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**LOCATION:** Schönbrunner Tiergarten-Gesellschaft  
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**DESCRIPTION:** The main idea of the Nature Experience Walk at Zoo Schönbrunn is to immerse visitors in the native flora and fauna of the local natural environment. The walk is made up of three parts: 'In the Forest', 'At the Water' and 'In the Reeds'. The Nature Experience Walk is situated on the foothills of the Viennese forest. The forest was modified by forestry and today represents an attractive mix of forest and park with a high biodiversity. 'In the Forest' is a 160 meter long tree canopy walk, where zoo visitors can observe the native wildlife from a high viewpoint, followed by a 170 meter long trail on the ground. The canopy path makes use of the zoo's topography. Starting at the Tirolerhof, the path gains height and leads visitors through the tree canopy in a height of up to 10 meters. Visitors may see birds and their nests located high up in the trees. Some visitors may prefer the alternative path on the ground, where it is possible to see squirrels, bugs and even fox. Four bomb craters are located in the forest. On exiting 'In The Forest', visitors pass a meadow with wild butterflies and grasshoppers. Man-made insect homes are on display, as are hedges, piles of branches and stones that serve as habitats for native fauna in an urban environment. A number of terraria displays native reptiles and amphibians. The path winds down towards 'At the Water'. Here, three large outdoor aquaria direct the attention to native fish. The Nature Experience Walk then continues to 'In the Reeds', where pelicans, cormorants, fire-bellied toads and harvest mice can be seen. The purpose of the Nature Experience Walk is to interpret the native flora and fauna as being equally as exciting in comparison with exotic animals, such as elephants, lions and fruit bats.

**OPENING DATE:** 16 April 2009; **DESIGN:** Beginning 2005; **CONSTRUCTION:** Beginning 2008

**PLANTS:** The European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) was planted in the forest as it is important for the habitat but was not originally growing in the specific area.

**FEATURES DEDICATED TO ANIMALS:** The forest provides a natural environment for native wildlife. The vegetation is used by the animals for nesting, perching, foraging, feeding and protection. Two

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terraria are set up for poisonous snakes. Another terrarium holds newts, salamanders and toads. All terraria have underground chambers for hibernation and heated pads on the outside. The area for the lizards was designed like the edge of a vineyard with loose stone walls, piles of wood and a puddle. The animals can hibernate in a covered pile of stones. The visitor barriers are glass panels.

**FEATURES DEDICATED TO KEEPERS:** Native wild animals do not require husbandry for their care. Animal management is limited to feeding and nesting support that improve visibility of the animals for the visitors. All terraria have electricity and water connections. A separate chamber between the underground winter chamber and the terrarium serves the animals as a retreat and allows keepers to lock them in and access the terraria for maintenance without any risk of injury or escape.

**FEATURES DEDICATED TO VISITORS:** Visitors can experience being in the middle of a forest in the Vienna city center. Signs are available for visitors to learn about the Viennese forest, its fauna and flora. Information is offered on plants that use the trees as parasites, commensals or for support. Visitors may observe birds, squirrels and other native wildlife, while at the same time enjoying a special view of the zoo, Schönbrunn palace and the city of Vienna.

**INTERPRETATION:** Signs are available with information about the trees, wildlife and the forest itself. A hearing-based interactive about bird calls is situated in a tree trunk.

**MANAGEMENT:** The hanging bridge consists of three parts. Light barriers, turnstiles and lights are installed at the entry and exit of the bridge.

**CONSERVATION:** The construction of the tree canopy path had to respect the natural aspects of its surroundings in order to work for the Nature Experience Walk. A range of native wild animals uses the terrain of the zoo as their habitat. A study completed in 2005-2006 by Dr. Sachslehner showed that 74 bird species were observed, of which 22 species were breeding frequently in the zoo grounds. Three of the breeding species are locally endangered: middle spotted woodpecker, short-toed treecreeper and barn swallow, as their populations in this area are in decline.