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“Our Zoo News”

and Guide.

A MONTHLY CHRONICLE OF NEWS OF
CHESTER ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS.

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Photograph by courtesy of the Chester Chronicle.

One of the lionesses at Chester Zoo enjoying the Spring Sunshine.

The North of England Zoological Society,

ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS, UPTON-BY-CHESTER.

Tel. Chester 1898.

April, 1949.

News Flashes.

Spring is here once more and life at the Zoo brightens as another season approaches. The animals, recognising that Winter is over, take an interest in their surroundings and especially in their visitors and vie with each other for popularity. The Sea-lions jump and swim up and down their spacious pool with great vigour; the Polar Bears play about in their enclosure and perform new diving stunts in the water. The lions playfully gambol around their open-air enclosure as though full of the joys of Spring.

The gardens are beginning to lose the bare look for the trees are sprouting and the spring flowers bursting into bloom.

Spring is an exciting time at the Zoo. Preparations for Easter are in full swing, and we particularly welcome the Zoo babies which appear at this time of the year. The majority of the birds here are already nesting, including our Griffon Vultures. It is most interesting to watch these enormous birds making a nest in their enclosure from twigs which are carefully picked by the male bird.

Whilst on the subject of birds we must mention that once again the crows are nesting, and this year they have taken possession of more of the tall trees. The rookery has now been one of the features of the Zoo for many years; in fact the crows are a real asset, and it is one of the most interesting sights in the very early hours of a morning following a

busy day to see hundreds of these big black birds searching the Zoo gardens for bits of food left by untidy visitors.

One of the biggest developments in the Zoo this Spring, has been the erection of seventeen new aviaries on a site which was once part of the Bison Enclosure. These aviaries contain many varieties of Parrakeets and Cockatoos and are designed especially as breeding aviaries. Eventually, we hope also to build some new Parrot Aviaries and a Tropical House. A new drive which leads to the new aviaries goes right up to the lake and branches off by the Coypu's enclosure at the lakeside. On this new drive we are hoping to lay out an attractive garden with a bridge over the old pond. Much work will be necessary before this is completed and it may be some time before the task will be accomplished, but a start will be made in the next few weeks.

We are pleased to note that another pair of Swans have arrived on the lake and we hope that this year some cygnets will be reared. It is amazing how quickly the wild swans settle down, this pair were extremely nervous when they first arrived, but after one or two weeks they started to get quite tame, and now come with the other waterfowl for food.

We have had no more experiences with the Beaver since they started to burrow their way under the Reptile House. During the last few weeks they have not been seen quite so much, and so we are hoping that there will be some young this year.

The Reptile House continues to be extremely popular and the inmates themselves are very well. The crocodile enclosure has been altered in its botanical layout and several new plants have been introduced which will add to the attractiveness of this popular enclosure. Our Chameleon always has a large number of visitors gathered around its case. The way in which it moves its eyes, upwards, downwards, backwards and sideways without moving its head, until it sees a fly which it decides will make a tasty meal, and then its slow deliberate movements to get within reach of its victim and the quick flash of its tongue which means the end of yet another fly, fascinates young and old alike and many visitors have been known to spend an hour watching this unusual reptile which looks almost pre-historic. Its perfect gauging of distance, one always thinks that it is too far away to reach its victim, the extreme contrast in the movement of the reptile itself and the movement of its tongue and its unerring judgment has an almost magnetic effect on onlookers.

Our large African Python has got another of its sulky moods and refuses to uncoil from its trap at the back of its case. This snake has not fed since December when it had a meal after a fast of over eighteen months.

Topsy, the baby chimp, is a great favourite with visitors and can keep anyone amused for hours with her antics. A pair of old stockings have been tied across part of her cage so that she can play with them, and she spends a great deal of time trying to walk along these like a tight-rope walker. She cannot quite retain her balance, but it certainly looks as though she will master this art before very long, and if she doesn't it won't be for lack of trying, for although at times she gets very annoyed and smacks the stockings as though they are to blame for her falling off, she is always ready to try again.

