
“Our Zoo News”

and Guide.

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CHESTER ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS.

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At this time of the year we receive numerous telephone calls asking whether we are open during the late Autumn and Winter. The Zoo is never closed throughout the year, and we are open every day, including Sundays and all Bank Holidays from 10 a.m. in the morning until dusk at night. Some people seem surprised that we do not close during this period of the year, but those of you who have visited here recently will agree that the gardens have a beauty and a sense of tranquillity which is only found during this season of Autumn. Although in the Summer the flower beds are unrivalled for colour, they have had their day and the trees are every bit as beautiful and colourful now as the flowers were during the Summer.

The animals too, look extremely well as they are getting their new warm coats for the Winter, and if you will read the following article you will see how Autumn here appeals to one of the Zoo Staff.

AUTUMN AT THE ZOO.

September and October have come and gone, and though they brought with them some of the warm sunny days that August seemed to have forgotten, Autumn has now closed in steadily, and has made her presence felt at the Zoo. The swallows have lined up row upon row on the telephone lines and flown away to warmer climes, but occasionally from the office window we can see a prettily coloured tomtit chirruping merrily on one of the lines which passes close to the window.

The grounds are strangely silent, the children whose gay excited laughter and incessant chatter, echoed through the Zoo all the time during the months of July, August and early September have gone, for another term has begun, and only at week-ends are the happy little faces to be seen excitedly peering in at the pay-box window, waiting for the older members of the party to arrive to take them in.

The green lawns and tidy paths, are carpeted with green, red, brown and golden tinted leaves, which make a mysterious rustling sound as the visitors start on their way round the Zoo. Early each morning, the gardeners arrive armed with brooms and wheelbarrows to sweep away the carpet of thousands and thousands of multi-coloured leaves before the first visitors arrive. While the gardeners work the many magpies, young rooks and blackbirds, which live in the Zoo's many stately trees watch and wait, hoping that the brooms will reveal a hitherto hidden worm or grub. No sooner is the last leaf swept away, than the merry Autumn artist, for that is how I always think of Autumn, begins to laugh, and the wind as if influenced by fairy magic starts the tree branches dancing and down come the leaves from the splendid chestnut trees which line the walks, slowly at first and then faster than the gardeners can cope with, and as the first visitors begin to arrive down come the "conkers", the small boys' delight. Father and Mother and the younger children, even the most sedate gentlemen and stately ladies, can be seen stooping to pick up the little brown marble-like balls to take home for the boy at school.

The old oak trees not to be outdone, start to dance and down come the leaves, the fairy cups and saucers, and away roll the acorns.

Mother immediately thinks of the pet rabbit at home whose meals she is supposed to find since the young owners, now back at school, no longer have time to go foraging, and down she goes again in search of acorns. Alas, the gardeners mop their brows and grimace at the trees, but after all, there is something very beautiful about falling leaves, hearing them rustle underfoot, looking for things, even if the pine needles do catch in your stockings, and stray leaves lodge in your hair. The border beds which all the Summer have been a blaze of colour are now finished, and the Autumn artist tries hard to make up for the missing rainbow colours with her rich golden browns and reds.

How does Autumn affect the animals? Well, let us go and see a few of them. The Malayan Sun

Bears don't seem to mind at all; they still climb their tree and redouble their efforts to impress their visitors now that the audience is not so big, because the tit-bits are not as easily won, now that so many of their friends have gone. Every now and then you will see Teeny, who spends quite a lot of time up the tree, with her front paws stretching beseechingly upwards. What does she want? Why is she always watching and waiting? The answer is "snow"! Snow.....Sun Bears, it seems fantastic, but there it is. The cold Autumn winds and rain mean that Winter is approaching and strange though it is the little Malayan Sun Bears love the snow, and all attempts to get them to remain in their heated dens during the coldest weather fails. Then we have the Dingoes; they don't seem to mind the weather at all, but then in Australia, their native land, they are as used to the bitter winds and torrential rain as they are to the blazing sun. The Huskies seem to be getting their thick arctic Winter coats, and play unconcernedly, except that when an occasional leaf dances across their enclosure, they give chase and usually end up in a hopeless tangle of legs.

