Talking a walk on the wild side in panda paradise

By Kathryn Reed

CHENGDU, China – Fur against my cheek, gnawing away on his (or her?) apple, I so wanted to suddenly be able to speak panda.

For a brief moment, I was in black and white heaven as I held the 6-month-old on my lap. Thoughts of running off with it, learning to grow bamboo in Tahoe, and wondering how to contain it in my back yard filled my head.



Kathryn Reed in panda heaven in Chengdu, China.

With claws that looked like they could slice and dice me and whatever else it wanted to, I decided to let it stay in China.

The donation to hold this bundle of fur (a Christmas gift from Sue) goes to the reserve to continue research on the endangered breed and to help sustain its existence.

Although I have mixed feelings about humans holding wild animals, I know without such contributions it's likely future generations might not ever see a panda other than one that is stuffed.

For nearly 30 years, the World Wildlife Fund has been working in China to help preserve the 3.8 million acres of forest in and around the habitat of pandas. The giant panda is listed as endangered in the World Conservation Union's Red List of Threatened Animals. There are about 1,600 left in the wild. Nearly 300 live in zoos and breeding centers around the world, mostly in China. The nearest to Tahoe are in San Diego.

Pandas have been special to me ever since they first arrived in 1972 at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. I was in grade school, living outside of the capital at the time. Every time someone would come visit, I'd ask my parents if we could take them to see the pandas.

I still have one of my stuffed pandas named after those two original ones – Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing. Mom made me a pantsuit with pandas. I had sheets with pandas. I insisted on visiting the current pandas when I was in D.C. a few years ago. I have panda pajamas.

Last month, I went to their homeland of China – specifically, the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding. This reserve opened in 1987 with less than a dozen pandas and now has 80.

The goal of this site is to study their behavior, have them reproduce and one day reintroduce them to the wild – though the latter is a future goal.

Our guide, Philip He, gave us a little history lesson as we drove to the reserve – like how the word panda did not exist in the Chinese language before the 20th century. Panda means bear cat. It was a French explorer who named this animal panda. Their habitat is in five major areas, two of them in Chengdu where we were.

Still, the panda has been a symbol of peace in China for centuries. Armies would put a panda on flags as a way to signal a day of rest from war, according to He. And it was 39

years ago they were a symbol of peace when President Richard Nixon made his groundbreaking trip to China.

Part of why their population is dwindling in the wild is that they are solitary creatures and their mating season is short.

They are big eaters – consuming about 44 pounds of bamboo a day. It could be one of 60 kinds of bamboo.

He said in the 1980s large areas of bamboo died, which led to numerous pandas dying off.

At the Chengdu breeding center about two dozen pandas are born each year. On this particular day three 6-month-olds are sleeping in a tree. Then one scrambles down, deciding mom looks bored. They tumble around in a playful manner until mom gets tired of this game and saunters off.

The 321-acre reserve is also home to red pandas – but in my world – they are just weird looking raccoons and not real pandas.

It was the 1½ year olds playing on their jungle gym of sorts that captured me. One just sat there chomping away on bamboo, oblivious to the camera shutters clicking away.

The pandas are reason enough for me to book another flight to China.

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Seminar about increasing lodging occupancy

As part of its Chamber EDucation program, the North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce is hosting “Internet Bookings: How to Increase Your Lodging Occupancy” April 27, 1-3pm, at the North Tahoe Event Center, 8318 North Lake Blvd. in Kings Beach.

The seminar is geared for owners and managers of hotels, motels, condominiums and vacation homes, and will assist properties in increasing their visibility in domestic and international markets, increasing occupancy and online booking presence, and how best to utilize North Lake Tahoe Resort Association member benefits. Speakers include Leisure Sales Manager Jeremy Jacobson of the NLTRA, as well as representatives with Travelocity, Expedia, Alpine Adventures and BookIt.com.

The registration deadline is April 25. This seminar is free to North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce members and is $25/person for non-members. To register, contact North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce Manager Kym Fabel at (530) 581-8764 or kym@PureTahoeNorth.com.

Hike offers extreme Sierra challenge

By Marek Warszawski, Fresno Bee

Backpacking across the Sierra Nevada as a high school freshman changed Chris Casado’s life forever.

Now, Casado wants to use that experience to help change the lives of others.

Casado, a 31-year-old Orinda resident is co-founder of Trans Sierra Extreme Challenge, which this summer is guiding a series of 75-mile hikes across Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks in central California. The nine-day trek traverses some of the most remote areas of the parks before culminating in an ascent of Mount Whitney, the highest point in the contiguous U.S.

