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Great Ape Trust of Iowa sets new hours, new experiences for 2008 member tours

Visitors will be able to see orangutans exploring large outdoor yard

Des Moines, Iowa – February 27, 2008 – Great Ape Trust of Iowa members taking part in member tours this spring and summer are likely to see orangutans Azy, Knobi and Allie exploring their new outdoor yard, at nearly 4 acres, one of the largest for captive orangutans in North America.

This spring's anticipated opening of the outdoor yard, a major new development at Great Ape Trust, will increase the apes' enrichment options. Importantly, it also will expand the options available in the scientific study of how orangutans move about a natural forest habitat, forage for food and other aspects of their behavior related to memory. Such data sets teach scientists about the mechanisms by which orangutans make locomotion or food choices, information that is valuable to conservationists developing strategies for the long-term survival of orangutans in the wild, where they are endangered or, in the case of the Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*), critically endangered.

That's just one of the changes in Great Ape Trust's 2008 public visitation program. Hours of tours for paid members have also been changed to 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. each Tuesday and Thursday from May 27 through Sept. 4, to better complement scientists' research schedules. As in past years, the member tours will feature an

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overview educational session, but experiences with the apes may change periodically, depending on whether the bonobos and orangutans choose to spend their time doing computer and lexigram work in their enclosed laboratories or exploring their respective outdoor yards. All activities at The Trust, including the daily scientific research, are predicated on the apes' willingness to participate.

Operations Director Jim Aipperspach said the public tours reflect Great Ape Trust's commitment to transparency of its programs. Great Ape Trust scientists designed the visitation program to work in concert with their ongoing research on ape intelligence, language, tool use and culture.

"Members of Great Ape Trust contribute to breakthrough scientific research, innovative educational experiences and conservation efforts of great apes," Aipperspach said. "We wanted to reward our members for this commitment by providing them an opportunity to visit our campus."

Tour group sizes will be limited to 30 people. Due to the advanced nature of the experience, Great Ape Trust requires that visitors be at least 10 years old. While a paid membership is required to visit Great Ape Trust, members are not guaranteed a tour because of limited tour availability. Registrations begin immediately at www.GreatApeTrust.org for the 30 dates that have been set aside for the public tours. Tour dates will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Six membership levels are available, but at least a \$35 membership is required before application can be made for two tour tickets. The cost of the tickets helps defray some of the costs of conducting the 2008 visitation program, and also offsets some of the costs of providing free educational tours to schools and students, Aipperspach said.

Depending upon the level of membership, members may be able to purchase additional tickets for \$15 each. The Trust's membership structure is as follows:

- \$35 membership – 2 tickets
- \$75 membership – 2 tickets with the option to purchase 2 additional tickets at \$15 each
- \$250 membership – 2 tickets with the option to purchase 6 additional tickets at \$15 each

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- \$500 membership – 2 tickets with the option to purchase 12 additional tickets at \$15 each
- \$1,000 membership – 30-person tour
- \$2,500 membership – Private, behind-the-scenes tour for small group

In addition to the public tour dates, Great Ape Trust has set aside dates in May, September and October for educational visits, including those associated with Great Ape Academy, The Trust's one-of-a-kind education program for public school students in Iowa. In the initiative's pilot year in 2007, hundreds of Des Moines middle school students visited Great Ape Trust for a rare opportunity to look over the shoulders of world-renowned scientists doing ape cognition research that only takes place in Iowa.

"It's so important for students to learn about Great Ape Trust and our important scientific and conservation work," Aipperspach said. "That's why we've committed to free tours this spring and fall for students ranging from middle schools to university graduate programs."

Also, Great Ape Trust officials have determined the organization's own charitable giving plan, which includes a commitment to provide six auction items to support other non-profit groups' fund-raising activities.

"As a non-profit, we understand how important it is for groups to assist each other in the good work we are all doing to make Des Moines and central Iowa stronger," Aipperspach said.

This year, The Trust will offer six auction packages, each of which includes a Caretakers-level membership and the opportunity for up to four people to tour Great Ape Trust and an assortment of merchandise. Tours granted as part of the auction packages will be fit in the regular public visitation schedule.

GREAT APE TRUST BACKGROUND

Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a scientific research facility in southeast Des Moines dedicated to understanding the origins and future of culture, language, tools and intelligence. When completed, Great Ape Trust will be the largest great ape facility in North America and one of the first worldwide to include all four types of great ape –

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bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans – for noninvasive interdisciplinary studies of their cognitive and communicative capabilities.

Great Ape Trust is dedicated to providing sanctuary and an honorable life for great apes, studying the intelligence of great apes, advancing conservation of great apes and providing unique educational experiences about great apes. Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization and is certified by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). To learn more about Great Ape Trust of Iowa, go to www.GreatApeTrust.org.

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Insights Through Collaborations with Apes