

Zoo Zoomers: Locked down Czech chimps mingle online

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Two Czech zoos have installed large screens to let their chimpanzees watch each other via Zoom, an attempt to relieve the boredom during closures enforced by coronavirus restrictions.

The video chat platform, which has become a fixture for many humans over the past year, allows apes at the Safari Park in Dvur Kralove nad Labem northeast of Prague to see their peers at a zoo in the second city of Brno some 160 kilometres (100 miles) to the south.

"We are trying to ensure some entertainment for our apes at a time when visitors cannot come to the zoo and these intelligent animals therefore lack an important entertaining stimulus," Safari Park spokesman Michal Stastny told AFP.

The Safari Park is home to one male chimpanzee and five females, who enjoy sitting in front of the large screen, munching on salad or grass.

Safari Park zoologist Gabriela Linhartova said their interest has recently started to wane, but at first they loved sitting down in a row in front of the screen with nuts and fruit in their hands.

"The similarity between them and, say, cinemagoers or us sitting in front of a TV was really quite striking," Linhartova said.

"We can see that when something is happening with the animals in Brno, when there's a conflict or they are being fed, our animals react with

increased attention," she said.

Zoo life continues

Linhartova said the apes missed visitors just like visitors missed the animals.

"Visitors are a source of entertainment, study and observation for the animals," she said, adding that it took the apes some time to figure out the chimpanzees on the screen were not really there.

"At first, the male made gestures in a bid to protect the group when the [animals](#) in Brno got close to the camera," said Linhartova.

Before making new friends in Brno, the Safari Park chimpanzees were allowed to watch children in a kindergarten.

The two enclosures are also being broadcast on YouTube daily between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

"We are trying to show that although Czech zoos have been closed for more than 170 days since the spring of 2020, there's still life in them," Stastny said.

One of the worst-hit countries, the Czech Republic has so far seen 1.5 million COVID-19 cases and more than 25,000 deaths.

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