

Texas State Aquarium has variety of wildlife

The Texas State Aquarium opened a new exhibit this spring: Eagle Pass, featuring raptors that were rehabilitated at the aquarium after being found sick or injured in the wild.

Perhaps the most regal raptor in the new exhibit will be Grace, a bald eagle that was rehabilitated in Alaska and deemed non-releasable.

The aquarium conducts shows with trained hawks, owls and falcons, plus exotic small mammals. The shows take place at the Hawk Wild Flight Theater - a 300-seat open-air amphitheater that opened at the aquarium in 2007.

Of course, the aquarium is mostly about life under the sea. Three of the aquarium's most popular sea creatures are three Atlantic bottlenose dolphins that live in the Dolphin Bay exhibit, which covers more than 30,000 square feet and contains about 400,000 gallons of seawater.

The aquarium also offers visitors the opportunity for a unique experience by living the life of a dolphin trainer. This



Dolphins perform at the Texas State Aquarium.

four-hour private experience is just for visitors and their personal instructors. The program is available four days a week - Friday through Monday - from 7:45 a.m. until noon.

As a dolphin trainer for a day, a visitor will make dolphin food, go to dolphin training school, and prepare enrichment sessions. The highlights of the program are feeding the

dolphins and a private training session where visitors will learn to give hand signals to the animals. Participants must be at least 13 years of age, in good physical shape, able to lift 10 pounds, able to kneel and stoop for extended periods of time, able to traverse narrow rockwork ledges and know how to swim (this is not a swim program, but visitors will be around

large pools of water).

The cost for this program is \$250. To register, call (361) 881-1307 or e-mail reserve@txstateaq.org.

Folks can also meet the aquarium's three dolphins, Shadow, Kai and DJ, through the Deckside Dolphin Encounter. Visitors can learn dolphin behaviors and have the opportunity to hug, kiss, and shake hands with one of the dolphins. The program is offered Fridays through Mondays. Interested folks should call ahead for available times. Reservations: (361) 881-1307.

Another exhibit, called Living Shores, displays seahorses, shrimp and various kinds of crabs that live in the Laguna Madre and Padre Island areas.

The Amazon exhibit features the diversity of the species found in the Amazon. The exhibit explains how humans are connected to the wildlife of the rainforests and why this unique natural resource needs to be preserved.

Also at the aquarium, otters play in and out of the water and greet the guests as they walk

past a glass wall that allows visitors to watch every move the animals make.

The aquarium, at 2710 N. Shoreline Drive, is accessible by U.S. Hwy. 181. From downtown Corpus Christi, take U.S. 181 north across the Harbor Bridge.

Take the first exit (Corpus Christi Beach), follow the curve of the road and turn right on Burseson Street. Go to the first stop sign and turn right on Surfside.

Admission is free for members and \$15.50 for those 13 and older. Senior citizens 65 and older pay \$13.95, and children age 3 to 12 pay \$10.50. Children 2 years old and younger are admitted free. Parking is \$4.

A limited number of wheelchairs are available for loan, and strollers can be rented.

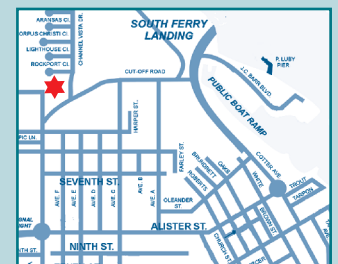
Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and summer hours begin March 1, when the aquarium will remain open until 6 p.m. The Aquarium is closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas days.

The Aquarium's phone numbers are (361) 881-1200 and (800) 477-GULF. The Web site is texasstateaquarium.org.



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