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Pepper, a female orangutan, sits inside an enclosure in the new Trail of the Tiger exhibit at the Virginia Zoo in Norfolk.

## ZOO'S TRAIL IS WELL WORN

New Asian exhibit lures record crowds to Norfolk facility

By Janie Bryant  
*The Virginian-Pilot*

### NORFOLK

About 30 Asian animals and exotic birds took up residence in a 5.5-acre expansion of the Virginia Zoo last April.

And more than half a million people followed.

The new animals in the Trail of the Tiger exhibit – along with old favorites on the winding zoo paths – stoked a record-breaking audience for Norfolk's 53-acre animal kingdom.

The 505,641 visitors who walked through the gates in 2011 represented a 23 percent increase over the year before, according to a recent news release.

"It's a significant milestone," executive director Greg Bockheim said.

"With the launch of Asia – Trail of the Tiger in April, the zoo has really grown into a world-class zoological institution, and people are taking notice."

People have loved the underwater view they get of tigers playing in their pool, said Winfield Danielson, zoo spokesman.

more visitors

# 23%

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They've watched brother Asiatic black bears wrestling and walked a new boardwalk that put them at tree-level with Oscar the red panda, he said.

And the white-cheeked gibbon has entertained the crowds, too. Visitors love watching the animal tease the Asian small-clawed otters by hanging just out of their reach, Danielson said.

This year, zoo supporters are focused on completing a \$4 million fundraising campaign for a new veterinary hospital and animal wellness campus, he said.

Groundbreaking is scheduled for March and the project should be completed by spring 2013.

The hospital will be designed so people can watch medical procedures through large windows.

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