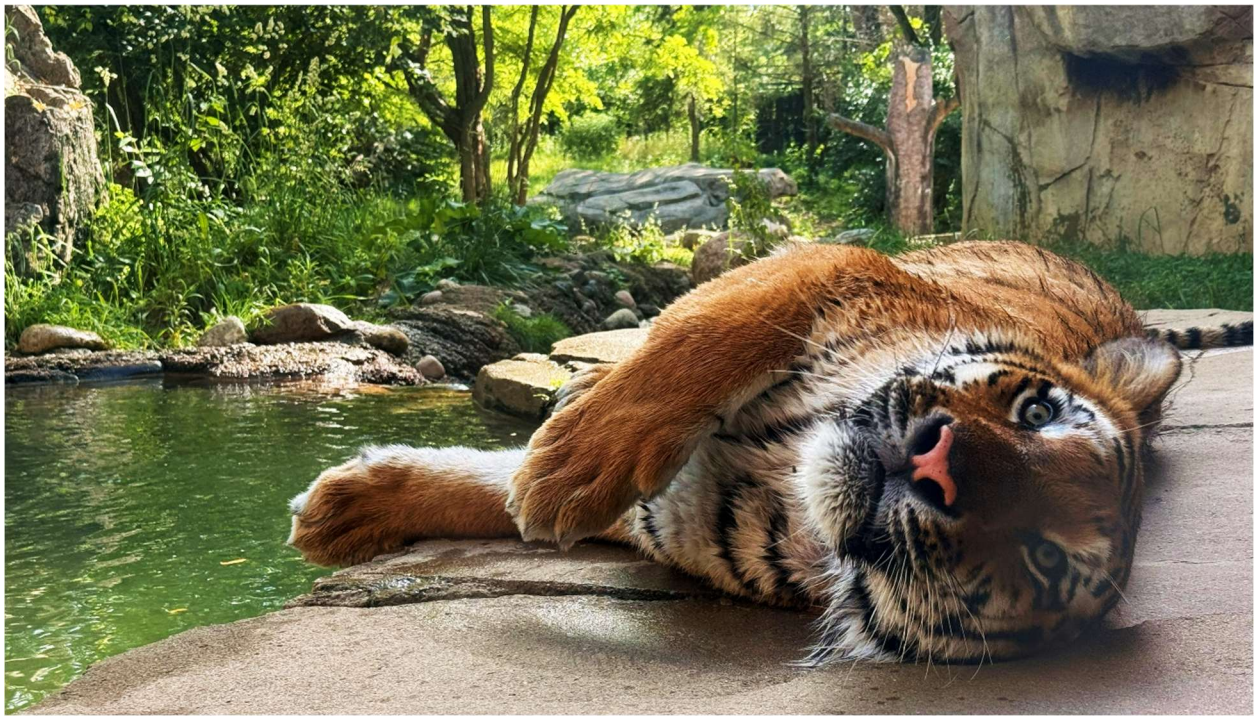
The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America
RICK'S ROADS
Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What

BLOG POST: 2026.06.05
Columbus Zoo, Powell, Ohio



After three weeks in the Boston area, it was time to head west again. Colorado was the next destination, specifically a four-day festival called *Peace, Love & Vans.* I had chosen a fairly expeditious route, but I was not going to go the whole way without stopping to see some cool stuff.



And zoos are cool. Well, the animals are. I do have that ambivalence about the zoo (or aquarium): prison or haven, little of both, maybe? I went through all that in the Mote SEA post (5-3-26), so I won't rehash it here.

The day's drive started just after 8:00 AM, in western New York, near Fredonia, which is a hour or so west of Buffalo. It was about 300 miles to the zoo. I have NO desire to be buying more than one tank of gas in a day, so this distance worked out fine.



It cost me $33 to get in, which was also fine. I tend to evaluate things by the number of good photos I can get for that admission price, and I was confident that I'd get plenty here.



