



LIFE / D1

CHECK IT OUT

Seein' Spots in Ballard has stripes on display, thanks to a rare zebra-donkey hybrid that resides there



Diana Krall delivers a warm set at the Santa Barbara Bowl

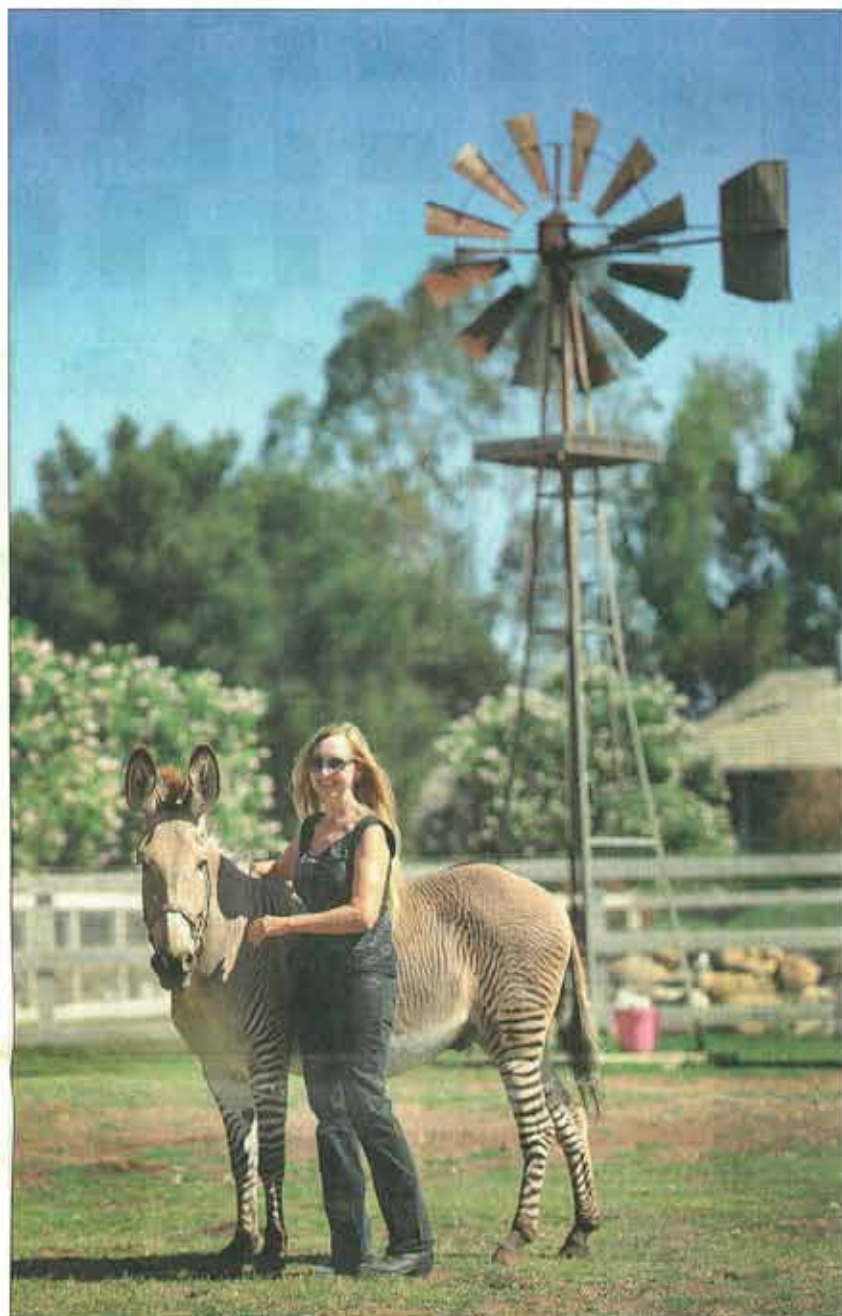
Codeword D2 Movies D3 Television D5 Club Calendar D7
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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2012

Star in stripes

Zeyore entertains Ballard visitors as one of those rare animals — a zebra-donkey hybrid

By DAVE MASON
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MIKE ELIASON/NEWS-PRESS

Linda Marchi spends a moment with Zeyore, a zonkey or zebra-donkey hybrid, at Seein' Spots Farm in Ballard.

IF YOU GO

Seein' Spots Farm, 2599 Baseline Ave. in Ballard, is open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays. The ranch includes a petting zoo of rescued animals, as well as Zeyore the zonkey. Admission is free, but donations are welcome. For more information, call Linda Marchi at 688-2275, email linda@seeinspotsfarm.com or go to www.seeinspotsfarm.com.

