



Clockwise from left: A bear at the Houston Zoo grabs a quick nap between visitors; the hippopotamuses keep cool in their own private swimming pool; at times even an ordinary squirrel can be seen behind bars at the zoo; hay isn't just for horses — it's for elephants too; these two members of a rare breed of jaguar, known as El Tigre, or spotted tiger, wander freely in a glass-enclosed area that resembles their natural habitat.

and legs to see the animals. As soon as they can see what's going on, the "big kids" are ready to move on.

Maybe this is why little kids like the petting zoo so much; they can get up close to the animals without all sorts of barricades to stop them. The petting zoo, located inside of the main zoo, lets visitors of all ages learn by touching and feeling the animals.

Now known as the Discovery Zoo, the petting zoo is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. and Sunday until 4:45 p.m. It has signs which you can lift, dial and imitate to help you learn about the animals.

Of course, if I could really talk to the animals, I'd sit down and have a chat with the "primates," better known as monkeys. It's amazing how the behavior of some of these animals closely resembles that of humans.

These monkeys put in the corner when mom pushes

them away, they aggravate and tease each other just like human siblings, and they pick the good stuff out of their meals first. Some of the monkeys, no doubt, probably think that we humans should be the ones in the cages.

The monkey cages at the zoo now have extra fencing and glass doors around them. New signs explain that this was done because visitors were throwing many items, not all of them food, into the cages. This extra protection makes picture taking harder, but it protects the animals, which is one of the purposes of the zoo.

The zoo is designed for enjoyment, education, conservation, protection and breeding of animals. And since no admission is charged, the facility relies on funds provided by the City of Houston's budget, donations for the purchase of new animals and special projects like the "adopt-a-pet" program.

The zoo also has a gift shop

and security and first aid station near its entrance for your convenience.

Since the Houston Zoo is located in Hermann Park in Houston, you don't have far to drive to see the animals. And make sure you wear something that's cool and comfortable if you go during the summer. It becomes so hot that many of the animals go inside early just to get out of the heat.

The zoo is open to the public May through September from 9:30 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. and October through April until 6:00 p.m. But keep in mind that concession stands, the Discovery Zoo and the administration office close by 5 o'clock.

I still have one question, though, that I can't seem to find the answer to: How do the caged birds and squirrels feel about the free ones that often come to the zoo and eat the popcorn and other refreshments that visitors drop? I wonder if they're jealous?

Zoos and don'ts

A trip to the zoo can be fun and educational, no matter how young or old you are. It can also be a great way to score some "brownie points" with girlfriends, boyfriends and mom and dad.

For some reason, many girls think it's "really neat" when a guy takes them to the zoo (maybe because it's something different from the same old dinner, dancing and movies). And Mom and Dad think you've grown up and learned to be responsible when you offer to take along your little brother or sister.

So when you finally do take that road trip to the Houston Zoo, you should remember and be aware of a few simple things. With the help of the zoo brochure and city ordinances, *At Ease* has put together this list of "Zoos and Don'ts" to make your zoo trip fun and safe for you and the animals.

Please be aware that:
• Crossing over any fence or

barrier or entering any animal enclosure is extremely dangerous.

- Pets must stay at home.
- Bicycles, rollerskates, skateboards, radios and tape players disturb others and should not be brought into the zoo.
- Zoo animals eat special diets, formulated by the zoo staff. The feeding of snacks and other food items may be detrimental to their health.
- Picking flowers, taking cuttings and walking off the paths can ruin the beauty of the zoo for others.
- Park police officers and security guards are on the zoo grounds at all times to insure that you have a safe and troublefree visit.

So, in other words:
• Don't climb the fences, no pets, no wheels and loud music, no picking the flowers, and most important, Please Don't Feed the Animals! Oh yea, and make sure you have a good time.