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ZOO

Is the Zoo Haunted?

Just in time for Halloween, Zoo employees share their scary stories of ghosts at the City facility.

At this time of year, Los Angeles offers lots of Halloween freak-out fun. The Club's great discounts on the best parks allow Club Members to enjoy all the spooky frivolity.

But it's all made-up. What about spooky for real? If you're interested in the real thing, you need go no further than our own LA Zoo, which many people say is haunted.

Is it? The City institution, as well as its neighbor, the Old Zoo in Griffith Park, long have had a reputation of being visited by ghosts. Based on what Zoo employees say they have seen and heard, many have no doubt that it is haunted.

"I often feel that someone is following me," says Bob Burford, Lead Electrician, 15 years of

City service, and longtime Club Member. "You know that feeling on the back of your neck? I turn around, though, and no one is there."

General Services Public Safety Officers, who patrol the Zoo at night, report seeing floating figures and many other strange phenomena. Many of the reported bizarre sightings take place at night when the zoo is closed, employees say, but not entirely. Some of the odd goings-on take place in the middle of the day.

If you're looking for your own very real Halloween experience, or not, here are some of their stories.



Sue Edwards, Animal Keeper, 14 years of City service, Club Member, says she saw "The Hoodie Guy" jogging down the road behind her before he disappeared without explanation.

THE HOODIE GUY

"I can't say that what I saw was paranormal," says Sue Edwards, Animal Keeper, 14 years of City service, Club Member. "However"

Sue goes on to explain what she saw one morning about three or four years ago, at 7:30 a.m. in broad daylight.

"I was standing just behind the gazelle exhibition on the service road," she continues. "And I saw this guy jogging down the service road. It's closed to the public, but it's not outside reality that someone would have come in here through the gate."

"I glanced as he went by. Do I say anything to him about the road being closed to the public? He wasn't supposed to be here. I turned around, and he was gone. I stood there thinking, where did he go? He couldn't have disappeared that quickly. I mean, I heard his feet hitting the ground. There was nothing unusual about it, but then he just wasn't there. It was the weirdest thing. I was completely confused."

She described him as being in his 20s and thin, wearing all black and a hooded sweatshirt. What she describes is now colloquially known at the Zoo as the Hoodie Guy. She is not the only one who has seen him.

"One time about five years ago, about 3:30 a.m., I was driving a forklift on the service road behind the chimp penthouse," says Mike Campero, Gardener Caretaker, 24 years of City service, Club Member. "I saw a guy leaning on a fence, just looking away. He was dressed in all black. It was the Hoodie Guy."



Juan Ruiz, Electrician, 3 years of City service, Club Member, says he saw what might have been "The Hoodie Guy" in front of this trashcan in the chimp area.

"When the lights of the forklift hit him, he stood up. He turned the opposite way from me, and ran toward the cactus garden, uphill and out of sight. There is no way anyone can run up that hill that fast, plus through all the cacti."

"About a month later, I saw him again, in exactly the same spot. But this time he didn't run. He turned the opposite way again, with no eye contact, and then he was gone. It was spooky, man!"

"I think he's friendly," Mike says. "He might be afraid of people. If he were a scary ghost, it would be different. Still, it gets scary here at night."

Juan Ruiz, Electrician, 3 years of City service, Club Member, can also attest to how scary the Zoo can be at night. What he saw one night might or might not have been the Hoodie Guy, but whatever it was, it sent him scurrying the other way.

"This happened only about six weeks ago," he begins. "It was in the chimp area, which is sort of the Hoodie Guy's area. We had had a special event, and I was walking back from the event to the electric shop." This happened inside the Zoo, an area that's open to the public. "I saw movement from the bend, about five feet high," about 25 feet in front of him, in front of a trashcan. "I thought it might be a couple from the event looking for some private space. I knew it was a person. I pointed my flashlight at it, and that quickly it was gone. In that time, it should have been able to move only a few feet from where I saw it originally. But it was gone."

"I knew it was a human figure," he continues. "I nearly choked on my food. I freaked out, and walked right back to the event. I radioed in, 'Come pick me up!'"

"I always wanted to see a ghost," he says, "but nothing prepares you."



Mike Campero, Gardener Caretaker, 24 years of City service, Club Member, says he saw "The Hoodie Guy" disappear into this agave/cactus garden.



Two photos from Mike Campero, Gardener Caretaker, of his girlfriend, Tania Prebble, in the Old Zoo. Mike cannot explain the distortion on the first photo, which doesn't appear in the second photo, part of the same photo shoot. The photos were taken in August.

'THEY LIKE TO PLAY'

Monica Van Duzer, Animal Keeper/Quarantine Keeper, 22 years of City service, has had many experiences not involving the Hoodie Guy. She experiences so much strange behavior in the Animal Health and Conservation Center (not open to the public) that she has taken an almost playful approach to it.

"Back in the kitchen, I place a sponge in its container, and several times it just jumps out," she describes. "Then it happens again, several times. I say, 'Knock it off,' and it stops. It's happened multiple times, the last time about a year or so ago. They like to play," she says of the ghosts.

"And then once I was doing my diets, preparing food for the animals in her care, I put a knife down, and it immediately stoop up on end. A knife, standing straight up on its tip."

"Or I'll put something down, turn around, and it's gone," she continues. "After I've exhausted all the places it would be, it somehow comes back. The other day I was looking for my clippers, and later in the day, when I didn't need them, they reappeared."

"And then, at other times, I hear the heavy metal doors open, and I go down the hall to see who's here. This is a protected quarantine area. If someone's here, I know about it. But I look, and no one's there."

"Or, at the end of the hallway, in a hoof-stock holding area, I'll see someone walk across to the next stall. I say, 'Hang on, I'm coming.' I put down my rake, but there's no one in the stall. It's not the Hoodie Guy; I haven't seen him."

"Nothing has been in fear. The ghosts aren't mean-spirited. They like to play."

THE OLD ZOO

Mike Campero, the Gardener Caretaker who saw the Hoodie Guy disappear into the agave/cactus garden, had a strange experience just this past August. He was taking photos of his girlfriend, Tania Prebble, at the Old Zoo, which sits right next to the current Zoo in Griffith Park. The Old Zoo site is long rumored to be haunted, too.

"I took a bunch of pictures of her, and when I went back to look at them, well, look at this," says, flipping through photos on his smartphone. The photo, reproduced for this story, contains an unexplained distortion. "The ones before it and after it have nothing like that, but then this one... I have no idea. The others in the series don't have the same distortion."



Monica Van Duzer, Animal Keeper/Quarantine Keeper, 22 years of City service, has seen plenty of strange behavior in the Animal Health and Conservation Center, especially in the kitchen behind her, and in stalls to the right (out of frame). "They like to play," she says of the ghosts whose behavior she says she experiences regularly.

YOUR SIGHTINGS

What's your story?

Have you ever seen ghosts, or other haunted or strange behavior, at the LA Zoo, or at any City facility? Let us know!

talkback@cityemployeesclub.com

