

# Cypress Gardens Swamparium

## Self-guided Tour

A little bit about the Swamparium...

This building is our former Aquarium; it was redeveloped in 2009 to better interpret swamps and the animals that live there. We invented the name "Swamparium" to better describe what is displayed in the building (so visitors don't expect to see sharks or sea turtles here). Animals in the front of the building can be found in the swamps of the southeastern U.S, including the one at Cypress Gardens. Near the back of the building is our "Swamps of the World" exhibit. Each tank has the name of a different continent on it and the animals displayed can be found in swamps in that part of the world.

All of the animals in the building are inside glass tanks, nothing is loose. There are identification signs on each tank with a photo or drawing of the animal and information about its max. size, diet, etc...

Some of the information on the signs may surprise you such as:

...Frankenturtle, our only Alligator Snapping turtle on the park (common snappers live in our swamp), who was shot in the head when he lived in a swamp in Louisiana. The metal wires that were used to hold the pieces of his skull together until his injuries healed are still visible on the top of Frank's head (hence his name).

..the Surinam toad, who stores its eggs inside the skin of its own back until tiny froglets hatch directly into the water.

...the Lung fish who, even though it's a fish, can drown if it can't reach the surface of the water to breathe.

## Warnings

The overhead lights are kept off in the room so that the animals don't see the visitors as well and are less likely to hide. This makes the room very dark and it may take your eyes a moment to adjust from the bright sunlight outside, so be careful when entering.

Please do not let anyone tap on the exhibits; an animal that is startled can injure itself against its enclosure if it tries to flee. Also, any disturbance can stress the animal and an animal that is repeatedly disturbed will stop eating or can simply die from stress. We are open seven days a week and the animals are always on display, so we have to be extra careful.

## **Classes of animals displayed**

All of the animals are either **fish** (they have fins and gills their entire lives), **reptiles** (they have lungs their entire lives), or **amphibians** (most go through a metamorphosis, so they may have gills for part of their lifecycle, but no fins – although some have legs that are very small and hard to find).

Several of the animals we display are long and slender in shape (snakes, legless lizards, aquatic salamanders, a freshwater eel, and a lungfish). Don't assume that you know what an animal is without reading the sign on its tank. Challenge your students to determine what it is by seeing if an animal has gills or not and if it has fins or legs.

Knowing which group an animal belongs to may also help you to locate it in the tank (i.e. any reptiles in the tanks of water that are hiding will need to breathe at least every 30 minutes, so if you wait long enough, you will see them emerge and swim to the surface).

## **Snakes**

There are several native snakes on display to the left, after you walk in. Some are nonvenomous (harmless) ones such as corn snakes and king snakes and there are a few venomous pit vipers such as rattlesnakes and water moccasins. This is a wonderful opportunity for you and your students to learn to identify local venomous snakes in a safe environment.

There is also a young anaconda in the Swamps of the World section, past the native snakes, also on the left.

FYI These are the only snakes in the room, in case anyone is trying to avoid them (although some of the other animals resemble snakes to some people).

## **Activities**

### **Penny Smasher**

Just inside the front door, there is a machine that will imprint one of four Cypress Gardens designs into a penny, it requires 2 quarters to run it plus one penny to smash (51 cent total).

### **Value of a Swamp Mural**

A photo of our swamp covers an entire 10 foot wall in the front of the building. The exhibit addresses misconceptions about swamps as well as the many benefits that swamps, like other wetlands, are known to provide. There is also a flip board with take-home messages about what people can do to protect swamps.

### **Swamp Trivia Flip Board**

Located past the swamp mural and around the corner, students can lift wooden animals to answer questions about snapping turtles, catfish, and alligators.

## Fossil Exhibit – Coming Summer 2013

Just past the swamp mural, in an alcove, are three walls (Terrestrial, Marine, and Freshwater) that display fossils discovered locally.

In this exhibit, students can learn how fossils form, some of the animals that lived here (such as Giant sloths, Megalodon sharks, Mammoths, and Glyptodonts) and how the changing sea levels have changed the coastline and habitats of South Carolina (i.e. during the times when the sea level was higher, this area was covered with water which is why marine fossils can be found here). Real fossils are mounted on the outside of the exhibit that students can touch.

An entire class cannot fit inside the fossil exhibit at one time; but close attractions are both of the flip boards and the aquatic salamanders.

### **Live Alligator Exhibit (outside)**

Behind a fence, there are three alligators in a pool of water (one male/two females). They are American alligators like the wild ones in our swamp, but were raised on an alligator farm and brought here. Their water is heated during the winter to 50 degrees, so they may be active on days when the gators in the swamp are not.

The live fish in the water are Tilapia that eat the algae growing along the bottom.

There are signs on the exhibit that discuss alligators as well as the law against feeding them. Since these alligators are confined inside an exhibit, we do bring their food to them. The feedings are only during the warmer months (alligators don't eat Oct.-April), usually once a week (but varies with their needs), and usually take place on weekends. They are presented by a member of the animal care staff and open to park visitors. The alligators are usually fed chicken parts.

Before you leave, did you see...?

\*The dead alligator under glass just inside the entrance. It is 12 feet, 2 inches long and weighed 580 pounds. The largest live alligator in the exhibit outside is about the same length, but we estimate that he weighs about 700 pounds.

\*The statue of an alligator snapping turtle mounted on the wall next to the tank that has the live one in it. Unlike a common snapper, an alligator snapper has a piece on its tongue that resembles a worm that it uses to lure fish into its mouth. Look inside the mouth of the statue and you will see it.

\*The cast of an Arkansas Blue catfish mounted on the wall above the live Channel catfish. It weighed 109 pounds and was caught in the Tailrace Canal in Moncks Corner and used to be the state record, but larger ones have been caught since then (in Feb. 2012, a 136-pound fish was caught in Lake Moultrie).

\*The skin of a Reticulated python mounted on the wall above the African Dwarf Crocodiles and near the anaconda. The skin is 17.6 feet long (Both pythons and anacondas can be over 30 feet long.)