

Zoo's octopus chooses her name

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And the winning name is: Cora. As cameras flashed, the headliner at the Akron Zoo's Journey to the Reef exhibit, a giant Pacific octopus, chose her name Monday morning, then held it up on a long tentacle as if to punctuate her preference.

"They are the 'octorazzi,'" Pete Mohan, director of animal operations, quipped as a half-dozen cameras snapped pictures of the 20-pound, four-foot long superstar while visitors eagerly awaited her decision.

Then, as if to put an exclamation point on her choice, Cora delighted the crowd by turning a bright red after releasing the colorful ball with her new name written on the side.

Cora was displaying her amazing and instinctive camouflage skills to the crowd of onlookers, Mohan said.

"It could mean she's excited, interested or just tired of the flash," he speculated.

If she had a nose, Cora would have turned it up to Scarlet and Octavia, the two other names zoo patrons had nominated that she could have chosen.

The octopus arrived at the zoo earlier this year minus a moniker, prompting officials to hold a contest to let her choose her own. More than 2,200 names were submitted, with the list narrowed to three that seemed appropriate for her species, said David Barnhardt, director of

marketing and guest services.

The names of the people who submitted Cora as their choice were placed in a random drawing. The winner will receive an octopus prize pack and a behind-the-scenes tour of the zoo's new reef exhibit, Barnhardt said.

Cora - a derivative of the word coral, the octopus' habitat and theme of the exhibit - was quick and decisive. It took her only five minutes to unscrew the lid from a large plastic container and pull out the first of three balls containing shrimp, her favorite treat.

By human standards, the [octopus](#) is highly intelligent and capable of learning new tricks, said Mohan, who has been with the zoo for seven years.

"We taught her to do that," he said as Cora balanced the ball on one of the suction cups, displaying it for the cameras.

Well, not exactly true, Mohan admitted, but possible.

Cora got visibly excited when trainers entered her habitat before placing the jar in her tank.

"She definitely knows when someone opens the door to her exhibit. She'll reach out to touch you or try to take things out of your hand. She's very curious," Mohan said.

And she knows her way around the lid on a jar that holds special treats. Trainers challenge the zoo's animals and keep them engaged with treat-filled enrichment toys, encouraging them to find a way to extract them, Barnhardt said.

"She's so intelligent, the possibilities are endless," he said. "They have been working with her, giving her a lot of enrichment," he said of the zoo's trainers.

Even after releasing the balls, Cora held out hope the jar still might hold tiny morsels of shrimp and refused to relinquish it from her grasp. Mohan said she would let go when it no longer held her interest.

"I wouldn't attempt to remove it while she is still looking for food. She would just grab you," he said.

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