The lions in their well-wooded enclosure, brave the wind and rain nobly and still manage their afternoon siesta when the sun comes out, though falling leaves cause them some annoyance. The Puma, who has a roof over his head, lies all day across his log, dreaming maybe of his early days in Canada, and if he could talk he would probably say that we did not know what a real Autumn day was like.

The monkeys don't seem to have given the departing Summer a thought, they have worries enough of their own without bothering about the weather, with the exception of the little brown Capuchin who has never experienced an English Winter before, and he seems to realize that something is going on and he does not like it. He prefers to stay in his inner heated cage and does not come out very often to play.

Molly, the Elephant, does not think much of Autumn; she has seen it before and can be heard on a cold morning trumpeting her disapproval. To her Autumn

means that she can no longer come out every day and give her little friends rides, for the cold weather affects her, and she is only to be seen when the sun is out; soon she will be confined altogether to her warm stable. Very nice too, you think, fancy no work to do, but Molly is not lazy and she loves her work, but even she, great as she is, cannot command the weather.

Many of our parrots and birds up to now have not said much and enjoy a spot of rain; you can see the big Macaws any day when there is a shower, sitting out in their aviaries, with their wings outstretched, getting a really good bath, and they spend hours afterwards preening their feathers. As the short days begin to close in though they are very glad to come into the warm house at night.

The Wallaby does not seem concerned with the change in the seasons, but his companion the Ostrich certainly does. The poor bird dashes up and down the enclosure, puffing out and ruffling his feathers, trying hard to convince himself that his coat is thick enough, his ungainly muscular legs beating out a steady military tattoo. He spends most of the day in this fashion, eye-ing the workmen working on his new house suspiciously and in a somewhat anxious manner, in case they should not get it ready before the Winter really sets in.

Trotsky, the Brown Bear, sits unperturbed on top of his hillock in the Bear enclosure, his thick brown shaggy coat protects him from the wind and the rain, although when the rain comes he prefers to stay inside his den. The Autumn sunshine attracts him, however, and he can be seen sitting up with his arms outstretched looking like an old armchair. Trotsky's companions, Won Lung and Paddy, the Himalayan Bears have thick warm coats for the cold weather, but although they can be seen on a pleasant Autumn day, they intensely dislike the Winter and spend most of the Winter days in their dens.

Rack and Ruin don't seem to mind what happens so long as they can play in their pool and get plenty of fish, but we shall have to see how they react to really cold weather, as our last two Polar Bears, Punch and Judy, dreaded the Winter and used to snuggle up in their dens, and it took a good meal of fish to entice them out, and as for a morning swim, they just could not face the cold water.

