerkat who climbs this obstacle with the grace and finesse of a professional athlete. The "Half Wall" is a wooden/wire barrier that divides Bara's (and her room-mates') enclosure from the enclosure of another one of our meerkat families. The Plexiglas ledge that covers the top portion of the wall was designed to prevent any meerkat from summiting. But clever Bara devised a foolproof method of gaining the top so she can lord it over the other meerkats residing at "base camp" below. We can't help but applaud her ingenuity as we watch her steadfast route to the "ledge on the edge of the world." (It seems it's all in the claws.)

Bara is a beautiful five year old female, the only one of our meerkats who is a sub-species found only in the very southernmost portion of the Kalahari Desert. All our other meerkats are the species more commonly found in Botswana. Bara is truly a meerkat of a "different color." For those of you who have visited the Center, you might remember her as the meerkat with grayer overtones, more distinct markings on her back, and a shorter, wider (at the base) tail.

Bara is the "responsible one" and acts as the chief sentry for all. She is, in fact, one of our only meerkats that regularly pulls guard duty

just as a meerkat would do in the wild. You can usually find her perched on top of a log or rock in the enclosure (or on "her" ledge.) She takes the responsibility very seriously. Standing upright with an enviable posture, she scans the horizon for predators as she constantly turns her head left to right. Her repetitive vocalizations are audible cues which tell her fellow meerkats that all is well, there are no predators around, and they can play, forage, or nap to their heart's content.

We wonder if she is frustrated when the others take this arduous task for granted. They seem to know they are safe at the Center even though hawks, falcons, and an occasional great heron elicits an alarm call which makes everyone scurry for the burrows. In general, the meerkats allow little Bara to do all the guarding. And so, she stoically carries on, guarding without fail. Such is the life of the matriarch of a family, eh?

Bara is also the most tenacious member of the mob and always, always, "gets the worm." She has the uncanny ability to figure out any puzzle box, trick ball, or other device we use for hiding worms. She's incredibly curious and sly. A momentarily unattended bucket of wood chips allows Bara to dump the entire contents and merrily spread the chips all over the enclosure with her tiny paws. After the mischief, Bara smiles at us (literally!) because she knows she's added 20 minutes of "clean up" time to our chores. She's a diva and vixen all in one. Our bright and cunning little meerkat is endearing and, occasionally, a little exasperating. We couldn't love her more!



Our passion for meerkats and our commitment to our mission has enabled our little Center to blossom into something far greater than we ever envisioned. Our loyal and generous adoptive parents have enabled us to make what was once just a fervent hope into a reality. We've set many new goals for the coming years. We're grateful that you'll be with us, stride for stride, every step of the way! We think of you often and with great fondness and appreciation!

"As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them"

-John F. Kennedy

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