

Alligators, Lizards and Snakes in Scottsdale!

Written by Rachel Roland

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Rachel Roland is a mom on a mission - exploring the Valley with her two little companions in search of the best restaurants, attractions, and products for you and your children. See what she has in store for your family today!



Let me introduce you to a gopher snake - one that's native to Arizona, and one that you may have even seen in your backyard. It looks scarily similar to a rattlesnake, but it's not. Where in the world was my son was able to hold one? The [Phoenix Herpetological Society](#) in North Scottsdale!

It's not only a reptile conservatory, but a functioning zoo. We recently took a tour with some other herpetologically curious folks, and it was incredibly informative.

One thing you notice when you drive up to the society (which actually operates out of a home owned by our tour leader and zoo curator, Daniel), is there are loads of tortoises. The first thing we learned on the tour was how to tell the difference between a tortoise and a turtle - do you know how? Tortoises live in land, while turtles live in water. Turtles will also bite your finger, while tortoises (unless they're of the hungry African variety) won't.



We met Galapagos and Aldabra Giant Tortoises and even got to help feed them. Jeremiah and Sarah loved it. We also helped feed the African Tortoises (pictured above) - the ones that will bite your finger if you're not too careful. They are hungry desert tortoises and they loved to eat. The Phoenix Herpetological Society goes through 75,000 pounds of produce per year feeding these vegetarians - and the carnivores (turtles, lizards, snakes, alligators) go through about 20,000 pounds of meat per year. They rely heavily on donations from grocery stores that would normally throw this food away - I think it's so important for businesses to donate their waste instead of allowing it to rot in landfills. If you own a store and want to donate, contact 480-513-4377.



We also got to PET AN ALLIGATOR! Seriously, how cool is that? Meet Tuesday, who sunned herself next to the pool while we were on the other side feeding the giant tortoises. She was raised in a home as a pet - she's housebroken and everything - but even though she's very friendly, they still taped her mouth shut to be safe. One interesting fact we learned during the tour is that while alligators may bite humans, they don't go searching to eat humans (apparently we're not very tasty). Crocodiles, on the other hand, are 'man eaters' and will eat humans if given the chance.



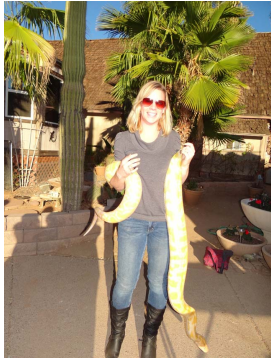
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We met many different lizards, which were housed for the cool winter months. Since lizards are cold blooded, the nighttime and morning temperatures are too low for them to move around and keep themselves warm, so they're housed until the nights start to warm up. Daniel is holding a Mexican Beaded Lizard, which is extremely endangered and also highly venomous. They don't bite like a snake to kill prey, they bite to protect themselves. The bite also won't kill you - there's never been a reported death - but in the words of Daniel: "The people who were bitten wished they were dead since the pain was so bad."

Next, we moved onto the Venom Room, where 200 venomous snakes are housed. They are kept behind glass walls and in their own glass cages, so there is a double layer of safety. In the Venom Room, there is also a classroom, where we learned some very sobering and frank information about rattlesnakes - something that all Arizonans need to be familiar with. I've always talked to my children about scorpions (we seem to get a lot around our home), but never rattlesnakes. One thing you do need to know is that the Phoenix Herpetological Society will remove rattlesnakes for a \$75 fee and relocate them to a safe area. Apparently, the Fire Department used to remove snakes away from your property, but now they have to toss them over your wall or fence - for safety reasons they cannot transport them. You can call 480-513-4377 if you need a rattlesnake removed.



After the tour was over (ours lasted about 3 hours), we got to meet all kinds of non-lethal reptiles - the kids were able to pet an African Pixie Frog (which is so huge - nothing pixie like about it!). Of course, I had to hold the albino Burmese python, and this is where Jeremiah was able to hold the gopher snake.

Overall, we had a great time and I learned so much. I'd definitely recommend this tour for older kids - maybe starting at 6/7 and adults of all ages. My kids did well, but they did get antsy after a little while. I'd also bring water, as well as a few snacks if your kids get hungry every two hours like mine. And dress comfortably - those boots I'm wearing? Cute, but not so comfy after three hours.

You can call 480-513-4377 to book a tour - they are \$20 for adults and \$15 for children. The Phoenix Herpetological Society is located just off Scottsdale and Dynamite Roads at: 28011 N 78th St, Scottsdale.



I'm Rachel - a mom, wife, and 'green' blogger at [Small Steps On Our Journey](http://SmallStepsOnOurJourney.com). If you have any suggestions for future articles or any questions on this one, please contact me at rachel@smallstepsonourjourney.com or tweet me [@rachelroland](https://twitter.com/rachelroland)!