Zeyore lowered his head and snuggled it in Linda Marchi's lap.

"He'll follow me like a dog," Mrs. Marchi said.

But he's got an independent streak, much like a cat, only playing when he feels like it.

He's got the stripes of a zebra.

And the ears of a donkey.

Zeyore is, in fact, a zonkey.

And, one could argue, an identity crisis in the making. Who lives with miniature donkeys, a horse, mule, goats, chickens and turkeys.

Mrs. Marchi and her husband, Brett, have had Zeyore, 6, for three years since purchasing him from Temecula breeder Bob Lucas. He makes his home at Seein' Spots Farm in Ballard, where visitors can see the zonkey, miniature donkeys, a horse named Pistol and other farm animals.

As the ranch's turkeys gobble, another donkey brays, chickens cluck and Pistol neighs — if Old MacDonald had a farm, this would be it — Zeyore quietly and slowly walks toward a visitor.

The gentle animal's donkey-like eyes say it all: pet me.

Please.

"Would you like to be brushed?" Mrs. Marchi said, later adding, "He knows he's special."

Zeyore, whose father was a zebra and mother was a donkey, is the 37th zonkey in the U.S. registered through the America Donkey and Mule Society, Mrs. Marchi said.

She and her husband got him as a result of her longtime interest in the donkeys that are painted with stripes for tourists visiting Tijuana. Mrs. Marchi, who grew up in San Juan Capistrano, kept a photo that her parents took of one of those donkeys. The couple saw their first zonkey 20 years ago at the San Diego Zoo. Mrs. Marchi looked for a zonkey online, but found what she wanted when she stumbled onto Zeyore at a Temecula petting zoo.

After purchasing Zeyore, Mr. and Mrs. Marchi sent him to Colorado, where an Amish family trained him in tasks such as pulling a cart and being ridden. After the training, Mrs. Marchi had hoped he could pull a cart in a parade, but found he went too fast and couldn't be stopped easily.

Donkeys and zebras are both from equidae, the horse family, and are from Africa. Some zonkeys are born in the wild, although that is rare. Usually, the father is a zebra and the mother is a donkey because zebras are stronger and more dominant, Mrs. Marchi said. As a hybrid species, zonkeys are sterile.

Humans originally bred zonkeys in the 19th century to pull heavy loads.

Today, most zonkeys are found in zoos.

Mr. and Mrs. Marchi named their zonkey Zeyore as a play on the word Eeyore, the sad but lovable donkey in "Winnie the Pooh," with the "Z" alluding to his zebra roots, Mrs. Marchi said. She explained the name fit because of all the kids who visit the ranch, which has a petting zoo of rescued animals such as goats. She also has rabbits.

Please see ZONKEY on D8

'There's no one like Zeyore'

■ ZONKEY

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There's no one like Zeyore.

The zonkey stands 13½ hands (almost 5 feet), the typical height for a zebra or a standard donkey. He has the strength and speed of a zebra, Mrs. Marchi said. The 600-pound muscular animal also loves to run, as zebras do. Sometimes you'll see him running with the ranch's horse, Pistol. The latter would beat Zeyore in a sprint, but the zonkey would win a long-distance race, said Hannah Marchi, Mrs. Marchi's 14-year-old daughter and ranch hand.

Zebras are wild, and Zeyore has some of that in him, Mrs. Marchi said. He gets spooked more easily than normal donkeys, to the point that Mrs. Marchi said she couldn't risk putting him in a parade.

"Don't stand behind him," Mrs. Marchi warned. If startled, he kicks.

"You respect him more because of the zebra (component)," she said.

While donkeys have been domesticated for thousands of years, zebras remain wild. Zeyore has both heritages in his DNA.

Nope, Zeyore isn't a zebra. At least, not entirely. For one thing, they're white with thick, black stripes. He's beige with thin, brown stripes.

What's more, he has the personality of a donkey, Mrs. Marchi said. Zebras aren't known for approaching strangers. Like donkeys, which are naturally friendly, Zeyore doesn't hesitate to walk to a new face and say hello. He obviously loves to be scratched behind the ears. Like a dog. (Oops. Sorry, Zeyore: Don't mean to confuse you more.)

In fact, donkeys in general, including Zeyore, are friendlier than horses, who can take you or leave you, Mrs. Marchi said.