“The trip had a huge impact on me, just as it has for dozens of others,” Casado said. “It lets you know you can do anything you set your mind to, including climbing Mount Whitney.”

The TSX Challenge is patterned after similar backpacking trips led by Gettysburg Elementary teacher and professional guide Mike Murphy since 1983. Murphy, who has stood atop Whitney 35 times, is a co-founder of the new commercial venture and will provide logistical support.

Read the whole story

El Dorado Savings’ earnings decline

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

Placerville-based El Dorado Savings Bank, one of the area’s most consistently profitable financial institutions, saw a year-over-year decline in first-quarter profit.

The bank posted a quarterly profit of slightly more than $2 million, about 18 percent below net income of $2.52 million in

the initial quarter of 2010.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Education might be issue where compromise is found

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the April 22, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

Make no mistake about it: President Barack Obama's two-hour stop in Reno on Thursday was more of a campaign stump speech than a town-hall meeting.

Any pretense of the latter went out the window when Jill Derby, the former state regent and Democratic challenger to U.S. Rep. Dean Heller in 2008, stood up and lobbed a softball to the president on health care. Her planted question was as subtle as the Obama's motorcade cruising down Terminal Way.

Billed as a town-hall meeting on the federal budget, the Reno visit was the last of a three-stop tour that also hit Virginia and the headquarters of Facebook in Palo Alto, Calif. Obama, before an invitation-only crowd of about 400, spoke in generalities about his plan to reduce the federal deficit. He also said he's forming a team to "root out any cases of fraud or manipulation" that might be contributing to rising prices at the fuel pumps.

But what should Nevadans take away from the speech? The answer came toward the end of his prepared remarks, when he spoke about priorities to keep the nation's economy from

backsliding.

Read the whole story

USFS making plans to open Tahoe recreation sites

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is about to begin the annual process of opening recreational facilities around the Lake Tahoe Basin. Campgrounds, day-use areas and forest roads traditionally open in mid-May, weather permitting.

The Taylor Creek Visitor Center and the Tallac Historic Site normally open Memorial Day weekend.



It's almost cycling season on the bike path at Camp Richardson. Photo/LTN file

Before facilities can be opened, the Forest Service must hire crews to staff and manage the sites, clean up from winter, remove safety hazards and wait for the danger of a freeze to

pass before turning on water systems.

As a reminder, until recreation facilities officially open, there is no parking, trash removal, or restroom facilities available. Park your vehicle off the roadway and do not block access gates. Pack out all trash and where pets are allowed,clean up after your animal.

For a complete list of projected opening dates, visit our 2011 Campground and Forest Road webpage.

Ski report: Don’t expect sunshine



The annual Snow Golf Tournament at Alpine Meadows scheduled for April 23 has been postponed to May 7.

Here is Saturday’s ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

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1 week until Upper Truckee

Marsh is off-limits to dogs

By Kathryn Reed

It’s the afternoon of April 22 at the Upper Truckee Marsh in South Lake Tahoe. Four dogs – two are leashed, two unleashed. This high percentage of unleashed dogs is what has led the California Tahoe Conservancy – the landowner – to issue an edict banning all dogs for three months beginning May 1.

On Friday, the dogs were being encouraged to run toward the riparian habitat to chase a ball. As the foursome walked toward the lake the people were yelling at the dogs – clearly not in control of their two dogs.



Two dogs are encouraged to run free April 22 in the Upper Truckee Marsh. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The two other people with one dog each on leash exchanged comments about how it’s too bad the responsible dog owners are being punished for the acts of others. They both agreed this area is no longer fun to visit in the summer because of the unruly nature of humans and canines.

For now, not all of the meadow is accessible because the water

is in the backyards of some residences.

Trout Creek is visible, but only because that's where the water is running the fastest. Otherwise, its banks have disappeared.

The CTC may have an item about the dog ban on its May 19 agenda. People can always comment on items not on the agenda.

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Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Tahoe Cross Country in Tahoe City is open until May 1.

• The Boys & Girls Club in South Lake Tahoe is celebrating 20 years of being open. The event is April 27 from 5-7pm at 1100 Lyons Ave. – the old Al Tahoe Elementary School.

• Keep track of what the Tahoe Area Mountain Bike Association is doing via its website. Look for TAMBA membership forms to come out soon. In the meantime, sign-up in person at Pearl Izumi in South Lake Tahoe. Membership is $10 for individuals and $20 for families.

• Julie Regan is now chairwoman of the Barton Health Foundation.

• The Boulder Bay project on the North Shore is back on the agenda of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board.

It is slated to be discussed April 27 at 9:30am in Kings Beach.

