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Oakland Zoo Internship Final Paper

For my internship project, I focused on the coati exhibit. Each week, I had a different concept to consider and worked to make improvements for both the coati and the visitors.

The first week of my project, I focused on the safety of the exhibit. I made sure the exhibit was safe for both the animals and the public. The concept focused on eliminating hazards for the coati in the exhibit, and made all of the options for them in the exhibit safe, including the landscape, structures, and enrichment.

When I started focusing on the safety, I first looked around the exhibit to see what stood out to me as a current or potential hazard. I noticed that the most frequently used rope was saggy, and the coati seemed to hesitate to use it at times. To fix it, Valerie and I pulled the rope and secured it to a nearby post. This made the rope much sturdier. I also noticed there were plants that were growing around and near the ropes that could potentially throw the coati off balance, so I trimmed them back to clear them out of the way. There were also plants growing through the perimeter fence that I trimmed. This may have not been a problem at the moment, but if they were to continue to grow, they could damage the fencing. While focusing on this concept, it was challenging to think of what could be hazardous. There were some that were obvious, like the loose rope or overgrown plants. However, I had to envision how the coati would play with an enrichment item to tell if it could be hazardous or if the way it is placed on the exhibit could be hazardous. To do this, I had to watch them, observe their behavior, and apply this knowledge. By the end of the week, the adjustments I had made created a safer environment for the coati.

For the second week, I focused on how the animals use the exhibit. This concept creates more options for the coati to choose from in their exhibit. If they only use certain sections of the exhibit, focusing on animal perspective will allow me to create ways to encourage them to get full use out of their exhibit.

Throughout the week, I was able to tighten a loose, unused rope in the exhibit and clear the overgrown plants around it. This also ties into the safety portion of my project because the ropes weren't entirely safe for the coati, which could be a reason why they were not using that part of the exhibit. I also came up with a plan to place platforms along the trunk of a tree that the rope was secured to. This will hopefully encourage them to use the rope again and climb the tree. I also replaced the pulley system's rope, so it could be used again. Attaching a bowl with food or scents to the pulley system will hopefully encourage the coati to make use of the upper portion of the exhibit. During the week, I faced a few challenges. One was I have not been observing them for long, so I could not be certain what parts of the exhibit the coati weren't using. Moreover, like with the challenges I faced in the previous week, I had to get into the coati mindset and think of how they would use the exhibit and what would encourage them to do so. Another challenge was that I was unable to put in the platforms before the end of the week. However, putting the platforms up will create another option for the coati that would make them visible to the public, which applies to the next topic, visitor perspective.

For the third week, I focused on how the visitors see the exhibit. This meant observing the coati as if I was a visitor and listening to how the visitors react to their experiences of the exhibit. This could potentially effect the coati in a negative way if I expose them too much to allow the visitors to see them.

During the week, I noticed the coati were usually hiding before and a little after their lunch feeding. To make them more visible to the visitors and encourage them to be more active, I suggested spreading the feedings out, so they would get part of their diet at one time and the rest at another time instead all of it at once. I also trimmed some of the bushes outside of the exhibit to create better viewing windows for the visitors. There were a few challenges I faced during the week. When I was trimming the bushes, there was one plant in particular that I wanted to trim because it was too high. However, I noticed that cutting it properly would create too much exposure for the coati, so I had to leave it. Another challenge was that we had difficulties getting the tools to work to finish putting the platform on the tree from last week. Despite the challenges, the changes will hopefully improve the visitors' experiences of the exhibit.

For the fourth week, I focused on the feeding of the coati. I observed what seemed to be their favorite food items, whether they worked to get their food, and if rodents and/or birds were taking their food. Then, I suggested and made changes to solve some of the issues I noticed. The concept affects the way the coati are fed: what they are fed, how they are fed, and when they are fed.

During the fourth week, we made the switch of the times they are fed from my suggestion I made in the previous week. This change ties into this week as well because it encourages them to go for their kibble instead of taking the high value fruit items right away and leaving the rest. Moreover, there is less food out on exhibit for the rodents to take, and the coati have a better chance of getting to it before they do. I also started using the pulley system to put some of their food up high, so I could encourage them to use more of their exhibit and work for their food by climbing. There were a few challenges that came up during this week. One was I did not observe the coati climbing up to get the food from the pulley system. It is possible that they did climb up,

and I didn't see them, but I noticed there was a lot, if not all, of the food left in the basket. To encourage them to use it, I could put more interesting things in it, like strong scents. Another challenge was selecting food items they liked. It is clear that they prefer the sweeter fruits because I frequently find carrots, sweet potatoes, and apples left behind. I would want to change their diet to items they enjoy, but I don't want them to have too much sugar. Moreover, they have sensitive bowel systems, so small changes to their diet could harm them. Nonetheless, the adjustments changed their routines, making it interesting and enriching.

For the fifth week, I worked on enrichment for the coati. This entailed me creating items for the coati and placing them in their exhibit. The enrichment items will bring out their natural behaviors and give them more options in their exhibit.

For enrichment, I added two items to their exhibit. The first item was half of a large pipe. I noticed that after trimming some of the bushes on the inside of the exhibit to allow the visitors to see the coati more, there was a very bare space that seemed to make the coati nervous because there was so much exposure. I placed the pipe there, creating a sort of tunnel for them, so they could still use that part of their exhibit without feeling too exposed. The last thing was the platform on the tree. This week, I was able to finish the platform and put it up on the tree. Hopefully, it will encourage them to climb and use more of their exhibit. Moreover, it gives them another option in the exhibit. There were not too many challenges this week. The only challenge was getting the platform in the tree because I had never done something like it before, so I got some help. After finishing the enrichment, it was time to finish up everything.

In my last week, I double checked that I was satisfied with the way the exhibit was. Hopefully, by the end of the week, the coati will have a well managed exhibit with new and interesting objects.

During the week, I dug out a plastic pool in the exhibit that was buried in dirt and woodchips. I created a few piles for the coati to dig through. I sprinkled some dirt from the goat exhibit on the piles to add another interesting scent for them. I also did a little more trimming of some of the plants that were starting to overgrow. One challenge that I had this week was not having enough time. Some of the ideas I didn't have time to get to this week included adding leaf piles from other exhibits for the coati to dig through, and adjusting some of the ropes in the exhibit. I noticed that one of the ropes that leads to the platform on the tree is fairly steep, but to fix it, I would need to drill an eye bolt into a tree to pull the rope up and decrease its slope. Nevertheless, I am satisfied with the changes I was able to make.

In the project, all of the topics overlapped in some way. Part of safety was making the structures in the exhibit safe for the coati to use. This encourages them to use their exhibit and come out to be visible to the public. Changing their feedings encouraged them to be active at more times of the day, allowing the public to see them more often and getting them to use their exhibit more. The enrichment items encourage them to use their exhibit more and in a variety of ways, and it brings out their natural behavior, teaching the visitors about what they do in the wild. However, at some times there were contradictions between concepts. For example, to try to get the coati to use the entire exhibit, I could put food or scents in the areas that they don't go, but these areas may not be visible to the public. This would pull the coati away from the viewing areas and may negatively effect the visitors' perspectives.

Overall, this internship project created a very valuable experience for me. As a student, trying to decide which career path I want to take, this project gave me a clear idea of the many factors a zookeeper has to take into consideration while caring for animals and their exhibits. After this project, I feel more comfortable with having control and taking initiative. I have also

learned more about the coati from observing them and the way they use their exhibit. I hope the coati enjoy their exhibit and the new items I added, and I am excited to visit in the future to see what more has been done.