

1.2 million visit the zoo

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Going to the zoo was a cool thing to do again in 2006.

More than 1.2 million people passed through the gates at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo last year, marking a record-setting 13th straight year of more than 1 million attendance.

"We're thrilled with the numbers and we're glad it puts us right among the top 15 zoos in the country," Zoo Director Steve Taylor said Thursday.

Zoo officials linked the 5.5 percent attendance increase last

year, the first increase since 2003, to the opening of "Touch! Amazing Rays and Sharks," an exhibit that allowed visitors to reach into an 11,000-gallon salt-water pool and stroke the slippery, smooth skin of stingrays and small sharks.

Taylor said the hands-on aquatic exhibit will return this summer and be joined by the popular "Dinosaurs!" which will include nearly 20 life-size creatures.

A spokesman for the Association of Zoo & Aquariums, which accredits 214 U.S. zoos and aquariums, including Cleveland's, said the zoo is at the fore-

front for combining conservation education and entertaining exhibits.

"Zoos are becoming places where wildlife preservation meets the public," said spokesman Steve Feldman. "Of course, it never hurts to have a few cute, cuddly animal babies, either."

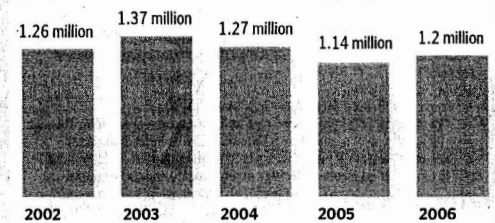
The Cleveland zoo will celebrate its 125th anniversary this year. For admission and exhibit details, call 216-661-6500 or go to www.clemetzoo.com.

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New exhibit helps draw zoo visitors

The Cleveland Metroparks Zoo's "Touch! Amazing Rays and Sharks" exhibit helped attendance to grow by 5.5 percent last year from 2005, which slumped by 10 percent when no new exhibits opened.

Annual attendance at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo



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Cleveland
Metroparks
Zoo



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