There is a science behind embarking into the great outdoors. As humans, we check weather apps and listen to meteorologists before braving the elements. We make plans around the possibility of precipitation. We consider the ratio of sunlight to cloud cover. We evaluate wind speeds.
Our lives can revolve around so much more than the mere temperature.

The same is true for the animals at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. Zookeepers must examine several factors – from the temperature to the animals’ dispositions – before letting the zebras dart across the savanna or the tigers at the Columbus Zoo are some of the least tolerant of this continent’s climates. Consequently, like the other residents of the Zoo, these newer members have a state-of-the-art facility to enjoy when the temperatures drop.

Outside of the main viewing area, the giraffe barn is designed to accommodate not only its inhabitants’ size, but their social behaviors. Open-access compartments allow the animals to find some privacy without secluding themselves from the herd. Large groups can congregate in a community area, where the giraffes can nibble on branches or at the raised troughs. Even when it’s too cold for these weather-sensitive mammals, the giraffes can still enjoy the sunlight pouring in through the ceiling skylights, which are specifically designed to allow in the UV rays that are important for their health.

On warmer days during the fall and winter seasons, giraffe can have access to outdoor yards near the savanna. While the Columbus Zoo’s guide suggests visitors might catch these large cats pouncing on snowmen built by their keepers or using their bellies as bobsleds on the winter landscape. With the exception of high winds or other unfavorable conditions, the tigers at the Columbus Zoo have access to their outdoor habitats even during the winter.

Unsurprisingly, the species at the Zoo that can be found in the wild in North America – wolverines, moose, otters, arctic foxes, polar bears, brown bears, cougars, bobcats, beavers, reindeer, timberwolves and swans – will likely have outdoor access throughout the winter.

The barnyard animals, elephants, lions, leopards, rhinos, the African hoofstock gazelles and antelopes (including the greater kudu, dama gazelles, slender-horned gazelles and Thompson’s gazelles), flamingoes and birds at the North America aviary are the next hardiest animals at the Zoo, but cannot tolerate temperatures below 35 degrees.

On the other end of the spectrum, the koalas, Komodo dragons, cockatoos and Aldabra tortoises are some of the most sensitive to Ohio weather. These species typically move indoors when temperatures drop below 60 degrees.

Generally, the kangaroos, gibbons, lorikeets, small-clawed otters, langurs, giraffes and vervets cannot be outside in temperatures below 50 degrees. The next to move indoors are the gorillas, colobus monkeys and mandrills (their temperature range includes a low of 45 degrees); followed by the okapis and sun bears (low of 40 degrees); and the leopards, rhinos, flamingoes and the birds at the North American aviary (low of 35 degrees). The elephants and African hoofstock animals generally have to move indoors when temperatures drop below 32 degrees.

Even if they are not outside, many of these animals are still on view throughout the winter season. With the exception of the Mainland Asia Aviary (which has a heated winter shelter for the animals), most animals’ habitats include an indoor component visible to guests.

Because a species’ outdoor schedule is as unpredictable as Ohio weather, guests are encouraged to call ahead to make sure their favorite animals are on view that day.

Assuming that, after the daily weather app analysis, they are ready to venture into the outdoors themselves.