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Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park *Upgrades and Events*

CARLSBAD, NM – Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park (Living Desert) is announcing some important upgrades and new transformations for the coming year. Exciting projects have begun to provide new amenities for park visitors, including a new reptile exhibit, an improved paved trail through the park, and a new thick-billed parrot display. Some changes have been made to the event schedule for the spring and summer as well.

“Visitors will experience some new and exciting things at Living Desert this year,” said Director Tommy Mutz. “Due to the generosity of donors, the community and partners, we have been able to make substantial changes at the park and invite visitors to join us.”

Reptile Exhibit

The ground-breaking event for a new reptile exhibit took place on March 5, 2013 at Living Desert. The project is made possible by the generous grant of \$1,000,000 from a private individual in Carlsbad. It will replace the existing exhibit, which was built in the late 1960s and early 1970s and is showing its age. This project was identified by the zoo as the next facility to be upgraded to bring it into modern standards and practices.

The new building will be approximately 3,150 square feet and will feature an exhibit room, where the visitors can view the reptiles in their new displays. There will be 16 new exhibits for native snakes and other reptiles.

This building will be built from structural insulated panels, which will save energy and operating expenses. LED lighting and efficient air conditioning and heating will also keep electric bills to a minimum.

“The design is intended to blend into the landscape and to evoke reptiles,” said State Park Architect, Rob Vadurro at the ground breaking ceremony. “Construction is starting today and will be done before the December holidays.”

Thick-billed Parrot Exhibit

A new exhibit open to the public displays two endangered Thick-billed Parrots. Living Desert participates in the AZA Thick-billed Parrot Species Survival Plan, and received the male from the San Antonio Zoo and has a female on loan from the Cincinnati Zoo.

Thick-billed Parrots are the only parrot species native to the Chihuahuan Desert. They are very social, live in flocks, roost in groups and are very vocal. Their loud calls can be heard from over a mile away.

“State Parks is lucky to have this pair of special parrots and we are excited to feature them as part of our interpretive programming for the public,” said Director Mutz.

Other Park Upgrades

State Parks is also involved in other improvements at Living Desert. An extensive renovation of the walkway through the first half of the zoo is nearing completion. These improvements provide consistent surfacing, and meet the Americans with Disabilities Act standards. Phase two of this effort will commence after the completion of the reptile exhibit. This project was funded through the Recreational Trails Program.

Also, a major upgrade of the electrical infrastructure throughout the park is being undertaken. This will provide additional power to the east end of the park and will ensure greater safety for our staff, visitors and animals.

Special Events

Many events will continue this season, but Living Desert and the Friends of Living Desert have mutually agreed to suspend the *Mescal Roast and Mountain Spirit Dances* for 2013. Plans are already in the works to have an event focused on the *Mescal Roast* for 2014 and possibly even a bridge event for later this year.

Despite this, Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park will still hold many fun events throughout the summer, such as: the *Preschool Story Time* program that will run through April 27, 2013; the *Spring Plant Sale*, April 6-7; *March for Parks Earth Day Event*, April 20; a monthly *Music and the Moon* event; the *Carlsbad Gem and Mineral Show*, June 14-16; the *Living Desert Art Show*, June 22; the successful *Zoo Camp*, for kids of many ages, beginning in July; and multiple star parties.

Living Desert Zoo and Gardens became a State Park in June 1971, and has evolved into a premier indoor/outdoor living museum, offering natural history education for visitors. Contact Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park at (575) 887-5516 for additional information, including special events and activities for visitors and its ongoing commitment to wildlife conservation and science education or visit www.nmparks.com.

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