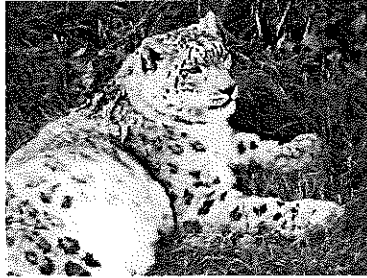


A Day at the Zoo

By ReadWorks

ONE



Zoe yawned as she entered the employee entrance of the Bronx Zoo. It was 6 a.m. and much too early for the recent college graduate to be wide awake. As she waited for her morning coffee to kick in, she watched the sun rise over the canopy of blooming trees that decorated the park grounds. It was her second week on the job as an animal keeper. After four years at university studying zoology, she finally landed a spot at one of the most famous zoos in the world. She thought of all the visitors that came from all over the world to wander around the grounds to see thousands of exotic and foreign animals.

“Zoe!” her supervisor, Carlos, called out. “Let’s get going!”

She jolted up and out of her trance. “Coming!” she shouted back. She stuffed her things into her locker and pulled out her uniform—a simple pair of khaki pants and a white polo shirt. She yanked on her rubber boots and set off after Carlos. It was time for their morning rounds, during which they fed the animals and cleaned their habitats before the visitors arrived.

Zoe had specialized in behavioral ecology during her studies at university, so when she applied for a job at the zoo, she specified that she was very interested in the ways animals adapt their behavior to changing environmental factors. Zoe remembered hanging posters of endangered animals in her room as a child and hoped one day she would somehow be able to save them. Therefore, when she came to work at the zoo, she wanted to work in the exhibits of endangered species.

“Alright, you set out the food, and I’ll start cleaning,” Carlos said to Zoe. They had arrived at the snow leopard habitat after a short cruise in one of the zoo’s several golf carts—a way in which the animal keepers traversed the 265 acres of the zoo. Zoe was still new to the job, so she was still thrilled by the rare opportunities it presented. She treasured the mornings she spent with Liya, the snow leopard, especially because Liya had just given birth to a cub named Leo.

Zoe could spend hours watching the mother and her cub. With light-gray fur speckled with large, black splotches, Leo was extremely playful—he spent hours running around the rocky habitat, prancing, falling, and teetering across narrow tree trunks with his big paws stumbling underneath him. Since snow leopards are usually most active in the early mornings

and late afternoons, Zoe always got a show when she was assigned to their habitat at the beginning of the day.

As she laid out small rodents for the leopards to eat, Zoe tried to picture Liya and Leo in their natural habitat, far out in the mountains of Pakistan. Although it pained her somewhat to see the two majestic animals in such a limited space, she reminded herself that it was for the better. Snow leopards were at serious risk in their homelands as a result of poaching, a loss of habitat, and decreasing amounts of prey. Liya was originally rescued from the mountains when she was found alone after her family had been killed.

There are only somewhere between 3,500 and 7,000 snow leopards left in the wild. Since they are still being hunted for their pelts and bones, conservationists have set up cameras to watch the endangered animals in their natural habitats, which are found in Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan. The snow leopard habitat at the Bronx Zoo is part of the Species Survival Plan Program, which helps to manage the species population around the world.

“You know, one day we’ll have to say goodbye to these two,” Carlos said, pointing at the mother and her cub, who was busy leaping from rock to rock, his fluffy tail trailing behind him.

“What do you mean?” Zoe asked.

“Well, once the government of Pakistan is able to ensure a safe habitat for the leopards, we’ll have to send them back to their home,” he explained.

Zoe knew the pair would be happier back in the snow-covered peaks of the Himalayas, but she would miss starting her days with them. Yet she also knew it would be a while until the government could guarantee a safe place for the leopards.

During her time at university, she had spent some time researching the snow leopards. Farmers in the high-altitude grasslands of the snow leopards’ habitat had begun increasing their number of livestock. Because the livestock competed with the leopards’ natural prey for resources, the population of the prey had decreased. As a result, the snow leopards had started to feed on the livestock, creating more interactions between leopards and humans. To protect themselves and their livelihood, humans often made this interaction fatal for the snow leopards. Zoe knew the government had to solve that problem before the snow leopards could be reintroduced to their natural habitat.

“Alright then, let’s get moving,” Carlos said. Zoe looked over to where she had dropped the rodents for the leopards’ breakfast, and sure enough, they were gone. Liya lounged on a rock on her back while Leo tried to get her attention by walking on her stomach. He pawed at her and licked her face until she lazily got to her feet and chased after the prancing cub. Zoe laughed at the two and climbed into the golf cart next to Carlos. “On to the next one!” she exclaimed. As the sun climbed higher in the sky, the two animal keepers moved on to the next exhibit. It was just another set of rounds that would help ensure the safety of endangered species from all over the world.