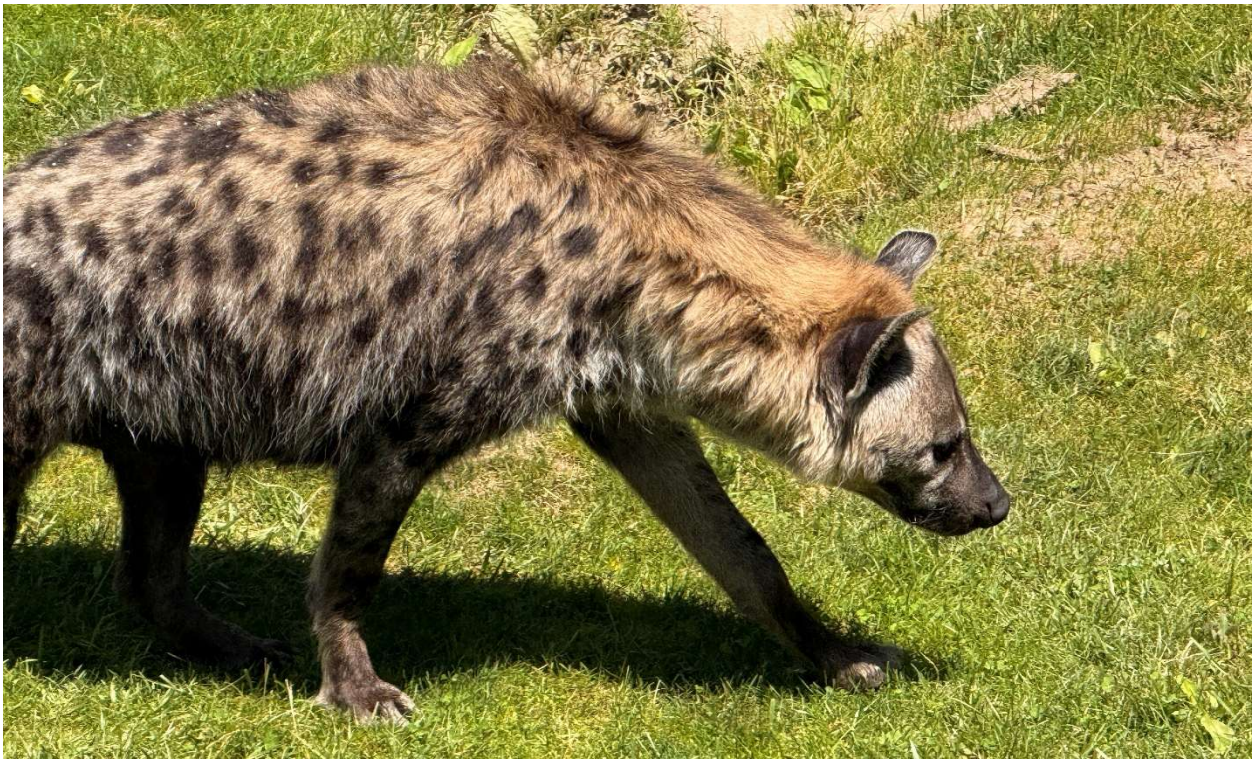
I'm going to pass along a little advice that I knew but forgot to remember: mid-afternoon on a hot, sunny day is not the time to hit the zoo. I walked in at 2:00 and most of the animals were in hiding.

It was Siesta Time. Go find a shady spot and have a power nap. See ya in a couple of hours when the sun is lower. This fur is hot, y'know.



The moose cools off with an afternoon dip.

The hyena prowls his private savanna.





The Polar Bear sizes up his next seafood meal.

