



Michael Paulsen photos / Houston Chronicle

Shasta, a male cougar, licks a cool ice pop treat at the Houston Zoo. The ice pop is made of water and chicken broth and contains whole eggs and a rib bone.

SUMMER IN THE CITY

Helping animals keep their cool at the zoo

Staffers come up with inventive ways to help their charges cope with heat

By Alyson Ward

A greenish chunk of ice is melting slowly on a rock in the Houston Zoo's cougar exhibit. Shasta and Haley are somewhat wary.

The two cougars circle around the ice, ignore it for a while, then circle again. Finally, Shasta moves in and takes a few tentative licks. He retreats, moving swiftly along the exhibit's edge, then returns to the cold, wet block for another lick. Outside the exhibit, a group

of little boys is enthralled.

"It's a lollipop," one of them says, pointing. "Look, there's a lollipop right there for him."

"He's licking his ice cream," says another. "Are they the only ones that get ice cream?"

The greenish ice pop is the sort of treat only a cougar would love. The mix of water and chicken broth contains whole eggs and a thick rib bone. The icy creation is there to help Haley and Shasta stay cool on a day that will soon reach 98
Zoo continues on E5



Methai, a 44-year-old Asian elephant, gets a cool bath and foot rub from zookeeper Kim Klein.

ART

Going out on a limb for the Blue Trees

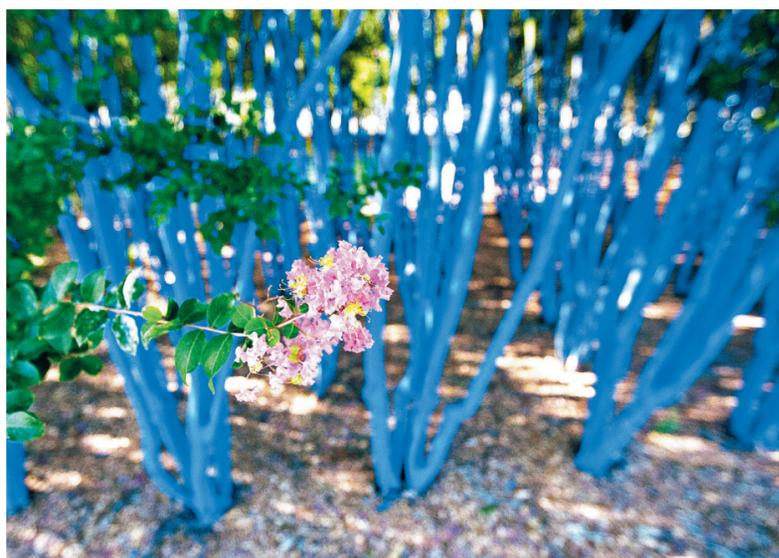
By Molly Glentzer

Driving by them almost daily, I've watched Konstantin Dimopoulos' "Blue Trees" transform from winter through spring and now into summer.

Dimopoulos, who lives in New Zealand, has recently left a trail of blue trunks across the world, a public art project designed to draw attention to global deforestation.

In Houston, we didn't need much of a reminder. Drought brought an apocalyptic die-off to many of Memorial Park's canopies; millions of other trees were lost across the city.

It seemed a little gimmicky at first, when the *Trees continues on E3*



Nick de la Torre / Houston Chronicle

Konstantin Dimopoulos painted trunks of crape myrtles near Waugh and Buffalo Bayou a striking blue as a part of the "Blue Trees" public art project.

KEN HOFFMAN *Commentary*

Counting dogs again this year

Thursday marks my eighth consecutive year judging the Hot Dog Eating Contest at Nathan's Famous on Coney Island. In my house, we call it "The Streak."

With each contest, the organizers give me a more prodigious, higher-ranked competitor in Major League Eating. The first year, my contestant was practically a picky eater. I could have out-eaten him. Last year, I counted for Matt "Megatoad" Stonie, MLE's Rookie of the Year. He finished fourth with 46 hot dogs and buns.

Don't forget

the buns; you have to eat them, too.

This year, I've got my fingers crossed for Joey Chestnut, the all-time hot dog king. I've earned it.

ESPN will air the contest in a one-hour special, starting at 11 a.m. in Houston. But the show, complete with jugglers, cloggers, stilt walkers, trampoline jumpers, clowns and a guy dressed in a hot dog suit (this is what killed him. Last year, I counted for Matt "Megatoad" Stonie, MLE's Rookie of the Year. He finished fourth with 46 hot dogs and buns. Don't forget

vaudeville), starts more than an hour earlier. That's when the crowd begins to fill the corner of Stillwell and Surf avenues in Coney.

Hoffman continues on E5



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STAR Zookeepers bring in a snow machine twice a year



Michael Paulsen / Houston Chronicle

Jacob Chaffee, from left, Kim Klein and Kim Putnam give Baylor, a 3-year-old Asian elephant, a cool bath.

