
“Our Zoo News”

and Guide.

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Fallow Deer at Chester Zoo.

The North of England Zoological Society,

ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS, UPTON-BY-CHESTER.

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Our Zoo News.

We must sincerely apologise to our readers for being so long in issuing another Zoo News, the trouble being that this magazine is dependent on a small circle of Zoo Staff to compile it whose labours have been fully occupied in carrying out the numerous duties which are necessary in running a Zoo.

We are pleased to say that so far, 1952 has been a very successful year, although we have not completed some of the jobs undertaken last year—principally the new Giraffe House. However, many improvements have been and are being made and we feel sure that visitors to the Gardens will notice the changes which have taken place for their benefit.

With the rapid increase in the number of visitors to the Zoo, our catering facilities became hopelessly out of date, so this year to rectify this, a considerable amount of new equipment has been installed in order that better meals can be served to the public—we can now supply hot meals in addition to the snacks and salads, which had been the main feature in our catering.

Work is now proceeding rapidly with the Giraffe House and every effort is being made to complete this within the next few weeks so that we can bring our Giraffes from London.

There have been a number of additions to our Collection during the last few months. A consignment from Ceylon which arrived dur-

ing the Whitsun holiday consisted of the following:

2 Spotbilled Pelicans, 2 Greater Egrets, 6 Starred Tortoises, 1 Water Monitor and several birds of the Parrot family.

In the early part of the year we received an African Clawless Otter. This had been hand reared and has been kept for the first part of its life in the Monkey House where it is warm. We are now taking steps to place it in one of the open pools, but of course, provisions will have to be made to ensure that it cannot escape.

There have been a few minor additions in the Monkey family. This section of the Zoo is rather crowded at the moment and we are very short of accommodation for these animals. Our eight Chimpanzees are growing so rapidly that it will soon be a matter of great urgency to provide an Ape House for them. When the present Monkey House was constructed it was not intended to accommodate full grown Apes, and unless we take steps to provide stronger quarters for them we will almost certainly witness the Chimps. breaking up their home. Their Keeper has constantly to provide them with cardboard boxes, etc., to keep their minds occupied and so divert their attention from destruction—consequently their cages often look a very sorry sight. However, we consider this much better than letting the Chimps. cause material damage.

A number of Wallabies have been born this year and all these animals were transferred back to their old enclosure in the spring. There was one in particular popularly known as

"Benjy" who refused to be confined ever since he could run about. He always managed to get out of and into his enclosure, and caused much excitement at times by appearing a long way away from the Zoo, to the consternation of the people who saw him. Several weeks ago an alarm was received at the Zoo in the small hours of the morning from the driver of a motor car, that a Kangaroo had been seen on the Warrington Road, about two or three miles from the Zoo. At the time we wondered whether the driver was returning home from a very successful evening but later on we received a confirmation from another source. However, nothing could be done until daylight came and when we went round the Zoo for our early morning inspection Benjy was back again in the enclosure with his companions. Benjy's roaming, we are sorry to say, has come to a sudden end. Recently we were called up by the Police to say that he had been run over by a car between two and three o'clock in the morning about a mile from the Zoo. It was a sad ending of the life of a Wallaby who had characteristics of his own, and insisted on having his freedom. Even to this day, we have not discovered how he obtained his freedom—but somehow he did.

The season opened with glorious weather at Easter, but on the Monday approximately 15,000 people had passed through the entrances by three o'clock and at least as many more were outside queueing to come in. At this point the sky became cloudy and it suddenly went so dark that it almost looked like night. Then the storm burst—the thousands inside the Zoo, realising that there was insufficient cover in the Zoo, clamoured to get out, while the thousands outside thought there would be shelter inside and clamoured to get in, with the result that many yards of fencing were broken down, and for a time there was a stampede. That day, thousands of people were saturated to the skin but we learned a lesson from this

occurrence and have now installed four more entrances so that people can pass into the Zoo more quickly. Wider exits have also been provided for people to get out of the Zoo more rapidly. A different system of organising queues and parking of vehicular traffic has also been installed and although at Whitsun our gate was not as heavy as at Easter it was obvious that the steps we had taken had solved the problem and made it possible for us to deal with many thousands without any inconvenience.