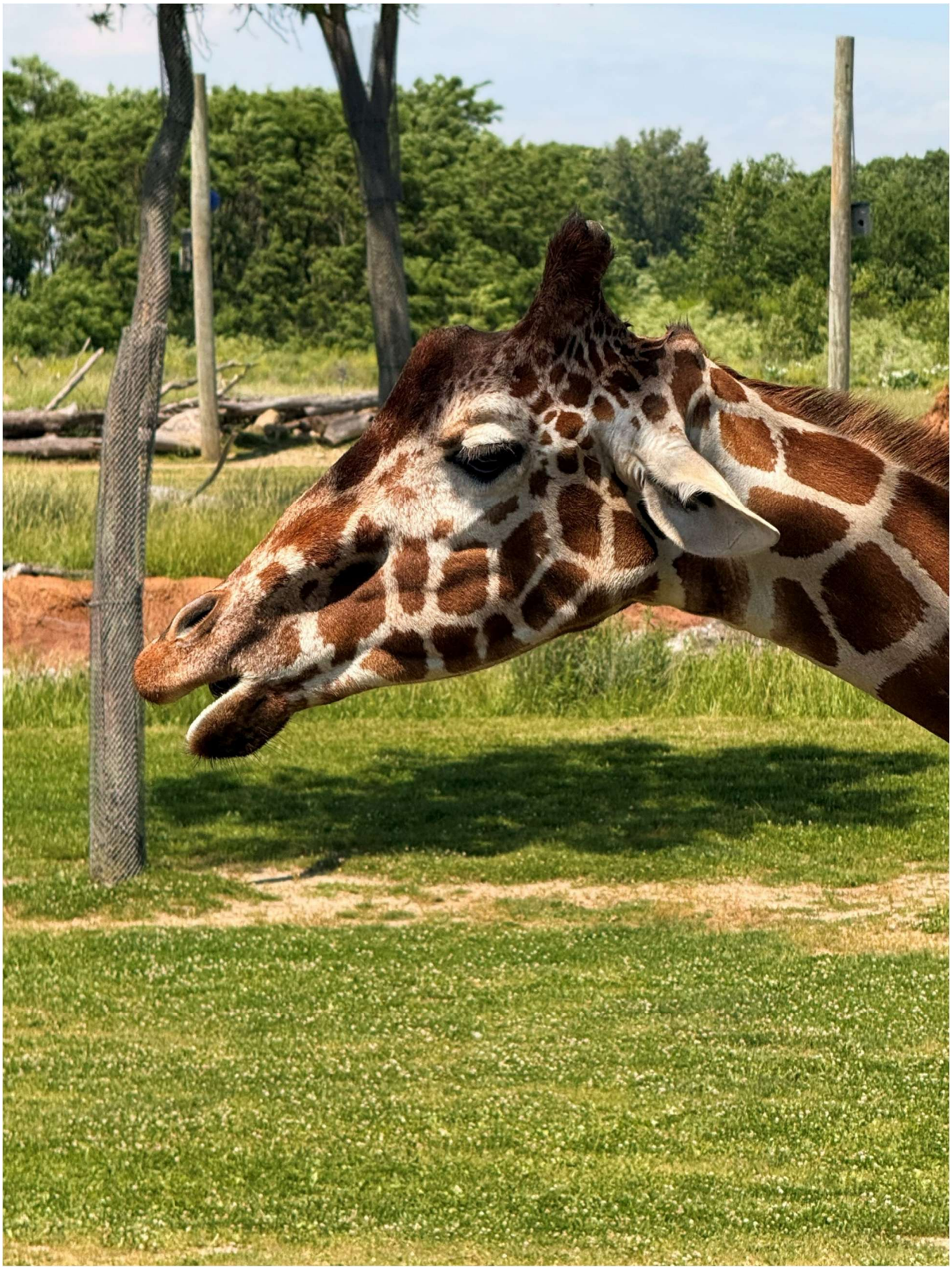


A lioness enjoys the shade under a roof, on the wing of a WWII-era airplane.

