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Overnight accommodations at Fossil Rim (left), Will Crooks feeding a Gizelle (right), Katie the Maned Wolf (bottom) photos by Wendy Crooks



## Take a Ride on the Wild Side

By Wendy Crooks

“ARE WE THERE YET?” asked my 4-year-old daughter for the fifth time during our trip. From Frisco to Glen Rose, Texas, it only took 2 hours and 15 minutes to reach Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, but the anticipation was more than our four children could bear. Traveling through the scenic hill country of northern Texas was actually quite relaxing, even with four very excited children in tow.

Once we arrived, our friendly tour guide, Jan, greeted us. She explained that visitors could take a self-guided drive through the Wildlife Center or they could arrange for a guided tour. On the “Behind the Scenes” tour, a trained naturalist will take you to places on the property that the general public can’t see. You will come face-to-face (nearly) with wolves, cheetah, black rhino and other great animals. We were lucky enough to take the guided tour with Jan and she shared a plethora of intriguing animal information as well as

information about the property itself.

A Dallas company that ironically used the property for a hunting camp originally owned the Fossil Rim Wildlife

Center. Now, the nearly 1,800-acre property is currently operating as a non-profit wildlife conservation and education attraction.

Although the weather was less than spectacular on the day of our tour, it didn’t dampen our visit in the least. Riding in an open vehicle, we bundled up with coats, gloves and blankets and set forth on our adventure. As we drove through the Wildlife Center, we didn’t have to go searching too far for the animals. In fact, they were most eager to come see what goodies we had to offer. Jan warned that we should save some of our special animal food that she gave us because the giraffes really liked it. I thought the kids were going to burst at the seams when she mentioned the long-necked creatures that awaited them.

We all seemed to get giddy as we saw the spotted and striped animals throughout the ride. We saw several different types of deer and antelope.



“This is funner than I ever could imagine!” my son exclaimed as the giraffe came over to see if we had any treats.”

We saw emus, zebra, kudu, gemsbok, blesbok, aoudad, bison, gazelle, ostrich, attwater's prairie chicken and yes, even giraffe!

"This is funner than I ever could imagine!" my son exclaimed as the giraffe came over to see if we had any treats. I have to admit, although I would have phrased it a little differently, I was having a great time myself. The giraffe was my favorite animal too. They were beautiful. I am forever amazed at how graceful this long-legged, long-necked animal is. One giraffe came up close and personal as he stuck his head close enough to feed him.

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"I felt like Indiana Jones as we embarked on and spotted a cheetah. Okay, so he was behind a fence, but it still made my heart race..."

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#### OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

After we finally saw the tall lanky guys, we stopped at the area where the "tents" were. Fossil Rim invites overnight guests and offers them a few choices for bunking down. Jan showed us my kind of tent. The tent cabins are fully equipped with twin beds, a private bath, fresh linens, a ceiling fan and central heat and air. Even this city girl could be comfortable there! Then we saw the lodge and I realized that I could be even more comfortable there! What was once the original "ranch house" for the property was modified slightly to become a beautifully inviting Bed and Breakfast. Guests can enjoy relaxing in a great room with a massive stone fireplace. The different rooms offer different amenities but all of them offer guests a chance to view the deer, wild turkey, Arabian oryx and desert addax from the spectacular balcony view.

After checking out the great places to

stay, we went to see some endangered species. I felt like Indiana Jones as we embarked on a spotted cheetah. Okay, so he was actually behind a fence, but still it made my heart race to see him pacing back and forth as if he'd like to make me his next meal. We also saw a few black rhino and met a wolf named "Katie."

The next stop was the Children's Animal Center. Conveniently located near the gift shop and the Overlook cafe, the kids had a ball brushing and petting the small animals. My favorite small animal was a pot-bellied pig named Rosie. She was so ugly she was cute and made the funniest noises.

#### CONSERVATION WORK AMID THE FUN

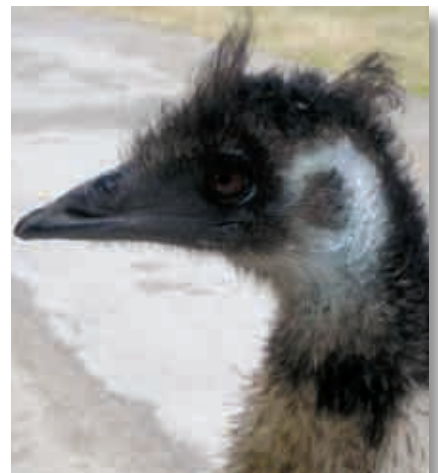
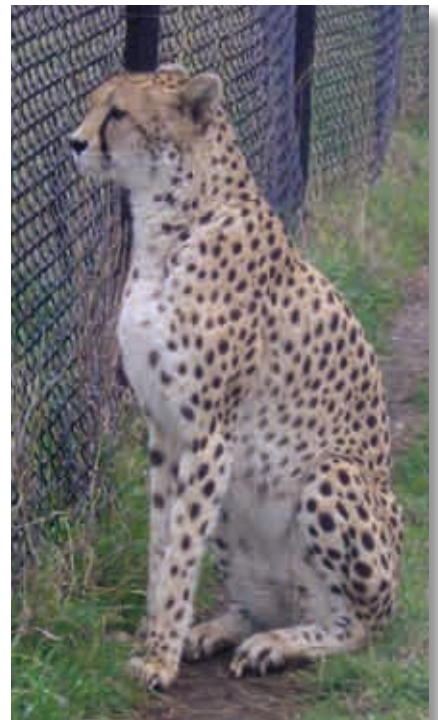
Of course, for us it was all fun and games while visiting Fossil Rim, but the work they do there is absolutely incredible. There are 14 endangered species that are protected and bred at the Wildlife Center. Research and public awareness also play an important role at Fossil Rim.

Despite all the great Fossil Rim treats given to the animals by visitors each day, they still have to be fed and watered regularly, cared for when hurt or injured, and studied. For these reasons, there are 76 people who work on the property plus 12-20 interns.

While the average visitor spends about 3 hours taking the 9.5-mile drive, we hung out longer than that. I thought for sure that the kids would all be tuckered out and ready for a quiet peaceful drive home. To the contrary, they couldn't stop chattering about all of the exciting animals they saw and the funny things they watched them do. They had had so much fun they were laughing and reliving the day all the way home. By the time we were nearing home, I couldn't help but wonder, "Are we there yet?"

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*Wendy Crooks is a freelance writer who lives in Plano with her husband and four children.*



*Black Rhino (top), Watchful Cheetah (middle), Hungry Emu (bottom) photos by Wendy Crooks*