
"Our Zoo News"

and Guide.

A MONTHLY CHRONICLE OF NEWS OF
CHESTER ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS.

Price 3d.

Annual Subscription 4/6d. post free.

NUMBER 91.

FEBRUARY, 1949.

News Flashes.

The most attractive event since our last issue was without any doubt the arrival of Topsy, the baby chimpanzee. Topsy arrived just in time to make a welcome Christmas present. Everyone was very thrilled when a cable was received saying that Topsy would arrive at the London docks on a certain day and would we collect her.

Mr. Mottershead went to London to collect Topsy and on arriving at the London docks was taken aboard the ship which had brought the baby chimpanzee from West Africa. He was taken along to the cabin where Topsy had been during the voyage, but to the horror and consternation of everyone there was no chimpanzee there. Topsy had vanished! A search of the ship was made, everyone calling "Topsy" but there was no response to the calls. It was then decided that the police must be informed and they immediately searched the docks, still to no avail. A very disconsolate party returned to the

cabin and the man who had brought the chimpanzee to this country noticed that his coat had fallen on the floor on top of a bucket. He picked up the coat and there curled up in the bucket was the truant! She had evidently decided to have a game of hide and seek and had got into the bucket and covered herself with the coat.

Topsy came up to Chester by train and on arrival at the Zoo immediately won the hearts of everyone with her mischievous little face and she looked very lovable in a white jersey with the name "Topsy" in red across the front and with a knitted red cap on her black head.

Topsy has now quite settled down here and is a great favourite with both children and grown-ups and we are sure that she will prove one of the greatest attractions during the coming season.

Two other new arrivals at the Zoo are two poisonous snakes with the most unusual name of

"Boomslangs"—These snakes are natives of West Africa and are sometimes called Tree Snakes. They are now housed in the Reptile House; one is a dull brown and makes an excellent foil for its companion which is bright emerald green.

Our two Hornbills, the large one a Brown-cheeked Hornbill and the smaller one a Laughing Hornbill are also now on exhibition in the Reptile House as they require a tropical temperature.

Our coyotes are now quite at home in their new enclosure and seem to have overcome their shyness for they will now run up to the fence and welcome visitors.

Zoo Personalities.

No. 5. AFRICAN CIVET.

In an outdoor den next to the Vultures is a small animal which is inclined to be overlooked by visitors, as he is rather shy and does not usually make an appearance until late afternoon, spending most of the day curled up in his box. This small animal is an African Civet and he was presented to the Society in May, 1946. He is quite attractive with his grey coat which has dark streaks all over it.

This type of Civet inhabits the tropical parts of Africa. Ours was brought to this country when a baby, by a sailor who left it with his mother to be looked after. When he next came home, however, he found, instead of a little kittenish creature, an animal about three feet overall length, and decided that he would present it to the Zoo as he thought it unsuitable to keep as a pet about the house.

When alarmed the civet exudes an unpleasant odour as a protection against attack. This odour comes from the secretion of certain glands in the body and although at first extremely unpleasant gradually changes into a very sweet perfume. At one time these animals were kept in captivity for the purpose of extracting this glandular secretion for the manufacture of Civet perfumes.

THE PRAIRIE WOLF OF NORTH AMERICA.

Every Schoolboy who has read a Wild West story or seen a Western Film will have felt his scalp tingle when his cowboy hero, or ranger, was suddenly awakened in the dead of night, by a blood-curdling howl which went echoing along the silent trail and will have heaved a sigh of relief when the scene changed and revealed a lone prairie-wolf silhouetted against the moonlit sky wailing sorrowfully. It was only a coyote after all. Consequently the Coyote is one of the most familiar of the North American animals to children, because it is naturally associated with the long winding trails, hard riding cattle-men, Indians, horses, covered-waggons and guns.

Almost twelve months ago there was great excitement at Chester Zoo; a large consignment of animals had just arrived from Canada and on the list of arrivals was a pair of coyotes. The Boys and Girls who came to the Zoo during their holidays soon made friends with the busy little beaver and the shy elk, but there were no coyotes. Anxious questions were asked, and the disappointed children learnt that the coyotes were compelled to remain in quarantine for a time. However, they knew that the prairie wolf had really arrived and that next time perhaps they might be lucky enough to see them.