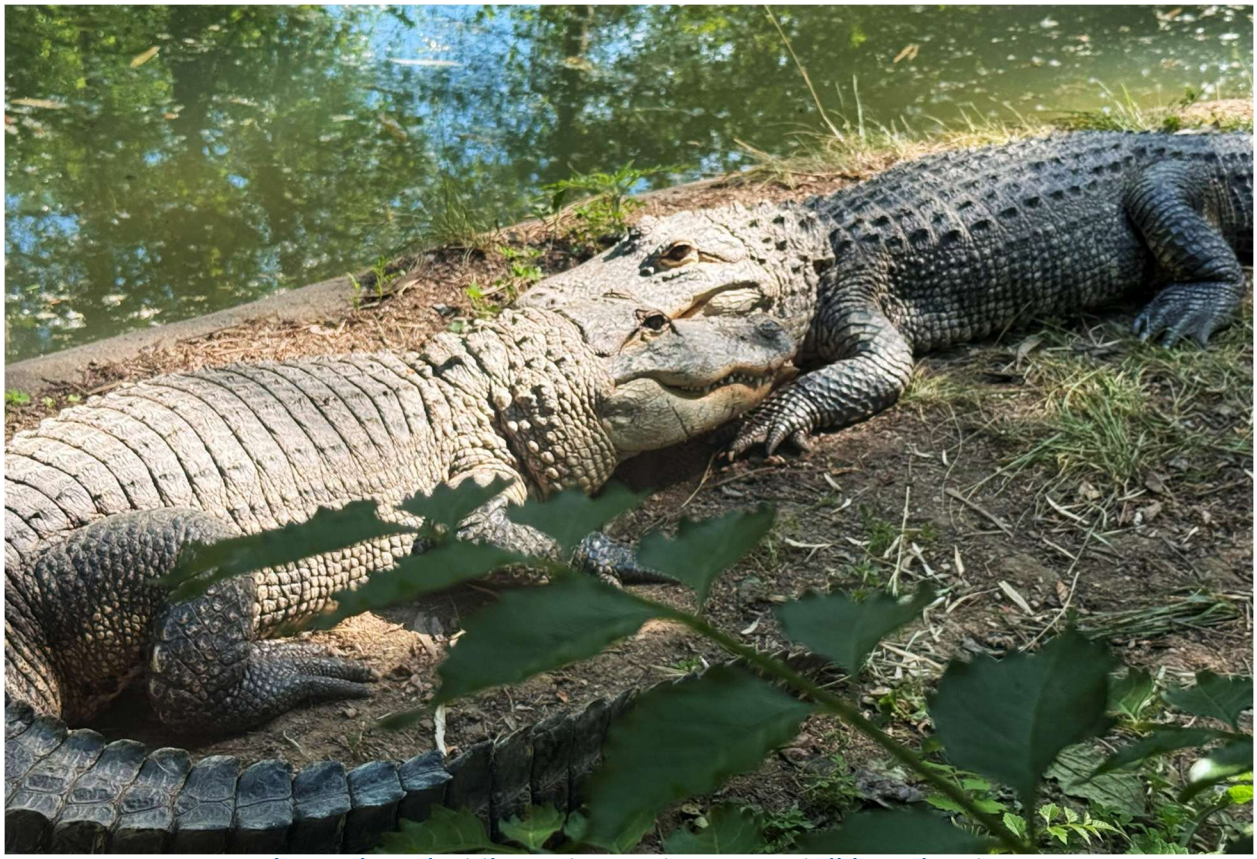


Cheetahs even look fast when they walk.