• The California water board, this week as expected, approved the Total Maximum Daily Load rules proposed by the Lahontan Regional Board. No one from the city of South Lake Tahoe attended the April 19 hearing in Sacramento.

• Here is the roadwork schedule from Caltrans that will affect the Lake Tahoe Basin for the next week.

Summer home maintenance will make winter less stressful

By Dan Sheehan

Summer is right around the corner and the sun will be beating down on Lake Tahoe once again.

What did you learn from this past winter and what are you going to do to prepare for next winter?



As a contractor in Lake Tahoe, I see firsthand how the environment/climate of the region affects the homes here. The following are a few things that probably could use some attention on your home this summer as well as a few other Lake Tahoe summer home maintenance tips.

House siding maintenance: If your home is like many in the Tahoe basin, it probably has wooden siding; be it shiplap cedar, shakes, board n' bat, T111 or something else. If your siding could talk to you, it would very likely tell you it is

thirsty. Your home does not wear sunscreen nor does it go inside after being in the sun for a few hours. Your home sits there day in and day out and gets hammered by the sun, rain, wind and snow.

This combination of elements dries out your home's siding, which typically can lead to structural failure (cracks, splitting, etc.). This is predominately true of the southern facing exposures of your home. If your roof is poorly designed, maybe runoff from it is watering your siding as well. So, it is good to maintain the coating on it whether it is oil/stain or solid paint. By maintaining the coatings on your home you will save yourself the trouble of having to do more costly repairs of replacing it down the road. It is also a good time to go over the siding and caulk any joints or cracks which may be a place for water to penetrate and freeze. Important places to pay attention to are around windows, doors and corners.

Decking and railing maintenance: Like your siding, your deck is probably thirsty, too. Decks have it harder in some ways. Primarily, a deck's biggest obstacle is gravity. Water just sits there. Worse yet, snow that is piled up on a deck slowly melts, keeping your deck perpetually wet. On top of that, if you have snowpack on your roof, it might be beating/dripping on to the deck. If you live in your home full time maybe you keep the snow shoveled from your deck, which is great. However, if your Tahoe home is not your primary home, then most likely the snow does just sit on that deck.

Like your siding, it is good to go over your deck, replacing bad screws and deck boards and also giving it a good coat of oil. And if snow was piled on your deck, then your railing probably got pushed around a bit and now is a good time to tighten the post's bolts and check that everything is screwed up tightly. Tip: Be sure to go over your deck and countersink any protruding. This will save you some aggravation when you go to shovel your deck next winter – or walk on it barefoot

this summer.

Roof and ice dam prevention: As mentioned above, you're siding and decks get hammered from the winter's cycle of rain, snow and sunshine. Very



Snow can take a toll on houses in the Tahoe area. Photo/Moonshine Ink

often the roof is a source of problems and summer is the absolute best time to address them rather than in the middle of winter. If you had any roof leaks, get them looked at by a good roofer. If your roof sheds water, snow and ice over your deck, entryways or onto the siding, then these are great places to install gutters to divert the water away. For gutters to be effective, you're going to need to install some form of ice melt technology such as the Bylin system which will keep ice from forming along the edge of your roof and breaking the gutters off. There is nothing worse than slipping on ice. A properly installed gutter and ice melt system can help to alleviate this.

Drainage: Water, water, water. That has been the main theme here. Water is life and water can be death to your home. Like the need to keep the ice dams in check and gutters to divert water away from your homes shell, you also need to think about the water at ground level around your property. If your home

sits on a hillside, it probably has good natural drainage keeping water away from your foundation and lower components. Many homes, however, sit on relatively flat lots and if the proper drainage system is not employed, then you could face some problems. Water and wood do not mix well and you should always be thinking of ways to keep them apart. Summer is a good time to look at the areas around the house that were always under water. A good contractor or landscaper will know what to look for.

Some other things to do now for winter: Another thing to think about this summer are things to buy now rather than wait till winter when you wished you had them. The two items that come to mind are: 1) snow blower and 2) generator.

If you wished you had a snow blower all winter, then buy one this summer when you find one cheap rather than waiting until a big storm. Did your power go out this winter? How much of a bummer was that? For less than a thousand bucks you can get a generator that can keep the lights on, Internet working, coffee maker brewing. Your neighbors will be jealous.

Do you have any other great tips to add to the Lake Tahoe summer home maintenance list? I would love to hear them.

Dan Sheehan is a Lake Tahoe general contractor. His company DS Construction stays busy repairing, maintaining and remodeling homes in and around the Tahoe City-Truckee area. You can find out more about DS Construction and read more at Sheehan's construction blog.