Zoo from page E1

degrees.
It's summer in Houston, and the animals at the zoo are toughing out the temperatures just like the rest of us.
"If it's uncomfortable for us, then it's probably uncomfortable for them," said Angie Pyle, a senior keeper in the carnivore division. So every day of the long, hot summer, zoo staffers look for inventive ways to keep their charges cool.
Ice pops are popular. The biggest are 5- or 10-gallon buckets filled with water, a little Gatorade or food coloring, and a hand-picked assortment of tasty treats. For carnivores, that's likely to be a bone or eggs, with blood or a little tuna juice to make it tasty. Herbivores get whole pieces of fruit.
"They have to wait for it to melt to get that apple or whatever we place inside," Pyle said. Unless the animals lick and chew at the ice, it will last for four or five hours. "It's a matter of waiting it out or cracking them open."
Ice pops aren't the only way for animals to chill out. Sometimes keepers will freeze their toys. Or they'll put those toys in the pool so the animals have to take a cooling dip to retrieve them.
Not all animals like to swim — in fact, tigers and jaguars are the only cats

at the zoo that swim for recreation. But at least one lion doesn't mind being teased into the water.
"Sometimes we throw barrels over the moat," Pyle said, "and every single time, she'll swim out and get it."
If an exhibit doesn't have a pool or a moat, keepers will bring in plastic baby pools. On really hot days, they'll fill the baby pools with ice.
And a couple of times each summer, the zoo brings in snow. Yes, snow — a truck with a snow machine will create a winter landscape in the Houston heat.
Most carnivores aren't big on frolicking in the snow, Pyle said, so keepers have to entice them.
"They may go out and step in it — that's about it," she said. "But if you build a snowman that's got meatballs inside of it, they're definitely going to interact with it."
Bath time
The zoo's elephants get a cool bath every summer morning. Three-year-old Baylor, an Asian elephant, was the first to get lathered up and sprayed down on a recent 90-degree morning. A cluster of the sweaty kids and parents watched from the shade outside the barn.
"He's taking a shower," said Cash Rowney, also 3, as elephant keeper Kim Putnam sprayed Baylor

down with a hose.
The elephants each drink between 40 and 60 gallons of water a day. "We usually go out and offer them drinks from the hose throughout the day and hose them off," Putnam said. Water stations are available throughout the exhibit, but Methai, the 44-year-old matriarch of the group, prefers to drink almost exclusively from the hose. During her bath, she opens her mouth wide, letting a stream of cool water splash inside.
Elephants flap their ears to cool off, and their wrinkles trap water against their skin, which they cover with mud or sand to retain that moisture.
"Really," Pyle said, "animals are much better at dealing with the heat than we are."
But that doesn't mean they can't use a little help. A zoo staffer recently found instructions on Pinterest for turning PVC pipes into a makeshift sprinkler, she said.
"You hook up a water hose, and there's water going all over the place," Pyle said. "It's like a little kid's water play station."
So far, the sprinklers have been a hit with the ravens and the otters. The zoo's ocelot, Novia, may be the next to get one.
"We're trying to be as creative as we can."
alyson.ward@chron.com

Hoffman: Judging once again

Hoffman from page E1

By the time Chestnut begins jamming dozens of dogs down his throat (chewing is for amateurs), 40,000 people will be crammed in front of Nathan's, which is really just a glorified hot dog stand ... which happens to sell the best french fries anywhere in the world. They double-fry them in peanut oil.
Judges must arrive two hours early for their assignments. Please let it be Chestnut. We're given an official referee's shirt and Nathan's baseball cap. The judges' tent has trays of free dogs and fries. I play it smart — maybe two dogs ... tops. No fries before the contest. There will be plenty of time to eat later.
From the official International Federation of Competitive Eating rulebook:
"Your main duties will be to ensure that there is no foul play by your assigned competitor — for example, throwing hot dogs under the table or into cups (the eaters typically drink large plastic cups of warm tea or Kool-Aid). You are to make sure there is no Reversal of Fortune (puking). Your No. 1 job is to count the number of hot dogs and buns eaten."
"As a judge in the most prestigious competitive eating contest in the world, you must ensure the competition stays true to the rules of the International Federation of Competitive Eating."
In 2007, I was witness to a major controversy. I was

judging the eater two down from Takeru Kobayashi, the legendary Japanese eating machine. Sharks have told Kobayashi to eat slower. That day, Koby was accused of vomiting into his cup of tea ... and drinking it. Cute story, huh? I saw the whole thing. But since Chestnut beat him anyway, the whole ugly incident was swept under the rug.
Three years later, Kobayashi was banned from the contest because he wouldn't sign an exclusive contract with the I.F.O.C.E. He showed up anyway to challenge Chestnut, à la Clubber Lang in "Rocky III" — the best "Rocky" for my money. Koby rushed the stage.
Looking back, it was probably a staged publicity stunt. But nobody told the NYPD officers, who tackled Koby before he could reach Chestnut. Kobayashi took a wild swing and hit a cop — uh oh, you don't do that. In the melee, Kobayashi shoved my son Andrew. It was probably the coolest thing that's ever happened to him.
Kobayashi spent the night in a Brooklyn jail. Andrew spent the night telling all his friends what happened.
Will Chestnut break his all-time record of 68 hot dogs and buns consumed in 10 minutes? I doubt it. The weather forecast for Coney Island is cloudy (that's good) with a high of 82 degrees (too hot). Sun, heat and humidity drain

the champ. He does his best eating when it's 75 degrees and cooler.
So if you've got a major gambling problem and the over/under is 65 hot dogs ... take the under.
Today's trivia
I start my summer of chasing kids playing baseball this weekend with a big Marucci tournament in San Marcos. I've never been there, but that name ... where have I heard of San Marcos before? That's right, one of my favorite movies of all time takes place in the fictional "banana republic" of San Marcos. Can you name the movie? I've already given you a big clue.
Near celebrity sighting
I got a flat tire on my bike and wheeled it into Cyclone Cycles on Bellaire Boulevard. The owner told me, "You just missed Anthony Yanez, the weatherman on Channel 2. He was in here buying a bicycle for his daughter."
Weird possible celebrity sighting
Three readers swear they saw Fabio shopping at Trader Joe's on Voss. One reader said a cashier told her, "Oh, sure, he shops here all the time." Anybody else seen Fabio?
Trivia answer
"Bananas," written, directed and starring Woody Allen. Hilarious.
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