

NORTHWEST PASSAGES

THE PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NORTHWEST WASHINGTON

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Zoo's red pandas welcome new addition

By LINDA LOMBARDI
Current Correspondent

There's a baby panda at the Zoo. And this time, it's the real thing — a red panda. "They were the first panda!" explained keeper Jilian Fazio. "Red pandas were discovered first and called the panda. Then they discovered the giant panda, and called it the giant panda. But really the red panda is the panda."

There's no explaining why certain animals, such as a certain black and white bear, capture the public attention more than others. But the Zoo's red pandas, 2-year-old Shama and 3-year-old Tate, inspire just as much passion in their keepers as do their more famous neighbors.

And in this new-baby story, there's at least one thing those keepers can be proud of: The giant pandas' mating troubles make front-page news, but as it says on the Zoo's website, "within seconds of their first introduction, Shama and Tate displayed breeding behavior."

When asked what "breeding behavior" that was exactly, Fazio clarified: "They actually just started copulating. But in the giant panda's defense, our male red panda didn't know what he was doing."

Many animals don't quite get it the first time, she explained, and

Shama and Tate might have been brought together too late in Shama's breeding cycle that first time. But the pair got it right this year, producing on June 16 their first offspring and the first red panda cub born at the National Zoo in 15 years.

The media closely follows the suspense involved in giant panda matings, but the effort is no differ-



ent for keepers of the red panda, which similarly has only one breeding season per year, and may go through a "pseudo-pregnancy" that makes it hard to determine if a female is really expecting.

So for several months the keepers were hopeful but uncertain, and because the animals are not surrounded by cameras like their giant comrades are, their caretakers were lucky to see the panda preparing to give birth on a rock outcropping rather than in her hidden den. The red pandas have a naturalistic exhibit, which allows the animals

to make their own lifestyle choices.

"Which is nice, but we were like nervous parents," said Fazio. "We didn't necessarily agree with the decision she was making, but it seemed to be the right one."

Keepers didn't see the birth itself, but they watched the female moving around uncomfortably and grooming herself, and soon they spotted a baby and saw the mama cleaning it.

The birth was a significant one because red pandas are threatened, and Shama and Tate were carefully paired to help propagate their species. Red panda matings at zoos are part of what's called a species survival plan.

"It's like a dating service for animals in captivity," said Fazio. "We know who can breed with who to keep the genetic diversity as high as possible."

As tree dwellers, red pandas have some interesting features that aren't shared with giant pandas. Their long tails help them balance, and their back ankles turn all the way around so they can climb headfirst down trees.

There are similarities as well, but red and giant pandas are not very closely related. Giant pandas are now considered to be part of the bear family, and red pandas are in a family of their own, closer to the weasel family than to bears, said curator Tony Barthel.

"They both are carnivores that



Courtesy of the National Zoo

Two-year-old Shama gave birth to a cub June 16. While the red pandas don't draw the crowds that their larger counterparts do, zookeepers are thrilled that Shama and 3-year-old Tate mated successfully.

eat bamboo," he said of red pandas and giant pandas. Because of this, the animals share certain adaptations, including a pseudo-thumb that helps them grip bamboo. Even their cuteness is a bamboo-eating

adaptation, said Fazio. "The big, round, adorable face that both the giant panda and the red panda have is because their jaw muscles are very well-developed for chewing

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GWU establishes honeybee colonies

By KARA BRANDEISKY
Current Correspondent

George Washington University has taken on a buzz-worthy project this summer: Junior Melissa Eddison is raising Italian honeybees at the school's Mount Vernon Campus.

Eddison, who is president of the George Washington Food Justice Alliance, hopes the project will increase awareness about the importance of bee pollination in agriculture. She received a \$1,125 public service grant from the university to run the project.

"People are immediately kind of scared, like, 'I don't want to get stung,'" she said. "It's important to get past that and see the benefits of having bees pollinating all your flowers and vegetables in your community."

Eddison said the Food Justice Alliance was inspired to bring bees to the university after hearing that the White House chef had



Courtesy of George Washington University
Melissa Eddison, president of the school's Food Justice Alliance, is raising Italian honeybees at the Mount Vernon campus.

decided to start keeping bees in the kitchen garden.

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Tribute dance class is a real thriller

By STEPHANIE KANOWITZ
Current Correspondent

"Five, six, seven, eight and hip roll, hip roll," dance instructor Quynn Johnson tells a few dozen students who are giggling at their missteps. The group spent 10 minutes trying to emulate the moves of one of the world's most admired dancers, and apparently he made it look easier than it is.

No surprise there, Johnson said. "He's the best entertainer, dancer, singer — he's Michael Jackson."

"Don't feel any kind of way about what you're doing," she told the crowd as they took their places to start from the top — again. "We all love Michael. It's the best Michael you can do."

To mark the one-year anniversary of the

King of Pop's death, Johnson, an instructor at Joy of Motion Dance Center, decided to honor the singer with a tribute class focused on four of her favorite M.J. songs: "Bad," "Smooth Criminal," "Beat It" and "Remember the Time."

"We picked different choreographies with in each video, and then we'll perform the choreography of that song," she said. "So, it's not the full song; it's just snippets from where that choreography was."

She also chose songs and moves that have varying levels of difficulty, ending the two-hour workshop at Joy of Motion's H Street NE studio with the hardest. "'Remember the Time' is fast — up, down, on the floor — and then all these crazy Egyptian arms. It's great," said

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Courtesy of Joy of Motion Dance Center
Learning "Thriller" at Joy of Motion

RED PANDA

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bamboo.”

But these shared features aren't due to a close relation — they are believed to have evolved independently, in what's called convergent evolution. “If you eat the same thing, your body is going to behave the same way eventually,” said Jess Kordell, a keeper at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in Front Royal, Va.