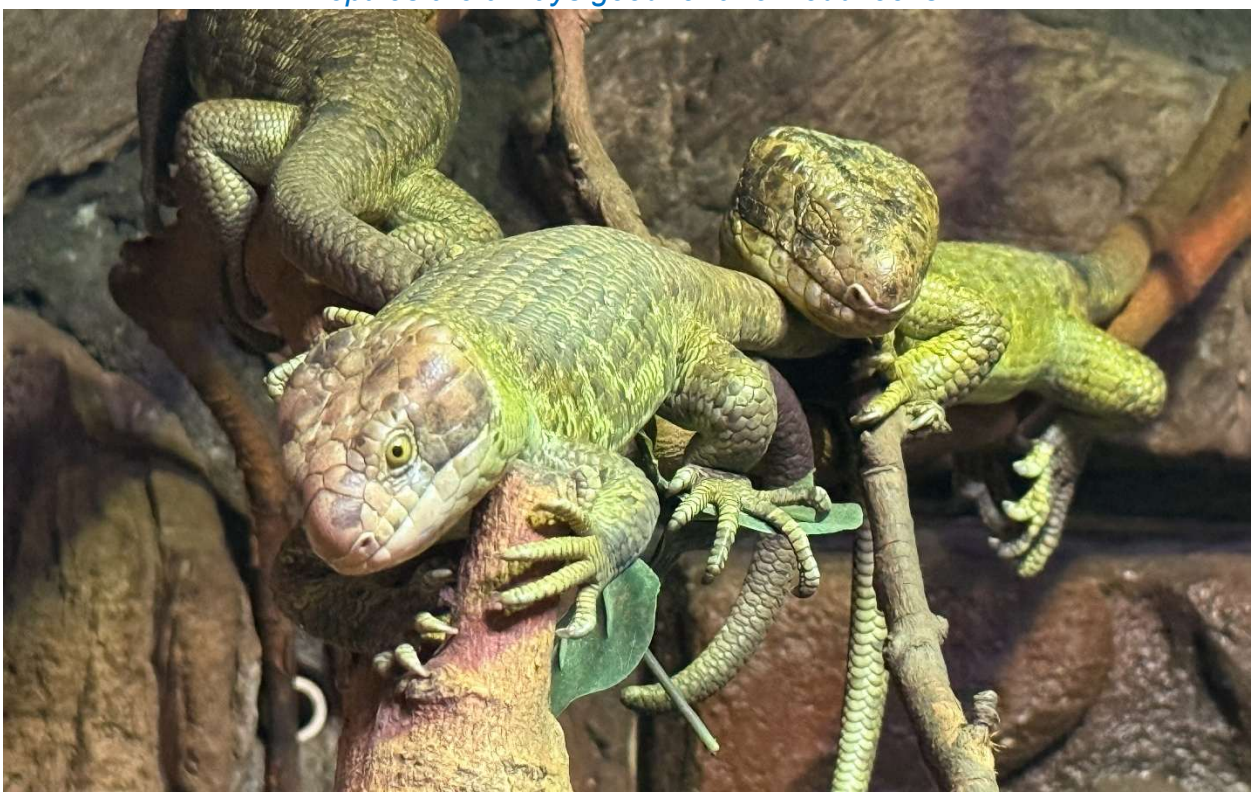


Without the long neck and odd body to look at, giraffes sure do look goofy.



I wonder what these two gators were talking about.

Reptiles are always good for a few odd looks.











I don’t even know what this creature is. Some kind of turtle, I think.



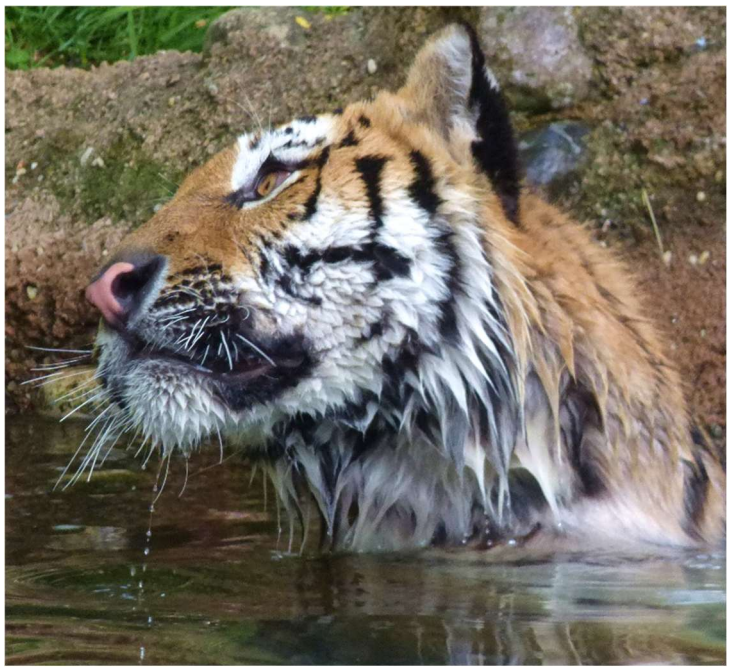
Iggy looking dramatic.

I was disappointed that I was not able to see the tigers, or the jaguar, or the elephants, or the red panda, but sometimes things just don't work out.

On my way out at 3:30, though, I asked if I could leave and come back in an hour or so. That was just fine with them. They put an ink stamp on my wrist and I walked back home (part-way across then parking lot) for a late lunch.

By 4:40, things seemed noticeably cooler, and I was feeling well-fed and refreshed, so I went back in and headed directly for the tiger paddock.

Two big girls were active. It was adult swim hour. I always thoughts that cats did not like water, but these two were loving the two pools. One pool was out in the open, and the other was down below, in front of a very thick and wide spectator window.



They even had pool toys! There was a round, flat, blue pancake thing that one of the tigers was intent on sinking.

They were ignoring the 20 or so of us on the safe side of the glass, just splashing around and lying on the concrete deck.

Until… for some reason, the larger of the two cats took a shine to the woman to my right.