A rather amusing incident occurred one morning a couple of weeks ago. We have two Green Amazon Parrots who wander around the house at liberty. One is called "Laura" and the other is known as

"Laura's mate." In one of the kitchens we have a large coke boiler which is used every day, and the fire is let out at night. This particular morning was exceptionally cold; there had been a very heavy frost the previous night and it was still freezing in the morning. We went to clean out the kitchen boiler and there sitting on the ashes at the back of the bottom of the boiler were Laura and her mate! They had evidently found it a warm comfortable spot and they were not inclined to move. We, of course, were unable to light the fire until the "squatters" removed, and though we attempted to persuade them to come out we merely received rude remarks from Laura in her own special vocabulary. Eventually bribery in the shape of a piece of cake, persuaded the pair to vacate their new premises.

The majority of birds can fly, but it is not very often that one hears of birds flying in an aeroplane. This, however, will be done by some penguins which are being brought over by plane from Johannesburg for Chester Zoo. We hope that they will arrive before Easter, as they will be a great attraction for the holiday crowds.

It has been a great disappointment to us that we have not been able to complete our new Elephant House during the Winter months, but labour difficulties have made this impossible. Many of our visitors enquire after Molly, the elephant. We are pleased to say that she is very well and as soon as the weather becomes a little warmer she will be out giving rides again.

A few weeks ago a gentleman very kindly presented us with a donkey which was called "Tommy Trinder." How he came to get this name is not known, but it has no connection with the famous stage and radio star. Tommy, who has been the pet of two children, is a lovable animal and is very fond of children, and we are sure that he will be a favourite for giving rides this Summer.

Our peacocks are looking particularly lovely now, and they seem to be well aware of the fact, for they strut up and down the lawns displaying their magnificent tails, to the delight of visitors. Two of our peacocks and two guinea-fowl who are free to roam the grounds, are nearly as useful as a clock to the Zoo Staff, for exactly at four o'clock every day they can be seen waiting outside the private entrance to the house, as they know that at that time they

will be given some cake crumbs which have been saved for them by the cafe staff.

Admirers of Bambi, our pet Fallow Deer, will be pleased to know that he is as friendly as ever, and will run across his enclosure to greet any approaching visitors, and then follow them right round the enclosure in the hope that he will be rewarded by some tit-bits.



Zoo Personalities.

No. 6. RACK AND RUIN, THE POLAR BEARS.

It is quite some time since two of our most popular inmates, the Polar Bears, have been mentioned in "Our Zoo News," and as many visitors ask a lot of

questions about them, we have chosen them as this month's Zoo Personalities. On a brilliant Summer's day last July, "Nomad" came to the Zoo, and before a very large excited audience performed the "christening ceremony" of these bears. You may remember that we organized a competition for the children to choose names for the two young bears and this was won by little Anthony Wright, of Kelsall, Cheshire, and the names he chose were "Rack and Ruin."

I'm sure that anyone who was there that afternoon would find it hard to believe, if they saw Rack and Ruin to-day, that they were the same two youngsters who put on such a star turn that sunny afternoon eight months ago. Rack and Ruin were little more than overgrown cubs when they arrived at Chester Zoo from Antwerp in October, 1947 and although they had grown considerably by July, they were nothing like the size they are now. During the long Winter Months they have grown from clumsy playful cubs into enormous lumbering shaggy creatures, who look every bit as powerful and dangerous as the old travellers' tales from the Arctic make the Polar Bears out to be.

Polar Bears are found all over the Arctic regions, and are often to be found on the large ice-fields which at certain times of the year are drifting in the oceans thousands of miles away from the Frozen Seas.

Unlike most white mammals the Polar Bear does not change its white coat with the seasons, but remains white all the year round. Its mouth, and foot-pads are black, its ears very small, and its head according to the authorities, is much smaller and narrower than most of the Bear Family, nevertheless the Polar Bear remains one of the most powerful and largest of the group.

