



David M. Jones, DVM
Zoo Director

N.C. ZOO EXPERIENCE INCLUDES SPECTACULAR PLANTS

While most people think of animals when they hear the term “zoo,” the North Carolina Zoo is also an exciting public garden.

The 1,448-acre park near Asheboro has more than 40,000 plants displayed throughout its 300-acre African and 200-acre North American exhibit regions.

Perhaps the most spectacular of these collections can be found in the zoo’s R.J. Reynolds Forest Aviary, a 13,000-square-foot indoor habitat featuring a Plexiglas®-domed roof. It represents a montage of tropical forests, complete with more than 2,000 tropical plants and dozens of exotic birds in free flight.

The aviary has been rated by *Southern Living* magazine as the only major conservatory between Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pa., and the Fuqua Conservatory at the Atlanta (Ga.) Botanical Gardens. The aviary’s plant collection includes more than 600 species. Among them are kapok tree, banyan tree, mahogany, sapodilla tree, banana plants, star fruit, papaya, orchids, bromeliads and many species of gingers.

The zoo has an extensive African plant collection, exhibited primarily in its 53,000-square-foot African Pavilion. Underneath a tent-shaped fiberglass roof, the Pavilion recreates forest and forest edge habitats. Animal species, representing various African eco-systems, and more than 3,000 plants are displayed in the Pavilion’s controlled environment. [The plant and animal collections will be phased out through 2009, with the building scheduled to be razed in 2010.]

More than 200 plant species are represented, including a number imported through a zoo field program in the African nation of Cameroon and found nowhere else in the country. Among the Cameroon plants represented are *Marantochloa*, *Aframomum*, *Leea*, *Rauvolfia* and *Psychotria*. Other African species in the Pavilion include coffee and oil palms, different types of cola trees, dracaenas, snake plants and a variety of ferns.

The zoo’s natural habitat approach to animal exhibits requires the extensive use of exotic plant materials throughout the park. Outstanding examples of the exterior use of these plants in the Africa exhibit area can be found near the entrance to the R.J. Reynolds Forest Aviary, the Wachovia Akiba Market, the BB&T Kitera Forest Chimpanzee Reserve and the Forest Glade gorilla habitat.

Bigleaf magnolia, windmill, needle and sabal palms, bananas and a wide variety of blooming plants, such as tender salvia and hibiscus, are among the more unusual and colorful “tropical look-alike” plants that give these areas the feel of an exotic garden in the midst of a North Carolina woodland.

Located in the Uwharrie Mountain range of Randolph County, the zoo is also home to a beautiful array of native Piedmont plants such as deciduous rhododendrons, flowering dogwoods, Eastern redbud trees, oaks and maples.





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Spring is the best time to witness the spectacular colors of the zoo's blooming plants. Among the spring attractions in the Aviary are several species of ginger, along with pinwheel jasmines, lobster claw heliconia, lollipop plants, paper flowers and flame of the woods.

The 200-acre North American region, opened in phases between 1994 and 1996, more than doubled the zoo's plant collection. Perhaps the most spectacular of the North America exhibits is the Sonora Desert, a botanically accurate 14,000-square-foot indoor recreation of the desert southwest.

Along with creatures such as tarantulas, gila monsters, road runners and ocelots, the Sonora Desert also features an extensive collection of cacti and other desert plants – over 100 species--including saguaros as tall as 13 feet. In 1994, it was honored as the first zoo exhibit ever to receive the Award of Program Excellence from the American Public Gardens Association.

Other North American plant exhibits include endangered pitcher plants—an insect-eating species growing in the zoo's mountain bog exhibit and in the Cypress Swamp habitat--together with another carnivorous plant, Venus' flytrap.

Little wonder that visitor surveys show plants and landscaping are an integral part of the zoo experience.