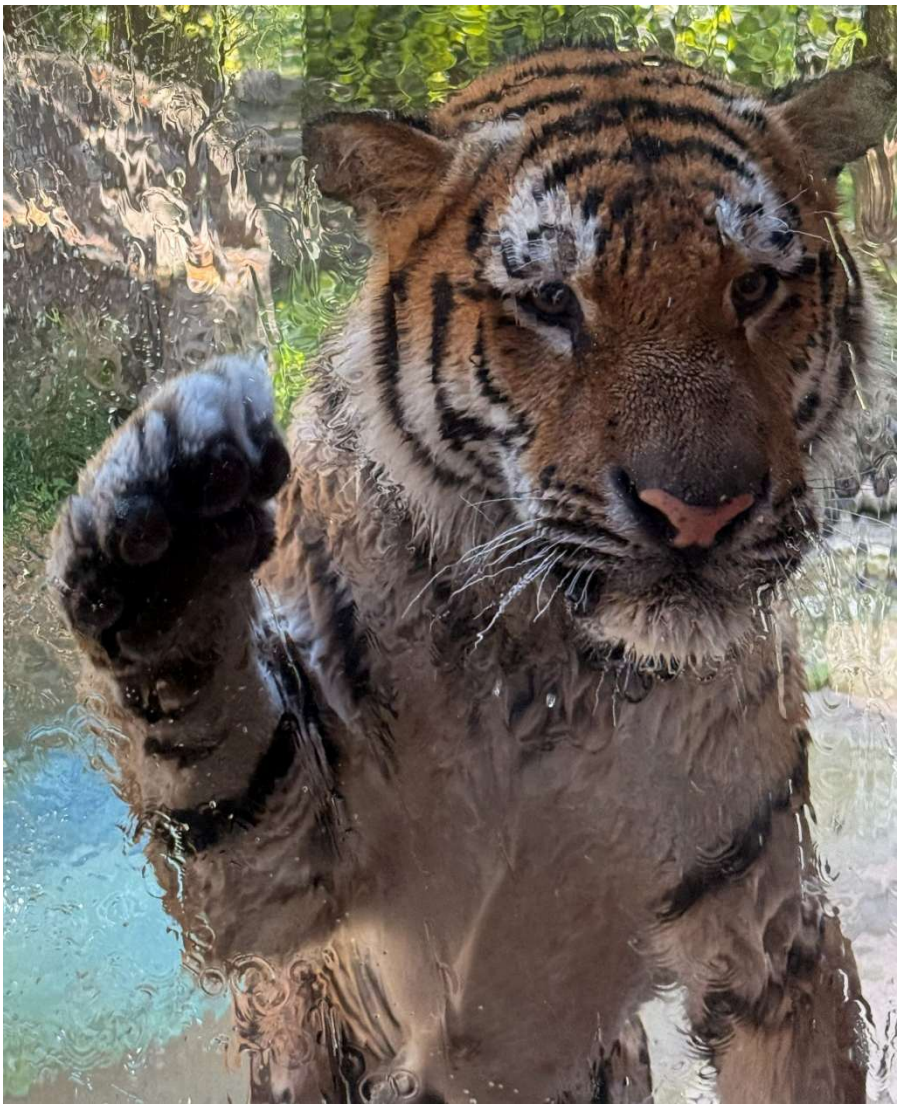


She (the woman) was taking a video, like so many of us were, but she was wearing a yellow hat that was eye-catching.

She wasn't moving at all. Nor was she looking at her phone screen. She was calmly looking right into the tiger's eyes, and the tiger locked onto it.

The woman was talking cooingly to the cat.

“Yahh, baby, come to mama, sweet baby…” she was softly saying. I swear she was sending the message with her eyes, and the tiger must have been receiving it. The cat cocked her head slightly, paused, then reared up and lunged against the glass, throwing her weight against it.



It took everyone by surprise, but probably me more than most. I was on one knee, with my phone pressed up against the glass, and in an instant all I could see was a wet tiger’s belly.

Now, here’s the weird part. I’ve seen a snarling tiger attack the glass before, fangs bared, claws extended.