Life at the Zoo is never dull. There are always some unexpected happenings taking place. Recently when a Keeper went into the Reptile House in the morning, he discovered that a large box containing a twelve foot long African Python which had been left there for the night, prior to being transferred to another apartment in the Reptile House, had escaped. On looking round, a small portion of the Python's tail was observed protruding from a drain pipe, but this promptly disappeared. Work was commenced at once to extricate the Python—a length of floor in the Reptile House and a certain amount of the drain pipe outside had to be excavated. Inside this four inch drain pipe was the Python, by this time completely stuck. After a little while he was released and taken back into the Reptile House, none the worse for his escapade.

To cope with the ever increasing number of visitors to the Zoo, a Cafeteria has been built behind the Zoo Shop, where visitors can obtain quick snacks, fish and chips, etc. Immediately outside the new Cafeteria is a Tea Gardens in the making, which we feel sure will be extremely popular in nice weather. Another convenience which has been installed for the public is a small cafe on the bridge over the lake. Here ice-creams, cups of tea and light snacks can be obtained. We trust that the

extra catering facilities will be of benefit to our visitors—we do ask all Patrons, particularly those who bring their own food, to assist us in keeping the Zoological Gardens tidy.

A very attractive exhibit is a little female Llama which arrived from Dublin recently. We have obtained this as a companion for our male Llama but at the present time the female is too young to be allowed to join him, and is kept in the Zebra House.

As the work on the Giraffe House nears completion we will continue with the construction of new paddocks for our Bison, and similar animals. This range of paddocks will have to be fairly extensive as our stock of animals, both at the Zoo and waiting to be dispatched, is now getting fairly large—by next spring we are hoping we will have a very nice range of these paddocks completed.

We would like to draw particular attention to our Cheetahs, which have completed the whole of last winter out of doors without any heat whatsoever and these animals are looking in really first class condition. They are extremely agile and appear to be thoroughly enjoying life. This may be due to the fact that their large enclosure must resemble to them a natural home in many ways because ignorant visitors frequently throw bread and biscuits in to these carnivorous animals who, of course, are not in the least interested. The result is that many of the crows and jackdaws, which are very numerous at the Zoo, fly down into the enclosure to retrieve the food. The Cheetah makes a lightning dash and catches his own prey. Unfortunately the diet of these animals does not consist entirely of the meat we give them, jackdaws and crows, occasionally pheasants and guinea fowl, fly down into the enclosure from the trees—only to come to a very sudden end. It is probably this natural element

which accounts for their extraordinary fine condition. We only have one regret—there are two males and only one female—but as I have not heard yet of any Cheetahs being bred in captivity this does not seem to matter. Nevertheless we cannot be blamed for hoping that some day the Cheetah will acclimatise himself and that we may have the pleasure of seeing young Cheetahs.

Many visitors have remarked that we have not as many Lions in our enclosure as we used to have. At one time we have had as many as nine or ten lions in the enclosure at a time. This is for a specific reason as lions in this country to-day have become very in-bred. We have decided to obtain new stock of forest-bred lions only and already young cubs have been secured for us. It will probably be another year or so before they will be introduced to the enclosure as a regular exhibit. These cubs, as and when they arrive, will have to be in quarantine for six months which will carry us into the winter but if all goes well we are hoping to be able to allow them to run out periodically into the enclosure. When they are approaching maturity we will dispose of our remaining old stock which by then, will be getting on in years.

We have not as yet introduced Satan, our Sumatra Tiger, to Sheika, our Tigress. Before we can do this we shall have to do a lot of transferring and there is already so much to do that this has had to take a back place. Satan however has now become more reconciled to people seeing him and can be seen on most fine days. Sheika still enjoys her enclosure and shows no signs of the viciousness which she exhibited when we first purchased her, three years ago.

The Serval which arrived at the Zoo last year, and has now completed its quarantine, has been put into the public quarantine cage at the side of the Leopards. All these cages are now full and make a very attractive show when all the animals are out.



