

## Features



Bonnie Traflet/Courier-Journal

First graders at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Elementary school carefully examine a boa constrictor from the Seneca Park Zoo during the zoomobile's visit to their school.

## Traveling menagerie visits Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Approximately three days each week, an assortment of unusual animals — typically snakes, hedge hogs, parrots and chinchillas — boards a van and leaves the Seneca Park Zoo to take a drive. Their destination? Schools, nursing homes, day-care centers, scout meetings and anywhere else they can meet the young and young at heart. On Friday, Feb. 5 — the last day of Catholic

Schools' Week — the van, called the Zoomobile, stopped in to visit the children at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School on Rochester's Joseph Avenue.

The Zoomobile program is sponsored by the Seneca Park Zoo Society, the County of Monroe and Wegman's Food Markets, Inc., and has been bringing the animals to Rochester-area residents since the summer of

1986.

"It's an opportunity to take smaller zoo animals out to the community," said Christine Bastian, the zoo society's assistant director. "The Zoomobile helps us to reach out beyond the zoo to the people who can't make it to the zoo, and to educate."

Michelle Laraby, interpreter for the Zoomobile, has developed various level

programs suited to different audiences. Preschoolers, for example, see a program called "Animal Discovery," which is designed to familiarize children with the different kinds of animals. The program for sixth graders — "Going, Going, Gone" — deals with why some animals are becoming extinct and with what people can do to prevent their extinction. It also makes them aware of the importance of animals in the world and the role zoos play in saving them.

In addition to seeing and learning about animals, the children are allowed to get in close contact with the creatures and — in some cases — to overcome unnecessary fears.

The response to the zoomobile program has been so positive that interested organizations must book the traveling animal menagerie months ahead of time, Bastian said.

Schools or other organizations interested in having the zoomobile visit them or who need information about the program should call (716)544-LION.



Students at Our Lady of Perpetual Help gingerly touch a hedgehog to learn how it protects itself against predatory animals in the wild.



A student watched as Matt the turtle crawled toward her. The zoomobile interpreter, meanwhile, explained the importance of a turtle's shell for the animal's protection.