

It's a wild,

Get up close and personal with 200 species of animals at the

Dateline: Taiping

By EDMUND NGO

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ENTERING the Taiping Zoo makes one feel like they have stepped into a different world. It is surrounded by lush tropical rainforest and filled with a plethora of animal sounds.

This is the surreal experience visitors get at the iconic site located in the quaint town of Taiping. The zoo has been operating for more than 50 years.

With nearly 200 species of animals, the zoo attracts some 700,000 visitors yearly — both locals and foreigners. The charm lies in its enclosures and variety of inhabitants.

Taiping Zoo and Night Safari director Dr Kevin Lazarus said the enclosures were an “open concept” designed for visitors to view the animals in their most natural environment.

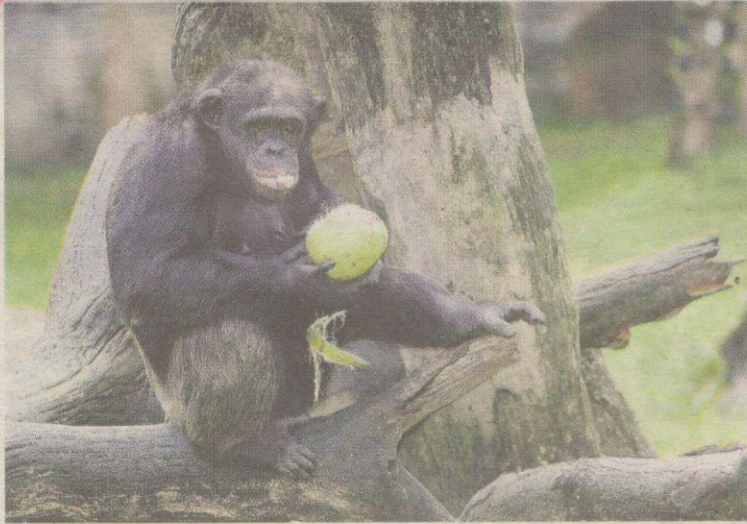
“This is a very different atmosphere as compared to putting all animals in cages. Here, visitors can see the animal interacting with its own species and even other species,” he said.

The effect is clearly visible when visitors stand in front of the tiger enclosure, feeling awe and fear listening to the beast's roar and admiring its stately figure as it moves about in its habitat.

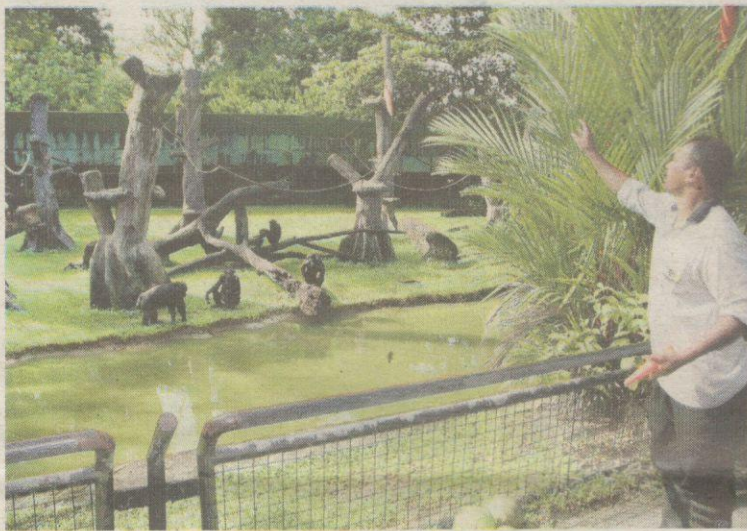
Undergraduate E. Vimal, 22, said the enclosures made visitors feel closer to nature, leaving them with a one-of-a-kind experience.

“You would be transfixed watching the animals from a safe distance yet still able to feel their roars and presence,” he said.

He said that one of his favourite animals was the Malayan Sun Bear, or honey bear, which would use sticks or its long tongue to draw honey out of cracks in between wood provided by the zookeepers.



Self-sufficient: A chimpanzee opens up a young coconut to eat its flesh.



Keeping to schedule: A zookeeper feeding the chimpanzees.



Jumbo diet: It is meal time for the mighty elephants.



Welcome all: The entrance to the

Visitors are transported into a different realm when they enter two separate large dome enclosures, which house the milky stork and the scarlet ibis, as they push aside the metal gates to observe the birds building their nests or flying freely about.

Another crowd-puller are the estuarine crocodiles placed in one of the zoo's newly designed enclosures where the reptiles can swim in the river. During feeding time, visitors can observe crocodiles moving towards their food and jump to snap it within seconds.

Successful breeding programs for animals such as elephant gaur (*seladang*), tigers and leopards have also enhanced the zoo's reputation for attentive care for the animals.

With the sun setting on the Bukit Larut, lights in the safari will light up to pierce the darkness, presenting another unique appeal of the zoo — its Night Safari. The first in the world, the safari started its operations in 1977 and became an

wild, wild world

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Personal with animals at the Taiping Zoo



Welcome all: The entrance of the Taiping Zoo and Night Safari.

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Expensive breed: The arapaimas swimming in one of the ponds.

Another crowd-puller are the estuarine crocodiles placed in one of the zoo's newly designed enclosures where the reptiles can swim in the river. During feeding time, visitors can observe crocodiles moving slowly towards their food and jumping up to snap it within seconds.

Successful breeding programmes for animals such as elephants, the gaur (*seladang*), tigers and gibbons have also enhanced the zoo's appeal and reputation for attentiveness and quality of care for the animals.

With the sun setting on the hills of Bukit Larut, lights in the shape of balls will light up to pierce the engulfing

as visitors could observe the nocturnal animals active at night.

Walking through the zoo in the dark, one can see the agile leopards and the playful otter running around in their enclosures while the jet-black panther growls menacingly. Currently, the zoo is undergoing renovation to improve its facilities.

Dr Lazarus said work was expected to be completed by year end.

"Among the facilities to be put in place are interactive and information signage on the animals, in addition to



Protected species: Tigers drinking water from the stream in their enclosure.



Full attention: Children and parents listening to a Taiping Zoo and Night Safari ranger explaining about the elephant during the educational programme.

other tourist destinations in Taiping would be highlighted in a gallery that was under construction.

He said the gallery would be a one-stop tourist information centre, giving tourists more reasons to visit Taiping.

"We want the public to do more in

Located near the Taiping Lake Gardens, the zoo is open from 8am to 11pm every day while the Night Safari is from 8pm to 11pm daily. Tram rides are available free of charge.

Dr Lazarus said students and youths could opt for the educational pack-



Pretty birds in a row: Three blue-and-yellow macaw perching on a branch.