

Kids get up-close look at bats and other wild animals at library program

BY MARILYN THOMAS

mthomas@hfchronicle.com

Sharon Peterson introduced the crowd to Maxie the skunk, Harriett the parrot, Virginia the possum, Togo the bat, Lulu the hedgehog, a trio of sugar gliders she calls the Powder Puff Girls and Navoo the bald python.

Peterson took kids and their parents around the world during her presentation "Incredible Bats" July 13 at the Homewood Public Library, discussing her collection of exotic animals from Illinois and across the globe.

She's affectionately known as "Bat Lady," a title she has worn proudly for more than 25 years. Her love of wild animals started when she was a Girl Scout leader and her troop did a project on bats. Peterson, of Mokena, took the effort a step further learning all she could about bats. That started her crusade to share the importance of bats in nature.

"Bats are vital to our world. If you have any fear of bats, get over it because these guys are really important. We need bats," she told the audience as she walked around with the Tanzanian bat named Togo giving those in attendance a chance to see the bat up close and watch as he spread his wings.

There are 900 different species of bats. They are wonderful pollinators helping to replenish the rain forests and oth-



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Ahmir Bolden pets the African parrot that was part of Sharon Peterson's Incredible Bats program at the Homewood Public Library. Peterson gave lessons on her exotic pets during her program.

er areas on earth. Many eat bugs and fruits for their nectar and juices. They are nocturnal animals.

Peterson blames Hollywood for turning the public off on bats. Movies depict them as scary and blood-sucking. Yes, there are vampire bats that go for blood, but it's from an animal not a human, and they don't suck blood but lick



Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle

Vinny Volini, 8, and his sister Frankie, 6, got to pet the bearded dragon on display after the Homewood Library program "Incredible Bats."

it after making an incision in a vein, Peterson's son, Daniel, explained.

"If there were no more bats in the world, we would be overrun by insects, every inch of the soil on the planet would be covered by bugs and we would have no food. Mass extinction. We need bats," Peterson said. "I'm telling you right now we need them for a balanced ecosystem. Do not fear them, but respect them."

Peterson presented about a dozen

animals and gave short informational lessons about each. Harriett the parrot, for example, is a beautiful green parrot from Africa, but really her feathers are gray. They only show green because of refracted light on the feathers.

Maxie the four-year-old striped skunk is a pet that Peterson has had since she was five weeks old. Maxie was bred to be a pet, its sensitive glands removed so she can't spray her pungent chemical.

Peterson is licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and has the Illinois Furbearer license so she can keep and present her animals. She presented several varieties of snakes explaining the difference between a constrictor, which will squeeze the life from its prey, and the venomous snake that uses its fangs to inflict its paralyzing venom.

While Peterson and her family enjoy having the array of animals around the house, she stressed that they don't make great pets. She acquired Lulu, the African hedgehog, after the family realized after several weeks that Lulu wasn't the friendly cartoon animal. She's nocturnal and the spikes on her back can hurt.

Peterson said scientists are learning a lot from animals. She pointed to biomimicry, the study of an animal's structure to have it work in our world. She said the hedgehog's skeleton is crossed, rather than straight like ours. Scientists have taken that pattern and used it to improve the structure of helmets.

Prairie State registration for in-person, hybrid, online classes now open

BY CHRONICLE STAFF

Registration is open for the fall 2022 semester at Prairie State College with various options, including in-person, online and hybrid classes with flexible scheduling options and convenient start dates throughout the semester.

Continuing and prospective students

seeking a degree or certificate can now enroll in 16-, 14-, 12- and eight-week courses. The 16-week and first eight-week courses begin Aug. 22. Classes for the 14-week session begin Sept. 6. The 12-week courses begin Sept. 16 and the second eight-week session begins Oct. 17.

To enroll, students must complete an online application, and new students

must speak with an advisor to register for the first semester. Current and returning PSC students can register through WebAdvisor or complete the online registration form.

All classes are listed on WebAdvisor, along with instructions on how to search for courses.

The college is open 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, and 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Wednesday through Aug 12. Regular hours resume Aug. 15.

Financial aid and scholarships are available to eligible applicants. The PSC Foundation offers scholarships for tuition, books and fees to those who qualify.

For additional information, visit the PSC website prairiestate.edu.

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