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Wallaby, Mongoose and Python ... Oh My!

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*By Annabeth Miiler,
ShowMe Times Editor*

There was a excited gaggle of youngsters on Wednesday with incredible wide eyes. Sometimes they would giggle, sometimes "ooh" and "ahh" and the action at the front of the room. When asked, they would sit absolutely still and be as quiet as "church mice" (very unique for this many young children). There were times some weren't so sure, and sat a tad nervous.

The sixth and final week of Keller Public Library's Summer Reading Program - "One World, Many Stories" - was a special time for the nearly 90 youngsters on hand. It was "Zoofari" day, and Naturalist John Ham brought a half dozen of his friends - a Bennett's Wallaby, Emerald Toucan, Dark Mongoose, European Legless Lizard, Brazilian Salmon Pink Bird-eating Tarantula, and Burmese Python.

Ham took the animals one-by-one, held them for all the children to see, and even got them involved in showing off the animals. Four youngsters were recruited to hold the python (some even eagerly!); one young man held the sack that the baby wallaby enjoyed resting inside. Children volunteered to point out the world's continents on a large globe.

And while the toucan would "talk" into Ham's microphone and the young wallaby jumped around and explored part of the room, it seemed as though the greatest enthusiasm was for

--- the snake. Yes, the snake!

While some adults were looking for the nearest exit, the kids for the most part were excited by the site of the nearly five-foot long reptile. In fact, at the end of the program, Ham recruited four volunteers who held the critter while the rest stood in line for the chance to touch the python. Some, in fact, stood in line multiple times, and others would take their hand and trace the python's entire length.

Wednesday's program was the conclusion to the six-week summer reading program. Library Director Pam Trammell was enthused by the program's success.

"We have had tremendous crowds every week," she said.

Trammell thanked the Friends of the Library organization, as well as the many volunteers who made the summer reading project a success. "We couldn't have done it without their support and help" she said.

Photo Above: Naturalist John Ham holds Rikki-Tikki-Tavi, a mongoose, during Wednesday's Story Hour at the Keller Public Library in Dexter.

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