

# Ground Hog Day as an Educational Tool

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*Weather Day at the Zoo* was held on Ground Hog Day at the Houston Zoo on February 2, 2002 and 2003. The event is organized by The WRC™ Weather Museum and the Houston Zoo and involves much of the community. Participation from Houston area schools, civic groups, both local and national media outlets and corporate sponsors made *Weather Day at the Zoo* a success. *Weather Day at the Zoo* goes well beyond a single day educational event. Students participate during the fall and winter months by studying animals and their climatological environment. The students prepare this information for the event by researching where the animal comes from; what type of winter weather is the animal exposed to; what does the animal eat; and if the animal hibernates. The students learn research tools on the Internet as well as study geography, climate and weather.

Prior to the event, students create a black and white drawing of the animal as well as a fact sheet. This fact sheet is reproduced by sponsors and used in an educational coloring book made on the day of the event. The students plan decorations for a booth at the zoo that is manned by the students on Ground Hog Day where they pass out the sheets to visitors to the zoo. The visitors stop at each student-run booth, collecting sheets to create a wonderful coloring book full of facts on climate and animals. The day turns into a media event when national and local meteorologists check with a special animal that has been designated to view his/her shadow to see what the forecast is. Since Texas is too big for a mere groundhog to predict its weather. Willie the Spectacled Bear was chosen to make a prediction on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2002.



Houston Zoo's Willie the Spectacled Bear Defeating the Ground Hog Feb 2, 2002

Weather Research Center as part of its educational programs through The WRC™ Weather Museum developed the Weather Day at the Zoo Event to show students of all ages that science can be fun. Ground Hog Day proved to be an optimal day, when the attention of many is focused on weather and animals. The Houston Zoo makes a logical partner in this educational endeavor. To make this event a success the following is needed:

1. 20 Area Schools or Girl/Boy Scout Groups
2. Volunteers
3. A Star animal
4. Television Meteorologists

5. Corporate Sponsors
6. Great Weather
7. State and Local government

In planning the event from one year to the next, you must be ready for changes. In 2002, we had Willie the Spectacled Bear make the weather prediction. Willie was chosen on the theme of "Texas is too big for a mere groundhog to predict its weather". This also helped the Zoo as Willie was in the process of raising funds to build his new home. Although, we faced a hurdle when Willie was unable to make a prediction in 2003. The bear asked Tufani [which means Stormy] to do the honors while Willie was vacationing in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Tufani was born during a tropical storm.



**WB39 TV Television Meteorologist Keith Monahan checks with Tufani to see what his forecast is for the next 6 weeks.**

#### **Education - Schools, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts**

One of the main features of the event is the idea that science can be fun. The students were assigned an animal to research. Questions prompted to the students included finding out where the animal was from, what type of weather did the animal experience, and if the animal hibernates during winter. The students then

created a fact sheet and black and white drawing of the animal that could be reproduced and passed out at a booth at the zoo on Ground Hog Day. The fact pages were also translated into Spanish. The students then decorated their booth making items that would aid them in describing the environment that their animal lived in. The booths were judged for best and most informative booth.



## COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEERS

This event would not be possible without the Houston Community which provided sponsors and volunteers. There were 150 volunteers from high school students, college students, civic groups and corporate volunteers. The volunteers helped set up the 20 booths organize lunch. Television meteorologists were the judges to determine if Willie or Tufani saw their shadow. The Houston Texans, which is the new football team in Houston, even sent their cheerleaders to cheer Willie on during his forecasts. Nick the Weather Dude from the Weather Channel was also present to entertain the crowd. Time Warner donated a year of digital cable for the drawing. Each visitor received a zoo make which they got stamp at each animal booth they visited. The Weather Channel also donated a weather camp to the school with the best booth.

## SPONSORS

The event is not possible without sponsors who provide volunteers, lunch, printing, banners, chairs tables, supplies



The following page are a sample of the animal coloring sheet which were created by the students. Visitors to the zoo were able to collect the pages at 20 different booths and create a coloring books.



# The Spectacled Bear Coloring Page