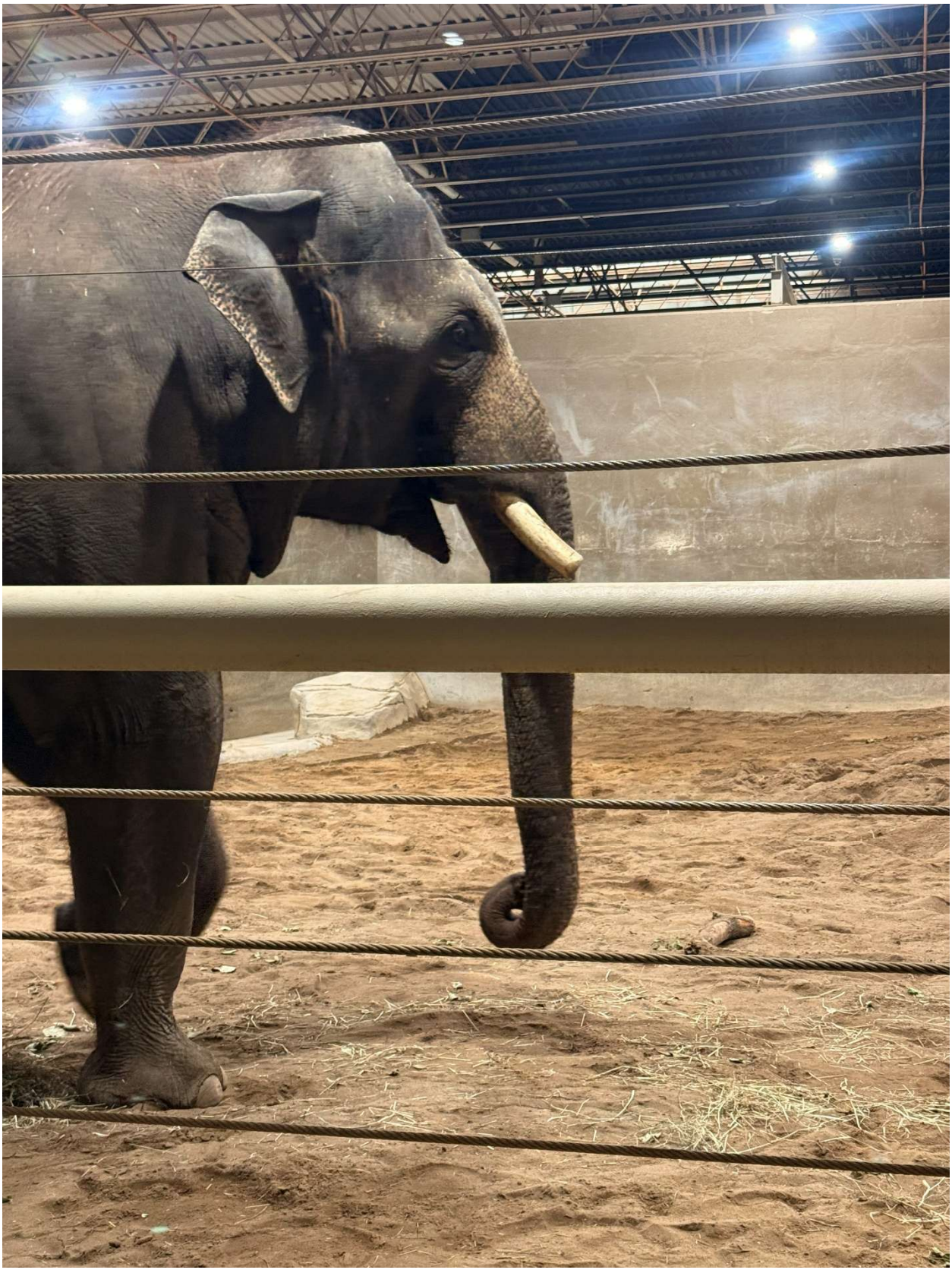
But there was no fury in this lunge. She wanted to play! Look at her face. That is not an angry cat.

And when she dropped back to all fours, she kept looking at the woman, gently pawing the glass, like a kitten or a puppy would.

I turned to the woman and said, “I think she likes you,” and motioned to let her get by me to get to the glass.

She suddenly lost her cooing demeanor. “Uh-uhhh,” she said with a small tremble, “I am fiiine right where I am.”

The tiger pawed a few times, about 4-5 gentle, clawless swipes at the glass each time, always looking right at the woman. Finally, the scorned beast got the clue and turned back to the pool.