A Fine Lion in the Open Enclosure.

We are very pleased to say that the Axis Deer which was born last year thrived very well and is now as large as its parents. Unfortunately the female had her young early this year and it was dead when it was discovered.

During the early part of this year there have been many Soya and Mouflon sheep born and we have noticed one or two Fallow Deer, which unfortunately are being bred from the dark strain, which to our mind is not nearly so beautiful as the light spotted ones. This strain was actually introduced through a male which we cannot identify. Both males were of the light variety, beautifully marked, but one of them apparently has a dark strain in his blood and we do not know which it is. However, it makes a comparison and as far as a lot of visitors are concerned it does not make much difference to them.

As in 1951 the cold spring had an adverse affect upon the breeding birds in the aviaries. It is too soon as yet to give any full results but quite a few young have been hatched. At the time of writing these notes we think there are young once again in the Leadbeater's nest but so far we have refrained from investigating the number. The Ringnecked Lutinos succeeded in hatching a brood which unfortunately all died during a very cold spell. Many varieties of birds have been interested in nesting operations and we hope in a latter edition to give the results of these.

The two Greater Egrets, previously mentioned, have been placed in the large Macaw aviary where we hope they will settle down and be an attraction. Once again we see several cygnets in the Gardens. One swan is proudly displaying seven very nice specimens. The Egyptian Geese by now have become established liberty birds, and fly about the countryside with the Zoo as their headquarters.

Since our last issue we were compelled to increase the entrance charges to the Zoo from 1/- for adults and 6d. for children under 12 years to 1/6d. for adults and 9d. for children under 14 years. This was necessary because of the ever increasing cost of both labour and feeding stuffs, and we are very happy to report that this has made not the slightest effect as regards the attendances at the Zoo. During the first half of the year there has been a very substantial increase over the corresponding period last year. The party concession rates have been re-introduced—for parties of 25 and over the admission charge is 1/- for adults and 6d. for children under 14 years. There are no concession rates on Sundays or Bank Holidays.

Skinks.

Lizards have always been a source of great interest to me, and whether kept for the purpose of study or display, or just as pets; their startling colours, their beauty and agility have a great appeal.

Lizards belong to the class Reptilia, and although reptiles generally are thought of as a decadent group, this does not apply so distinctly to lizards, for they are members of a very ancient order. It is estimated that there are 3,000 species and sub-species of lizard, divided up into approximately 300 genera, which in turn are grouped into twenty families.

One of these families, the Scincidae, contains the various forms of Skink, which are one of the connecting links between the typical forms of lizard and the sub-order Serpentes (which contains the snakes) and are therefore a very interesting group to study. They represent a transitional stage, in which the limbs are undergoing a process of abortion, and almost every gradation from the fully limbed lizard to a limbless burrower can be found.

The Australian Blue-tongued Skink (*Tiliqua scincoides*) is roughly half-way along this line

of evolution. This genus, known as the Blue-tongued Lizard, is only found in Australia, with the exception of the species *T. gigas*, which occurs in New Guinea, the Moluccas and Java, and the lizards appear as sluggish, long-bodied, thick-tailed reptiles with relatively small limbs. They live upon the ground, frequenting dry rocky areas, and their clumsy movements make possible their easy capture. When handled, these creatures constantly protrude their blue tongues and inflate their lungs to capacity, thereby increasing their body size almost two-fold; then suddenly they will deflate their lungs with a loud hiss, and many an inexperienced captor will be startled into dropping them. However, they are quite harmless creatures, and are really very friendly. The fat man who has to be congenial because he can neither run nor fight has nothing on these charming little fellows, for they soon give up their half-hearted struggles, and will take food quite contentedly while being held in the hand.

