

It's pumpkin time, and zoos think that's a smashing idea

By Ellen Brait, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.25.16

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A Siberian tiger plays with a pumpkin at the DierenPark Amersfoort zoo in Amersfoort, Netherlands, October 30, 2014. REMKO DE WAAL/AFP/Getty Images

Autumn is here again. Leaves are changing color. People are putting on coats as the air gets chilly. Fall brings pumpkins into many people's lives. Pumpkins also invade the lives of animals at zoos across the US.

Every year at this time, the U.S. gets ready for Halloween. Around this time, many zoos across the country take part in a long-time tradition. They place pumpkins in their animals' living areas. The animals can do what they like with these orange gourds. They eat the pumpkins, they play with them, they smash them.

Pictures of lions, chimps, birds and more flood the internet. They show the animals playing with the pumpkins. Yet, one important question remains. Why?

For Some Animals, A Healthy Food

Ron Evans is in charge of primates, or monkeys and apes, at the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens. He said the gourds do more than just look nice. The pumpkins are healthy for the animals to eat. Some zoo workers will put treats inside the pumpkins for animals to discover. This year, Evans said his staff put sugar-free jello in the pumpkins. They made it look “like brains, kind of traditional Halloween stuff”, he said.

Some animals that get a pumpkin have no interest in eating it. At some zoos, visitors will find birds, polar bears, and owls with pumpkins. Even snakes may get them. Evans says that at the Cincinnati Zoo, staff let the animals decide what to do with the gourds.

Smaller animals might just like to crawl inside them for a while. Zoo workers sometimes carve out the pumpkins. They make them hollow for birds to go into. This gives the birds a place to explore. Elephants can stomp on the pumpkins with their feet. Polar bears can take them underwater. They may eat them, later.

New Things Help Animals Think

Gigi Allianic works for the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington. She said they give pumpkins to the animals make them act more like they do in the wild. Allianic says it helps keeps the animals thinking sharply.

The Detroit Zoo in Michigan says it gives pumpkins to its animals to make their world more interesting. The workers there hide food in the animals' living spaces. The idea is to encourage animals to behave as they do in the wild. It is good for the animals to practice searching for food or hunting for smaller creatures.

The purpose behind the pumpkins does not end there. They are not just for the animals to enjoy. They are also to entertain guests.

Evans says it is one of many ways they try to capture their guests' imagination.

Guests Learn About Saving Species

Zoo, of course, rhymes with “boo.” The zoos use other plays on words to name their Halloween events. The Cincinnati Zoo has its yearly HallZooween. The Detroit Zoo holds a yearly Smashing Pumpkins event, and the Woodland Zoo puts on a Pumpkin Bash.

Evans says that zoos have always given pumpkins to animals. It wasn't until about 25 years ago that the Cincinnati Zoo started involving the public.

It is the perfect way to tell people about problems that animals face. Some of the kinds of animals in the zoo are species that are endangered in the world. The zoo wants to remind people about conservation efforts for those animals. Animal conservation means protecting animals in the wild which might be dying out. They or their habitats are being destroyed by humans.

“It gives us the opportunity to talk about conservation issues,” he said.

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following are TWO MAIN ideas from the article?
- (A) Autumn is here and pumpkins are in season; Pumpkins are a very healthy snack and a fun toy for animals.
 - (B) The Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle gives pumpkins to its animals; It makes them act more like they do in the wild.
 - (C) Zoos around the country are giving their animals pumpkins for Halloween; The animals like eating and playing with them.
 - (D) The Detroit Zoo holds a yearly "Smashing Pumpkins" event; The animals enjoy playing with the pumpkins at the event.
- 2 Which sentence from the article BEST summarizes a MAIN idea of the article?
- (A) Every year at this time, the U.S. gets ready for Halloween.
 - (B) The pumpkins are healthy for the animals to eat.
 - (C) The purpose behind the pumpkins does not end there.
 - (D) They or their habitats are being destroyed by humans.

- 3 Read the first paragraph of the article below.

Autumn is here again. Leaves are changing color. People are putting on coats as the air gets chilly. Fall brings pumpkins into many people's lives. Pumpkins also invade the lives of animals at zoos across the U.S.

What does the author mean by saying that pumpkins "invade" the lives of animals?

- (A) Pumpkins enter the lives of animals.
- (B) Pumpkins help the lives of animals.
- (C) Pumpkins shorten the lives of animals.
- (D) Pumpkins are thrown at the animals.

- 4 Read the paragraph from the section "New Things Help Animals Think."

Gigi Allianic works for the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington. She said they give pumpkins to the animals make them act more like they do in the wild. Allianic says it helps keeps the animals thinking sharply.

What is the BEST meaning of "thinking sharply" based on the information in the paragraph?

- (A) uninterested
- (B) thinking slowly
- (C) being calm
- (D) alert