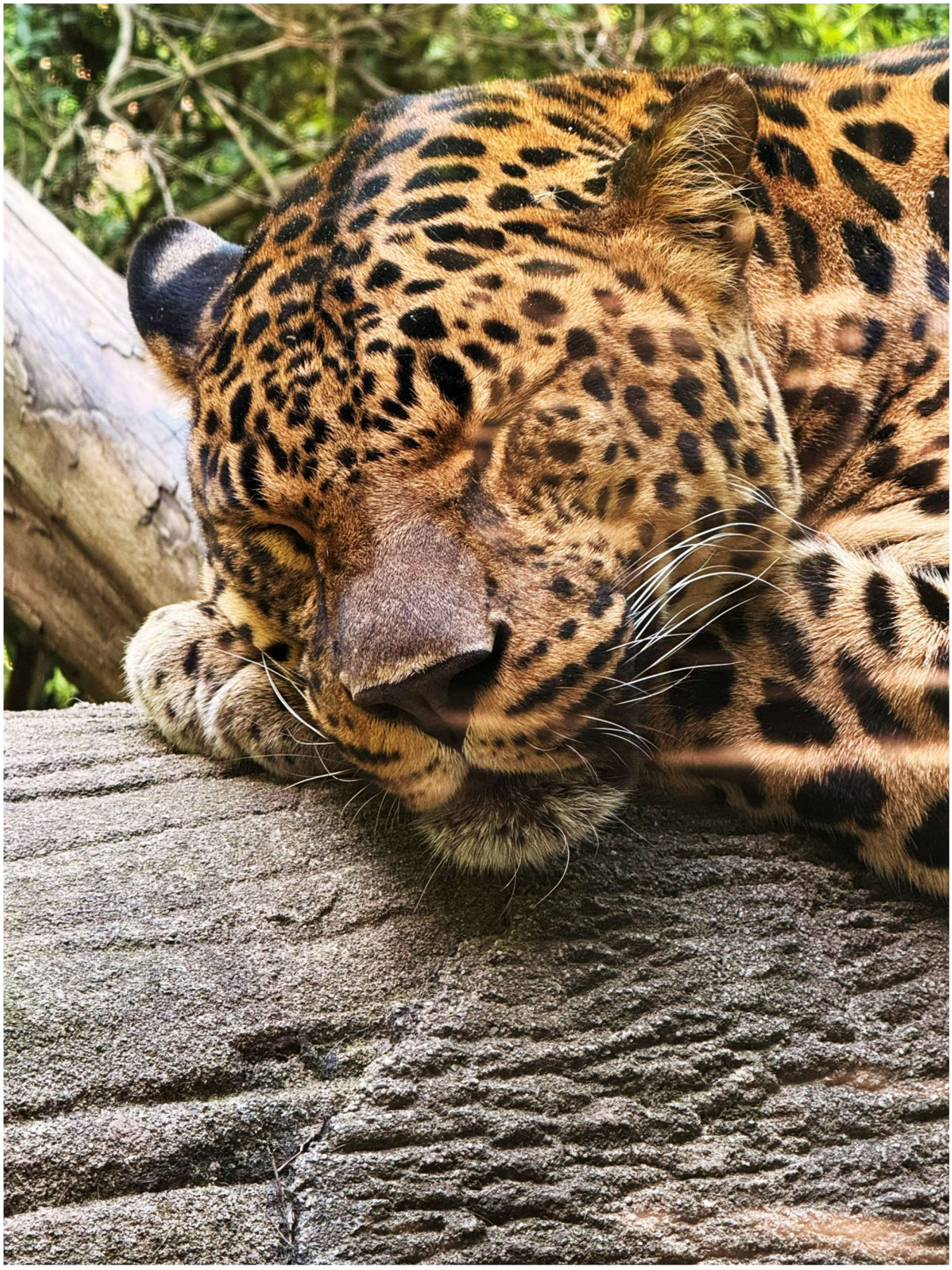


Somehow, the elephants almost completely eluded my lens.



The lemur was being shy, but the jaguar took his snooze right next to the big window.







Looks like it was tough day at work for the Red Panda.

I was told that the zoo closed at 6:00, so I tore myself away from the animal kingdom and made my way to the exit at 5:57. To my surprise, someone was getting a wrist stamp, and others were rushing to get through the gate. Do they close the gate but let people stay in??

I'll probably never know. I was outa there anyway. I had another hour to drive to get to my Harvest Host brewpub (Wandering Griffin) on the outskirts of Dayton.