In the past I have possessed a varied and extensive collection of all forms of reptiles and amphibians, but I think my Blue-tongued Skink, took pride of place among them all. He was given to me when just two weeks old. His length then was just a little over four inches, he had a stupid little curled tail and a head far too big for his tiny body. I came home with him most proudly, and we christened him "Digger". But Digger just did not seem to want any part of this life, and for the first ten days after his homecoming I had to force feed him with raw egg beaten up with milk and glucose. This treatment seemed to keep him fit, but he still declined to feed himself, so I then decided to put him into the tiniest cage I had, a converted aquarium measuring approximately 10 ins. by 5 ins. by 5 ins. This I heated to around 80 deg. by hanging an electric light bulb into it through the roof. I then placed a handful of mealworms in the cage, and although these quickly disappeared beneath the half-inch of floor covering, they were sufficiently numerous to be continually re-appear-

ing in every direction, and I hoped would entice Digger to become a little self-supporting. I continued my force feeding methods, adding to the recipe a little very finely grated beef. This, incidentally, I found very difficult to prepare in a sufficiently homogenised form to mix easily with the milk. I also left a few tiny pieces of beef soaking in a container of milk in the cage, and one evening my efforts were rewarded, for I found Digger tucking into everything he could find edible. Soon after this he sloughed his skin for the first time, and I really knew then that he was going to thrive. He has never looked back since, and at the time of writing is almost sixteen inches long and one year old, and a really fine looking creature, strikingly marked in simple colours. These lizards grow to within an inch of two feet in length, so that Digger after his first year has only another seven inches to go.

As implied by the name, the tongue is characteristic of the species. It is large and broad, and a distinct grey-blue in colour, making a most attractive addition to the general appearance of its owner.

These lizards are viviparous (live-bearing) in habit, and broods of between 10 to 15 are usually recorded. In the wild state they feed upon *Persoonia* and other berries, leaves and insects, fruits and a certain amount of carrion. In captivity they feed quite freely on a varied diet, or at least Digger has taken raw beef, raw liver, banana, mealworms, gentles and blue-bottle chrysalids, milk and water, newly born mice, and of late he has developed a taste for chopped herring and garden snails. In view of our present meat shortage, this fish and snail diet is to be highly commended.

Another extremely good doer in the vivarium is the striking but most peculiar Stump-tailed Skink (*Trachysaurus rugosa*). It is quite common in Australia, and has gathered a host of nicknames, Sleeping Lizard, Bobby, Shingle-back just being a few of them. It has a rather ugly appearance, with its large head, thick body and stumpy tail not exceeding 2½

ins. in a total length of 1 ft. 1 in. It is covered with cone-like scales, and is a very sluggish creature whose interest to me lies chiefly in the fact that it is one of the few lizards that breed freely in confinement. Two young are produced at a birth, and their size is almost half that of the mother.

But the Skink family is by no means restricted to such slow-moving creatures as the Blue-tongue or the Stump Tail. Many of the species, such as the Copper-tailed Skink (*Hinulia taeniolata*), the Sahara Skink (*Scincus officinalis*), the Oases Skink (*Chalcides ocellatus*) or the Italian Skink (*Chalcides tridactylus*) are very swift in movement and elegant in appearance.

All these lizards are perfectly harmless, that is to say, non-poisonous, in fact, the only venomous lizard in the world belongs to the family Helodermidæ. Only one genus belongs to this family, and two species are represented, *H. horridum*, occurring along the West coast of Mexico, and *H. suspectur*, found in the

South-Western United States and Panama. They are known as the Arizona and the Mexican Gila Monsters. There was thought to be a third species in Borneo, but the teeth of this Bornean earless lizard (*Lanthanotus borneensis*) show no trace of grooves, and it is now believed to be non-poisonous. For what purpose the Gila monsters ever came to possess these poison glands is hard to explain, for these extraordinary lizards are most sluggish in habit and certainly never actively hunt their prey. They are known to eat small lizards, which they no doubt take when in striking distance, for they are capable of snapping with great speed, occasional snakes and beetles, but in captivity thrive upon hen eggs and in fact will not take any other form of diet. The glands which secrete the poison are situated in the lower jaw, whereas the venom of snakes is contained in poison sacs in the roof of the mouth. The venom is neurotoxic in action, and is said to be equivalent in deadliness to that of a rattlesnake.

E. PITMAN.



Polar Bear plays with a tyre.