

Python Makes Historic Debut

Never Before Seen in a Show at Caribbean Gardens

Naples, FL – Since 1969, Caribbean Gardens: The ZOO in Naples has entertained and educated audiences with scores of fascinating snakes in its presentations. But one amazing reptile, the reticulated python, has been absent from those shows -- and for good reason. This longest species of snake in the world is notorious for their aggressive behavior. But that all changes this week as a reticulated python named "Kaa" makes its debut in the Zoo's *Serpents: Fangs and Fiction* presentation.

Zoo Director David Tetzlaff and his staff will introduce guests to the fascinating world of reticulated pythons. If stretched upright, the 9-foot-2-inch python would already tower over the 6-foot-4-inch Tetzlaff or circle him in coils several times over. And it's still just a youngster. As the fastest growing of the large constrictors, that difference will continue to expand rapidly. Although average adult size ranges from 15 to 20 feet, the largest reticulated python ever documented measured almost thirty-three feet -- the world record for any snake.

The Tetzlaff family has a long history with reticulated pythons. David's father, zoo founder "Jungle Larry" Tetzlaff, became known for his success in reptile husbandry and was hired by famed animal collector Frank "Bring 'em Back Alive" Buck to care of the large constrictors at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. Both Larry and his wife, Nancy "Safari Jane" Tetzlaff, presented reticulated pythons in educational programs in the 1960s. And both sons David and Tim cared for these non-venomous giants the Zoo had on exhibit over the years.

But over the past 36 years at Caribbean Gardens, no reticulated python has had a suitable temperament for the shows. "And with over 100 sharp, recurved teeth and yards of muscular coils, you want the right attitude," explains David Tetzlaff. Reticulated pythons are also not shy about big prey. Indeed, they have a documented history of attacking and consuming adult deer, leopards, wild pigs, and large primates. Significantly, they are also proven man-eaters.

So why is Kaa different? It appears to be related to geography. Over much of their range, reticulated pythons are known for their bad attitudes, but in some locations it's just the opposite. The Zoo was fortunate enough to locate one whose ancestors likely came from Thailand where

they are known to be more easygoing. And if the name “Kaa” sounds familiar, the Zoo’s python was named after the Indian rock python in Rudyard Kipling’s beloved “The Jungle Book” made even more popular by the 1967 Disney animated feature. According to Tetzlaff, “Kipling took poetic license to exaggerate Kaa’s length to thirty feet in the book. That’s about ten feet too long for a rock python, but well within the range for a reticulated python.”

In the wild, reticulated pythons live in tropical forests from eastern India throughout southeastern Asia and the nearby Indonesian islands. They are heavily dependent on water and are at home on the ground, in caves, in trees, and have even adapted to living in cities. They are exceptional swimmers and have been seen tens of miles from shore in the open ocean – most famously being reported as one of the first non-flying animals to return to Krakatau following its cataclysmic eruption in 1883.

Guests are able to explore the alien world of reptiles during *Serpents: Fangs and Fiction*. The fast paced program presented daily in the Safari Canyon open-air theater features a variety of reptiles including constrictors and native venomous snakes. Guests safely get an up-close view through the use of a live video camera broadcasting to video screens. The presentation is included in Zoo admission.

Caribbean Gardens: The ZOO in Naples is nationally accredited by the prestigious American Zoo and Aquarium Association. The 52-acre zoo is located at 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road in Naples across from the Coastland Center mall. In addition to innovative presentations like *Serpents: Fangs & Fiction* and *Planet Predator*, the zoo offers a historic botanical garden and many rare animals. Guests board the Primate Expedition Cruise to glide by islands inhabited by monkeys, lemurs, and apes live in natural habitats. Admission (\$15.95 adult/ \$9.95 children) includes all shows and the boat ride. Visitors can also pick up a healthy lunch and snacks at the SUBWAY® Cafe and shop for wild gifts at tame prices in The ZOO Gift Shop. The Zoo welcomes guests daily from 9:30 to 5:30 with the last ticket sold at 4:30. To learn more, click www.napleszoo.com or call (239) 262-5409.

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*For print quality **photo of David Tetzlaff and python** and/or the **python with a replica skull showing those 100+ teeth**, please contact denise@napleszoo.com or 239.262.5409 ext. 122*

Photo Captions:

Image 1: Zoo Director David Tetzlaff gets wrapped up in his work with new reticulated python. Tetzlaff’s family has a long history with this species of snake.

Image 2: New reticulated python crawls past a replica skull cast from a 25 foot reticulated python. In addition to the 100+ teeth, note both left and right jaws are not fused in the middle enabling snakes to break apart their skull to swallow prey many times the size of their own head (wire on bottom jaw is added for stability of replica).