At one time the sight or even tracks of a Polar Bear struck fear into the heart of the boldest Eskimo or Indian Hunter, but now they do not hesitate to attack them. Careful study has proved that the Bears will seldom attack man unless driven by hunger, and that though a formidable foe, it can fall to the experienced hunter like the other creatures of the wild. Its white flesh is edible and makes a variation in the usual fish diet of the Northern people; the flesh of a young bear is said to be like veal, and its warm coat is also useful. Unlike most of the Bear Family, the Polar Bear does not hug its

prey but bites, and never eats its victim until it is dead; it seems to enjoy a sort of cat and mouse game with its victims, and many tales are told of hunters and travellers who have managed to escape from its horrible jaws, although the hunters of the frozen wastes have now more or less overcome their suspicion of the supernatural strength of the Polar Bear.

What do these creatures live on? Well, their natural diet is of course the seal, walrus, porpoise and other fish, and this proves that the Polar Bear must be a silent and cunning hunter; they also eat seaweed, grass, lichens and other plants to be found on the fringe of the Tundra Belts. From the Hudson Bay Territory of North America, we learn that the Polar Bear is also very fleet of foot, and instances have been known where a large Bear has overtaken and killed trappers.

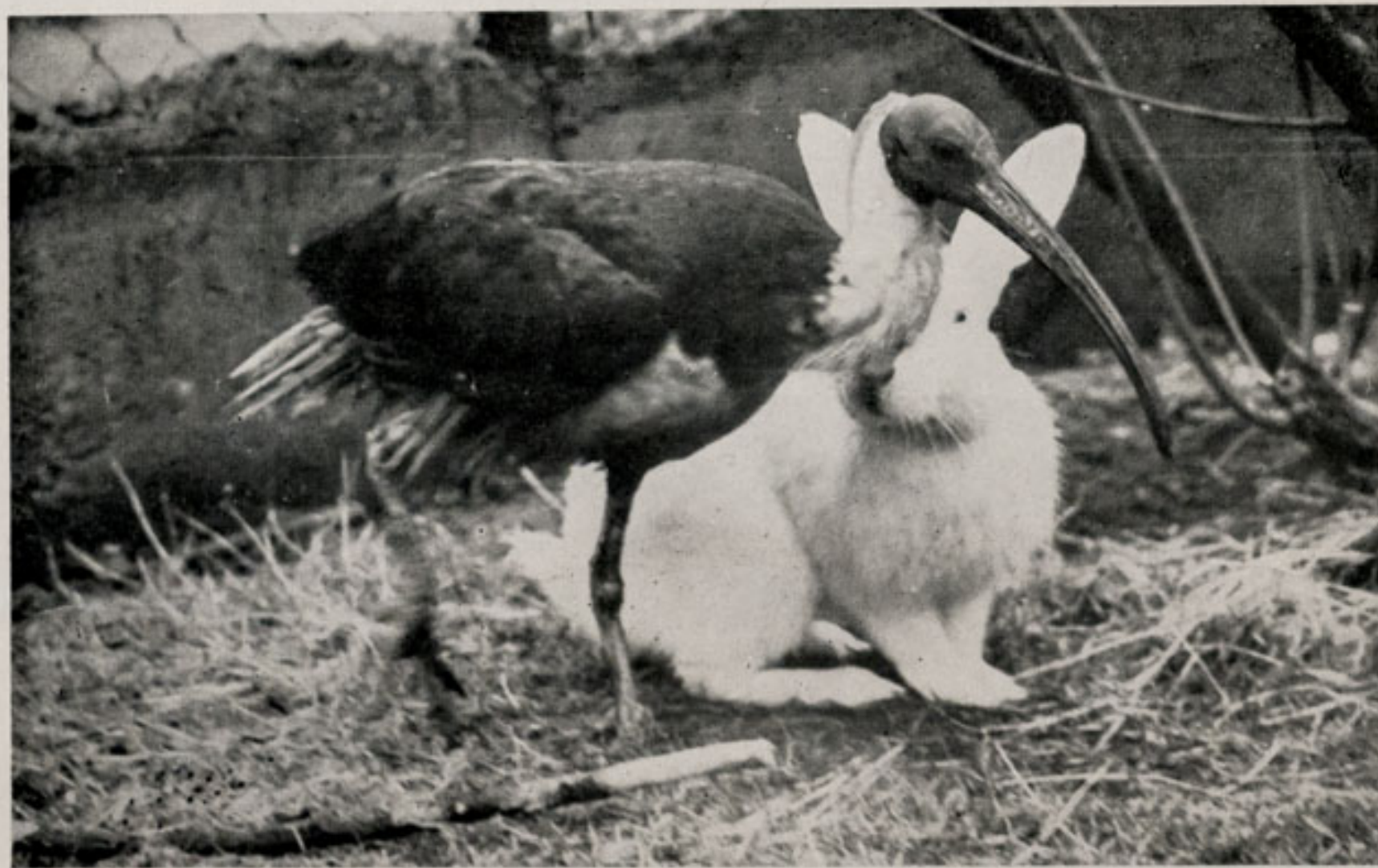
We naturally think of all Polar Bears as white, but this is not quite correct. The White Bear is the largest of its kind and strange to say the most timid, but the most dangerous and aggressive bear is the smaller type which is a dirty yellowish colour. It is generally supposed that when the Winter sets in the male bear takes the female well inland from the coast where she hibernates away in a sort of burrow in the snow; the male then returns to the coast to hunt. As soon as the Spring comes the female comes out of her snow hole bringing with her one or two cubs which she has had during the Winter months, and the family return to the coast. Very few Polar Bears are born in captivity, as man cannot provide the vast spaces of snow and ice which is their natural environment, in the Zoological Gardens which generally form their home.

