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QF pupils add spice to Doha zoo an mals' life

By Peter Townson

Students from Qatar Foundation have been working alongside Doha Zoo to create an 'enrichment programme' for some of the animals there, providing them with toys and other materials to make their lives more interesting and enjoyable.



raised her-who hand ,Rita with her keeper Tarik

Started some two months ago by students at The Learning Centre School (TLCS) at Qatar Foundation, the programme was initiated after a trip to the zoo, when the children felt that the chimpanzees there seemed to be bored and unhappy. As part of the "Roots and Shoots" club at the school, the kids have proceeded to work with the zoo management and zookeepers to create this programme for the chimpanzees as well as Bhalou the bear – one of the newest additions to the zoo who has his own interesting story. After being abandoned by the circus which brought him to Qatar, Bhalou was transported to the zoo where he has been kept ever since. Unaware of Bhalou, his back-story (or gender!), the students chose to name the bear Hilda after a woman at Phoenix Zoo in the US who is providing advice on how to look after him. The students have been organised by teacher Jenny Wilson who has also been assisted by Barbara Wilson from the American School Doha (ASD), and other students from ASD and Qatar Academy. "The kids have made toys from recycled materials for the chimps, and they are also shredding used paper at school which is then providing soft sleeping material for the chimps' beds," explained Jenny, adding that the children from ASD and Qatar Academy are helping with shredding the paper. The zoo has recently built a new outdoor sleeping area for the female chimpanzee (known as Rita), and keepers are also leaving food hidden in the outdoor enclosure of all three chimps so that they forage throughout the day. They are providing a similar service for Bhalou as well, hiding fruit, nuts and raisins in popsicles around his enclosure. Bhalou has also had water added

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to the moat around his enclosure so he can swim, and Wilson explained that they are awaiting a wooden sleeping platform which will leave him sleeping high off the ground. She added that the schoolchildren are also learning how to make smaller fruit popsicles to give to the chimps. TLCS students visited the zoo to hand over the toys they had made, and they have been writing logs of the animals' behaviour to see how they are affected and whether they are worthwhile additions to their enclosures. Jenny explained that the ASD students are now also doing the same work with the animals. "The head of the zoo, Hamad Salih al-Yazeedi; the curator, Mohamed Hussein Hassan and head veterinarian have made all this possible by being open to new and different ideas," said Jenny, adding "the students are thrilled and excited about continuing their work this school year and next." She added that everyone at the zoo has been doing a "wonderful job" of implementing the programme, and said that the group are already planning to develop enrichment for the elephant and cheetahs in the future. In providing education about the animals as well as presenting the children with the opportunity to enrich the animals' lives, this programme is a prime example of community involvement with animal welfare, and as a possible indication of future projects, represents a positive step for animal welfare in Qatar.

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