Those of you who visited the Zoo just before Christmas must have noticed the change that was going on in the main drive. Rowdy lorries backed, growled and skidded, disgorging huge loads of rich black soil on the side of the drive where there had once been an ever-green shrubbery, while busy gardeners were moulding and banking this soil into a high herbaceous border, and in between times laying a wide green turf margin between that and the drive.

Behind this workmen were busy enclosing a piece of wooded land with high fencing similar to that which surrounds the Lion Enclosure. Then the holiday came and there was silence and I for one forgot all about it.

One bitterly cold frosty morning in January, I was walking up to the office, when I suddenly felt even colder than before, and very uneasy. I had an idea that I was being watched, and I casually happened to glance over towards the recent scenes of activity and to my horror saw a wolf-like creature padding silently along beside me. I swallowed hard and felt my hair rising and then took another look, I stopped, and the animal was still there, only it stopped too, and stood motionless staring at me with large saucer-like amber eyes. I thought either I had not yet recovered from the holiday spirit, or else..... Then it dawned on my frozen senses, that between me and the apparent apparition was a wire fence, the new border and the green verge. The coyotes were on show at last! In spite of the reassuring fence it was a very shaken me, who climbed up the office stairs that morning, but I did not tell anyone about it, and it was not long before I heard these prairie wolves adding their queer rolling cry to that of the impatient Dingoes and yelping Huskies, who live in the same vicinity, as they scented the Keeper with their breakfast.

Apart from what I had learned from Hollywood's Wild West Films and Western Stories, and a ditty which has a verse that goes "- the coyotes wail, along the trail, Deep in the heart of Texas -" I knew absolutely nothing about the coyote, so I decided to do a little investigating.

The Prairie Wolf of North America is distinguished from the common Timber Wolf by its smaller size, much thicker and longer fur, and its foxlike bushy tail. Its colour varies with the seasons and vegetation. In summertime it is a sandy light brown and when winter sets in it has a more greyish tinge, but whichever colour is prevalent, it is always covered with blackish flecks. It almost resembles a cross between a wolf and a fox. It is found throughout North America from the Central States to the Hudson Bay Territory, and is still to be found in large numbers in the great plains of Texas and Mexico, and there we are back to the Cowboys and Indians again. From these countrymen we learn that the prairie wolf is regarded as a nuisance rather than an

enemy. Here it got its name "Coyote". These animals live singly or in pairs and are rather cowardly in the daylight, remaining for the most part in their scooped out burrows (here the fox-like tendency is evident) giving man a wide berth, but under the cover of night when the tired cattle-men want to sleep, the coyote comes out and changes his tactics, he gets brazen and will come quite close to the camp-fires and persists in howling in the most unearthly manner. They are not anything like as swift as the wolf and can readily be overtaken by a good horse. In some parts of the country the coyote is hunted in much the same way as we hunt the fox, with one difference, the hunters ride down the coyotes and shoot them.

The prairie wolf is not hard to feed and will eat almost anything, and will live quite well on berries, prickly-pears and other plants to be found in the Southern and Middle-West States if his staple diet of rabbits, rats, and young birds are not available. They do not often hunt in packs and never attack men or large animals, and if spotted in the daylight are inclined to adopt a slinking attitude, only when wounded and brought to bay do we find them displaying any of the wolf-like savagery, then they defend themselves fiercely. The cubs are born in the early Summer, usually five or six at a time.

If there is no one about the grounds our coyotes are to be seen running incessantly round their enclosure, or stalking one another between the trees happily, but the moment someone starts to walk up the drive parallel with their enclosure, they are right there beside you. At first if anyone approached them directly they fled, but now they are becoming quite docile and gentle and will stand quite near the fence to be admired. We hope that when the season starts they will make friends with the children as the other strangers from Canada have done, and become equally as popular.

J. Moffatt

Map of The Zoological Gardens, Chester