At Front Royal, Kordell works with three breeding pairs, one of which recently had its own cub as well. Staff there hope that the two other pairs are pregnant, too, but of course, they're not sure. So Kordell is researching a way to determine whether red pandas are pregnant using the hormone levels in fecal samples, which are the easiest evidence to collect.

The cub at the Zoo's Asia Trail exhibit hasn't been visible to visitors thus far, but curator Barthel said officials are hoping to allow public access soon.

“We're letting mom's stress levels dictate that,” he said.

When the cub becomes avail-

able for viewing, Zoo officials will announce the news at nationalzoo.si.edu, as well as on Facebook and Twitter.

Fazio said that although Shama is a first-time mother, “she has good instincts. If she leaves the cub and it vocalizes, she immediately runs back to it. If it rains, she carries it back to the den.”

Being the keeper of the less-famous panda can sometimes be discouraging. Fazio thinks that she's got the cooler panda, even if not everyone agrees.

“People come right by and they say, ‘Where's the panda?’ I say, ‘Here's the red panda’ and they say, ‘No, the black and white one.’”

“Everyone hears panda and thinks giant panda,” said Barthel. “But most people fall in love with [the red pandas] immediately, which is great.”

“My personal belief is that they are cuter,” said keeper Fazio. “I'm not biased or anything.”

Fazio pointed out that when the giant panda was discovered, scientists originally changed the name of the original panda to “lesser” panda, a name that isn't used anymore.

Said Kordell, “They are by no means lesser.”

DANCE

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Johnson, a Michigan native who lives in Landover, Md.

Ultimately, she wanted students to “have a good time and learn maybe a little part of their favorite Michael Jackson song,” she said. “Even people who have never danced before can come and have a good time, maybe meet some people.”

The Jackson tribute is part of an occasional series of classes Joy of Motion puts on to honor some of the biggest names in pop music. The classes are open to men and women ages 16 and older of all experience levels, including none.

Although her favorite dance form is tap, Johnson came up with the idea for the pop workshops. Inspired when Beyoncé's “Single Ladies” video became off-the-charts popular, she pitched the concept of devoting a class to the star's moves to her boss. Now that workshop is an annual event, scheduled around Valentine's Day. With the workshop capped at 50 participants, Joy of Motion had to add a second class this year.

“The response has been huge,” said 29-year-old Johnson.

Other specialty classes have included “Thriller,” which Johnson taught last Halloween and which the class performed outside the studio. The next one is “Gaga 4 Gaga,” a Lady Gaga workshop on July 23 from 7 to 9 p.m. Students will learn the choreography of “Telephone,” “Alejandro,” “Love Game” and “Paparazzi.”

Most of the attendees last week were there to have fun and pocket a few dance steps.

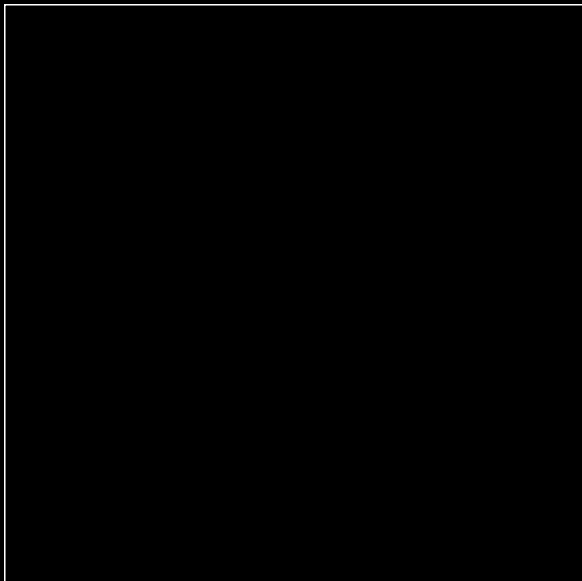
Jason King, 29, and Tara Perez, 28, teach hip-hop classes in Springfield, Va., and were looking to add to their repertoire. “It's actually my first dance class,” said King. “I'm more of a beat boy, break-dancer. This is the first time I'm taking instruction from someone else. I'm sure I'm not going to catch on as fast, but we'll see how it goes.”

After two hours, students “can expect to be able to do the dance steps from each song,” Johnson said. “It may not be perfect, but they'll know it. If they're out at a club somewhere and they hear that Michael Jackson song come on, they can do the little part of choreography.”

For Johnson, dance is about enjoying yourself regardless of training.

“Joy of Motion as a dance company — we just think that dance is for everyone, and we try to invite as many people as we can in just to enjoy dance,” she said. “You'll be surprised how it enhances your day and your life.”

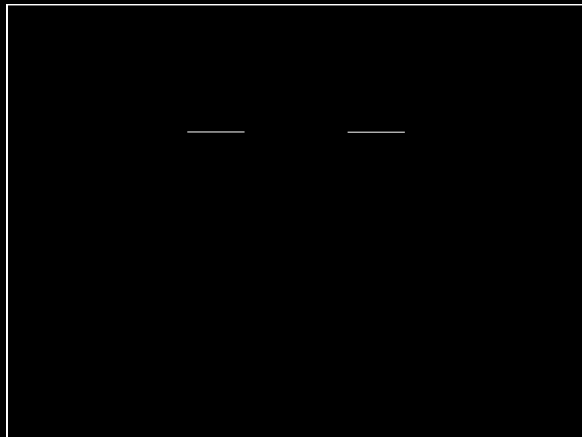
To sign up for “Gaga 4 Gaga” or learn about other dance workshops, visit joyofmotion.org or call 202-333-6801. The Lady Gaga class costs \$25 in advance or \$30 at the door.



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