Zebras tend to be aggressive, but Zeyore isn't, Mrs. Marchi said. "He doesn't have a mean bone in his body."

"He's very sweet. He's very loving, but he's very strong, so you have to be careful around him," Mrs. Marchi said. "He can knock me over with one turn of his head."

Wow. Has he actually done that?

"Yeah," she said with a smile. She said Zeyore didn't mean any harm. He just doesn't know his own strength.

"I've learned to be a little more cautious with him than with the donkeys," she said.

In fact, it once took five men to hold Zeyore steady when a blood sample was taken from him for a test, Mrs. Marchi said.

For the most part, the strong animal is sociable. "He would sit on my lap if I let him," Mrs. Marchi said as Zeyore lowered his head for her to pet him while she sat at an outdoor table. "He's just a big baby."

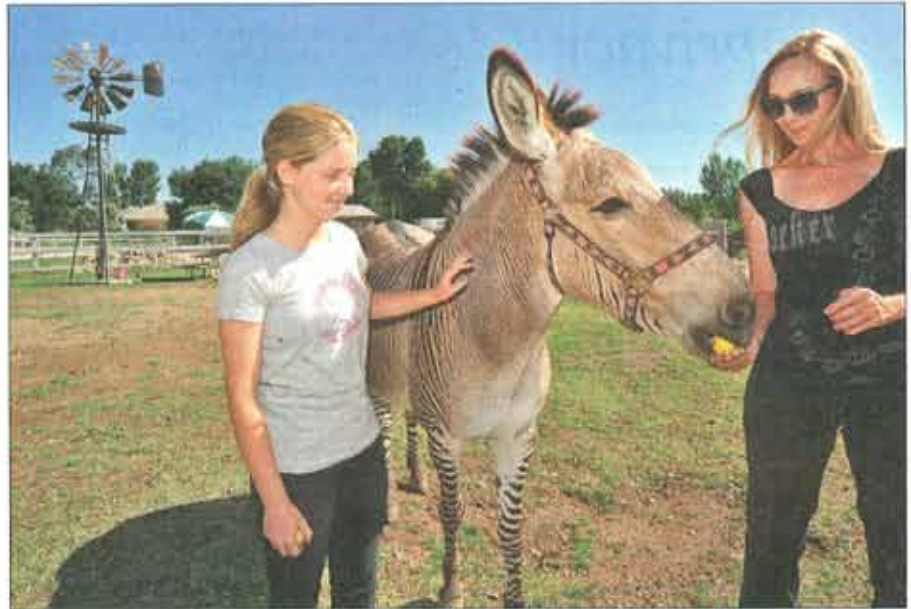
"He just loves having people pet him," said Hannah. "He loves attention; he's a big puppy dog. I call him a big teddy bear."

Like a dog, Zeyore loves to play with a ball, although Hannah compares him to a cat because he only plays when he feels like it. Zeyore proved that by refusing to play when Mrs. Marchi threw a ball toward him.

When he's in the mood, Zeyore will kick an inflated ball or pop it by stepping on it.

He also loves chasing the ranch's dogs or being chased by them, Mrs. Marchi said.

Mrs. Marchi said she knows of only one other zonkey in Santa Barbara County. "Michael Jackson had one in the (Santa Ynez)



MIKE ELIASON / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Linda Marchi and her daughter, Hannah, 14, spend time with Zeyore at Seein' Spots Farm. Below, Mrs. Marchi says Zeyore, a zonkey, has the sweet personality of a donkey and the strength of a zebra.



Valley," she said. The late pop icon had a zoo of exotic animals at his Neverland Valley Ranch in Los Olivos. "He (the zonkey) is still here somewhere; I think he's in Santa Ynez. He's old."

Visitors to Seein' Spots Farm are surprised when they see a donkey with zebra stripes, Mrs. Marchi said.

Judy Wareham, a Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital nurse, hadn't seen a zonkey until she met Zeyore on an earlier visit. The 64-year-old Santa Barbara resident brings her grandchildren to see him and the other animals.

"He's different. I love zebras," Mrs. Wareham said on this day near Zeyore's pasture. "I think he's beautiful."

As Mrs. Wareham talked, Zeyore walked to the fence. He wanted to say hi.

"He's pretty special to look at," Mrs. Marchi said. "He's a big attraction."

As for whether this part donkey, part zebra, who's related to a horse, can go for a ride?

"He's kind of fun to ride," said Mrs. Marchi.

"It's like riding a drunken sailor," she said.

"He doesn't go in a straight line."

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