Critter Corner by Rachael Komulainen, Park Animal Keeper

Happy Spring, everyone! I have a few updates to share, with you all. First of all, the Critter Fair – on Saturday, May 18th – was HUGELY successful! We had around 2,000 attendees for our 6-hour event. There was a nice variety of animal vendors, selling anything and everything related to animals. Also, several of the L.A. County Animal Shelters participated and at least 10 dogs got adopted -- yeah! The Barnyard hosted several games for the public to play and win prizes and extra raffle tickets. And, all attendees that entered the Barnyard, got a free raffle ticket to put in the corresponding bag of whatever cool basket that they wanted to try and win. We gave Barnyard Tours and did several animal interactions with the alpacas, llama, and tortoises. I want to THANK all of the staff, volunteers and patrons, for making our event so successful!

On April 15th, I learned the very sad news that my predecessor, Debbie Pepe, had passed away suddenly, a couple days prior. Debbie had been the Park Animal Keeper at Hart Park for 7 years, until I took over in 2013. She had only been retired for a couple of years. After her time at Hart Park, she went to work in the sanctuaries of the Natural Areas of L. A. County - Park & Recreation. Debbie really loved animals, especially horses. May her spirit reunite with all her beloved critters that have passed before her. RIP Debbie Pepe (11/15/61-4/12/24).

On May 7th, we had our spring/second collection day for the dung beetle research project. This time, there was a larger variety and higher amounts of dung beetles present in the feces of the bison dung, presumably due to the warmer weather than the February/first collection day. This study is so very interesting… Keep you all posted!

On May 22nd, we picked up our newest member of the Barnyard Critter Family: “Coconut!” Coconut is an adult, male Umbrella cockatoo. His human mom recently passed away, after battling a long illness, and her family placed him with us. He is getting acclimated to his new digs, especially his neighbor, Casper.

We GREATLY THANK our local LDS Church members (from multiple Wards) that, once again, participated in a spring clean-up-the-park day. They participate two times per year in this event, which really helps the park. Fortunately, we coordinated it to be a week before Cowboy Festival, to maximize park beautification.

Reminder: The Barnyard is open from 9am-2pm, every day except Mondays, so stop in for a visit to meet Coconut and see all the other critters! And, if you have free time on your hands and love animals, think about volunteering at Hart Park. We hope to see you soon!