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Fact Sheet – Baylor Bear Program

About the Program

- Baylor's two American Black Bears live in the Bill and Eva Williams Bear Habitat. The Habitat stands as one of the most-visited spots on the Baylor campus, estimated to welcome more than 250,000 visitors each year, including over 5,000 children visiting on educational trips for schools, camps, etc.
- The Bear has served as the Baylor mascot since 1914.
- The live mascot program began on campus in 1917.
- The Baylor Chamber of Commerce, an officially recognized student organization with oversight from the Division of Student Life, began caring for the bears in 1940.

Caring for the Bears

Daily care:

- The Bill and Eva Williams Bear Habitat is fully accredited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a Class C Zoo, regulated extensively by the USDA through random and rigorous inspections throughout the year and renewed annually based on adherence to standards of care and facility maintenance.
- Student trainers within the Baylor Chamber of Commerce are tasked with caring for the bears seven days a week, 365 days a year, including between semesters, on major holidays and regardless of weather conditions. Each student caregiver who helps in daily feedings and enrichments is trained and mentored by animal care experts and also has their food handler license since the bears enjoy a wide range of fresh raw meats, fruits and vegetables.
- Both Lady and her older sister Joy eat two meals a day consisting of a specially formulated omnivore diet and raw protein sources like fish, supplemented with fruits such as oranges, grapefruit, coconut, apples and peaches in the morning and vegetables such as lettuce, carrots, sweet potatoes and avocados in the evening.
- Joy and Lady are weighed every 1-2 weeks and tracked over time to ensure the maintenance of excellent health based on the time of year.
- The Habitat allows Joy and Lady to enjoy two separate yards for roaming and enrichment, along with trees, two pools, a stream and waterfall, two caves and a den. The bears also enjoy regular exercise and enrichment in an outdoor, remote facility and do not attend football games or other athletic or public events.

Medical/Health care:

- Joy and Lady receive state-of-the-art veterinary care at the Texas A&M University Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital in College Station, Texas.
- The Baylor Bear Program has worked with Joy and Lady to accomplish "voluntary vet care." This means they are trained with behaviors that reduce stress of yearly vaccinations or examinations they may need. They also have been taught learned behaviors that allow our veterinarian to check their teeth, muscles and other important aspects of their physical health.

- Joy and Lady are provided enrichment activities daily. All enrichment activities are what is known as "goal-based enrichment." This means that all enrichment activities are strategically planned based on the desired natural behaviors and stimuli that the bears need. There are activities that encourage vertical movement, which helps ward off arthritis; activities that encourage forging and digging; activities that heighten and stimulate their sense of smell and sense of sound; and activities that act as puzzles and toys, which strengthen their prolonged focus and more.
- As our bears are aging, all trainings, enrichments and diets are modified according to the recommendations of our veterinary care team to reflect the care the bears need in their unique stages of life.

Judge Sue "Lady" Sloan

- Age: 17 (DOB: Jan. 31, 2002)
- Weight: 263 lbs.
- Height: 6 ft. tall when standing

Judge Joy "Joy" Reynolds

- Age 18 (DOB Jan. 27, 2001)
- Weight 264 lbs.
- Height: 5 ft. 4in. tall when standing

- Life expectancy of bears in the wild is 15-18 years, while bears in long-term protected care can live up to 22 to 25 years.

2019 Diagnosis and Treatment of Lady's Thymoma

- In a June 2019 wellness visit under the direction of Sharman Hoppes, DVM, an exotic animal specialist with Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, a cranial mediastinal mass was found in Lady's chest next to her heart. A July computed tomography (CT) scan diagnosing the mass as thymoma, a tumor that affects the thymus, an organ located near the lungs that is part of the lymphatic and immune systems.
- This particular tumor had never been observed in a living bear early enough to treat due to its asymptomatic nature, meaning that there are no external physical or behavioral symptoms that would indicate a problem. The only previous case of thymoma in a bear was not evident until autopsy.
- Under the care of J. Jill Heatley, DVM, zoological medicine specialist at Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, Lady was treated in August with a low-dose TomoTherapy System, a state-of-the-art treatment system that targets tumors while minimizing exposure of radiation to surrounding healthy tissues and causing fewer side effects compared to conventional forms of radiation therapy.
- Following her initial treatment, Lady was prescribed a raw-based, high-protein, high-energy diet to encourage additional weight gain, including adding salmon, boiled eggs (whole, including the shell) and high-energy omnivore chow.
- After consultation with the radiation oncologists, surgical oncologists, zoo service and anesthesiologists at Texas A&M, accompanied by counseling with the Bear Program's board of advisors, the decision was made to continue a non-invasive treatment plan that called for three additional rounds of tomotherapy, with Lady undergoing those treatments on Dec. 2, 10 and 11 in College Station.
- There are no recorded cases of radiation treatments of a bear, with the veterinary staff pursuing an unprecedented treatment path that will yield new knowledge for zoological care.
- While no external signs of treatment are expected, Lady will be monitored closely and assessed by her care team to ensure her comfort and recovery. She will be served a soft food diet for a short period of time following treatment to accommodate any throat irritation resulting from anesthesia.