Family Zoo

Your family can create your own zoo filled with exotic species never before discovered. Let your knowledge of animal behaviors, habitats, and body structures combine with your imagination to create unique animals to fill your Family Zoo.

Start by raiding your recycling bin. Look for things like plastic bottles in a variety of shapes, cardboard tubes or metal cans. Make sure to clean any food residue to prevent mold and have an adult cover sharp edges with tape to prevent cuts. Use your materials to create a body with major parts like legs, arms, wings or head. Tape them together or let an adult help with hot glue.

Think about your animal’s body covering and even consider unusual camouflage options. With an adult supervising, make a papier-mâché’ paste. In a saucepan add 3 cups of cold water. Stir in 1½ cups of flour & cook over low heat until the mixture forms a thick paste. Collect newspaper, wrapping paper or thin cloth. Cut it into strips about 1" wide x 5" to 10" long. When the paste cools, dip your strips into the paste & and slide each strip between two fingers to remove the excess paste. Apply strips to your animal body to cover it entirely. Let dry for 24 hours. Add another layer if needed, and dry again. If your new critter doesn’t already have a fun pattern, you can paint it.

Get creative to complete your new species with more specific body parts like a nose, tail, mouth, tongue, or spots, ears, fins, eyes, tentacles. Glue on yarn, buttons, corks, corks, bottle caps, beads, string, chenille wires, wires, foam shapes, pom poms, or egg carton pieces. Really, any interesting loose parts you have on hand.

While building your new species be thinking about important factors such as:

- Food and food source
- Prey or predator
- Care of young
- Special adaptations for survival
- Landscape, water habitat or environment
- Home-cave, tree, hole, stream, pond, etc.
Everyone in your family can share information about each new species or write a story about it. Write a story about an adventure all the animals in your family zoo might take together.

Example: This is a Donkelped. It lives in a lush tropical rainforest and eats hibiscus flowers. It has sharp claws on its 4 feet and can run 42 miles per hour. The Donkelped grows to 29 inches tall in 2 years. It sleeps under palm trees and mama donkelpeds take care of their young for 8 months.

Sources for this activity:
*Growing Up WILD: Exploring Nature with Young Children, Council for Environmental Education, Houston, TX, 2010