

# Mr. Rogers at the Zoo

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by Mary Markey on June 18, 2013

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Mr. Rogers and Ambika, by Terry Arthur, July 1982 issue of *The Torch* (The Smithsonian's internal newspaper, *The Torch* is a great source for information on Smithsonian events and staff), Record Unit 371, Box 4, Smithsonian Institution Archives

Does the jovial fellow riding Ambika the elephant look familiar? It's Fred Rogers, leaving his neighborhood for a visit to the National Zoological Park in the spring of 1982. The host of the children's show *Mr. Rogers's Neighborhood* met giraffes, tigers, and lions as well as pachyderms Ambika and Shanthi; Keepers Jim Jones and Barbara Bingham were featured guests.

Despite rainy conditions, everything went smoothly until the elephant ride. According to *The Torch*:

As soon as Mr. Rogers was perched atop Ambika's back, she decided she wanted a bath and lumbered eagerly towards the pool. While zoo keepers headed her off, "little" (4,000 pound) Shanthi's curiosity was piqued by the cameraman and his fascinating equipment. As she set off to investigate, our fleet-of-foot staffers quickly foiled a farcical finale.

The episode filmed at the zoo was titled *Mr. Rogers Talks About Pets*, broadcast on June 4, 1982. You can find a synopsis at *The Neighborhood Archive*.

Shanthi and Ambika still live at the National Zoological Park, enjoying their new home, the *Elephant Trails* exhibit. Now Shanthi is up to 9,000 pounds!

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Wow. This brings back some memories. Used to watch Mr. Roger's when I was a kid.

**Se7en Soft**  
June 18, 2013 at 8:05 pm

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Rare picture thanks for sharing the picture with us..

**Smantha Webbur**  
June 19, 2013 at 7:06 am

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I love this photo! I grew up watching Mr Rogers; he was like a friend/parent on television every morning.

**Samuel Jeffery**  
June 19, 2013 at 7:24 am

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