Before we leave Rack and Ruin, may we add a word of warning to all visitors this Summer. You will all notice that the wall surrounding the Polar

Bear Enclosure has been built up considerably higher than it was last year. This will not affect your view of the bears, but we hope that it will be high enough to prevent people from trying to commit suicide. That sounds bad, doesn't it, but people do not seem to realize that Rack and Ruin are not two dear little pets, even if they do carry out the most amazing aquatic displays; they are two growing, powerful and exceedingly dangerous Polar Bears. Last year in spite of the large notices and appeals from the Keepers, there were people, not only children, who insisted on leaning over the side of the enclosure

and dangling handkerchieves and other tit-bits to the Bears in the water, and shrieking with delight when the Bears tried to jump to reach them. This is an exceedingly dangerous procedure and we appeal to parents not to allow their children to take these risks. If you want to see them fed, well the Keeper will be feeding them at the proper time. Rack and Ruin are not interested in handkerchieves, buns, oranges, etc., but they might take a fancy to Johnny's arm, if Johnny leans over a little bit too far, so beware!

J. Moffatt.



Photograph by courtesy of the Daily Herald.

"The best of Pals"

Our White Rabbit and Straw-necked Ibis whose friendship has caused considerable interest, and about whom we wrote in last month's Zoo News.

FEEDING TIMES.

Many visitors arrive at the Zoo armed with paper bags containing food of all descriptions for the animals. Some visitors ask whether they may feed the animals, some are harmless and just feed bread to the ducks and swans but to the annoyance of everyone quite a number of visitors dispose of the contents of their paper bags to any animal or bird they fancy, then throw in their paper bags and if they have any odd bits and pieces of things in their pockets or hand-bags for which they have no further use, dispose of these too to the animals. The result is that at the end of a busy day, the sea-lion pool, and the Polar Bear Pit are covered with dirty papers, orange peel, fruit cores, bread and numerous other objects which hold no attraction for the animals, and look thoroughly untidy and unsightly. The wisest visitors of all come without any food for the animals and watch the animals being fed by their keepers at the proper times. In the past we have lost animals

through the foolishness of some person giving them something unsuitable to eat. A pelican died because someone gave it a powder-puff which lodged in its throat and so choked the bird. We have seen visitors pass lighted cigarettes to the monkeys, and quite often these animals are given lipstick which anyone with the slightest common sense must realize is most harmful to animals. Every animal in the Zoo is well and properly fed on its correct diet and we do particularly ask visitors to keep this in mind and not to throw food to the animals unless they are sure that the food will do them no harm and that the animals will eat it, and not leave it lying round making the gardens look untidy. Official feeding times are as follows:

Lions—3 p.m.

Polar Bears—3.30 p.m.

Sea-Lions—every hour from 2.40 p.m. to 5.40 p.m.

Other animals—between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m.



Map of The Zoological Gardens, Chester

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