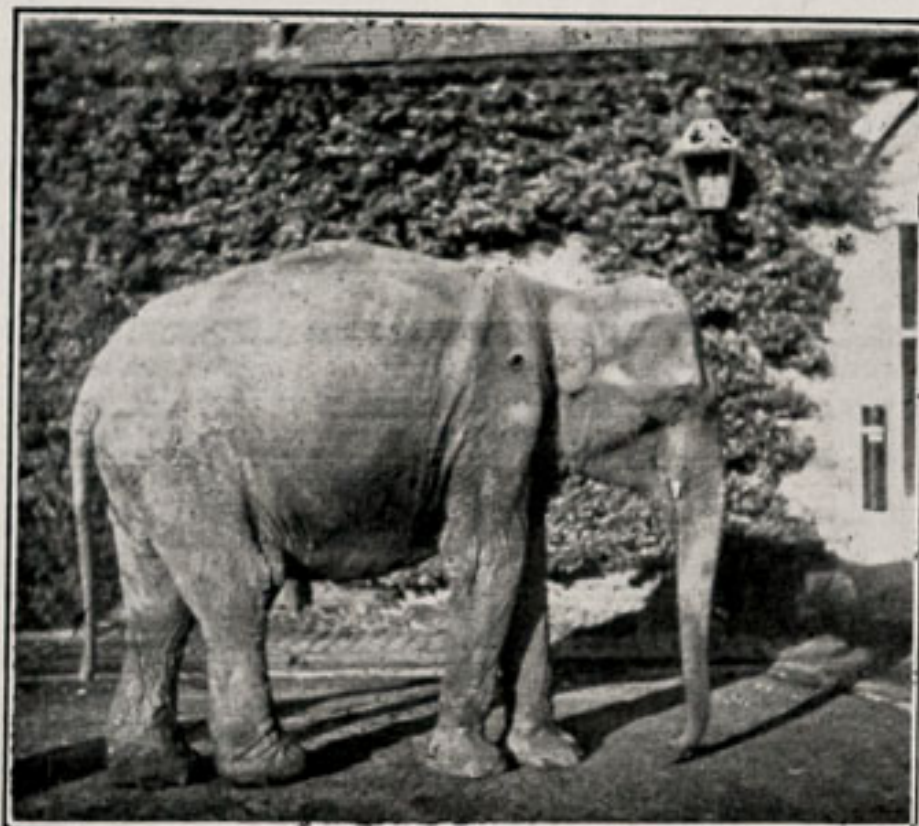
At the first tinge of frost the other day, our Zebras set their little feet firmly in their warm straw bed, put back their tiny black ears, and behaved in the most ungentlemanlike way. They did not want to go out, and there was quite a tussle. However as soon as the morning sun had got to work on the white-tipped field, and they realized that their stable companions, the Wapiti, were enjoying the best of the grass, they came out somewhat reluctantly.

The Bison never say or do anything except move slowly across their miniature range eating, but their coats are warm, and they should not mind the coming Winter.

The Deer family at this time of the year come in for as much admiration as was given to the more spectacular animals during the Summer, for the Fallow Deer and Wapiti are looking at their best during the months of October and November. The stags strut about like victorious warriors, their noble, massive antlers now stripped of their protecting velvet, are dangerous weapons, and their coats glisten like smooth silk in the sunshine. They begin to collect their hinds; they have been timid all through the year, but now they are like tyrants, brave, jealous, quarrelsome, resenting the presence of both man and beast.

Do come and see them, you won't regret it; a stag during its mating season is one of the most beautiful creatures in the world.

J. Moffatt.



Molly, the Elephant

Zoo Personalities.

No. 2. MOLLY, THE ELEPHANT.

One of the most popular animals at the Zoo is Molly, the elephant. She is perhaps the favourite of all the animals with the children, who love to have a ride on her back.

Molly was born in Ceylon, and before the war she travelled around with a Theatrical Revue. When the war came, however, Molly found herself out of work, and finding a new job is not very easy when one is an elephant. She was offered by her owner to the Government for work in the forests, but the Forestry Commission were unable to accept her as their rules made no provision for the employment of elephants. The story got into the press together with a report that unless some accommodation was offered, Molly might have to be destroyed.

Several children and animal lovers, reading of Molly's plight, wrote to Chester Zoo asking us to

give Molly a home, so we contacted her Theatrical Agent and it was agreed that Molly should come to Chester for the duration, but when the war ended we purchased her from her owner.

When Molly came to the Zoo she was only about six feet high. She has grown a great deal and now stands over eight feet.

During the Summer months Molly gives rides to both children and adults, every day except Friday which is her day off, but in the Winter it is too cold for her to come out, and she has to stay in her stable. She is not nearly so happy during the Winter as she misses her human friends very much, and she probably looks forward to the Spring and warmer weather more than any other animal at the Zoo. However, as many of you know, we have commenced to build a new Elephant House out of war-time scrap materials and we are making every effort to complete this before the end of the year so that Molly can be installed in her new home and see her friends throughout the Winter.

THOSE WISE OLD OWLS.

Amongst the birds at Chester Zoo are several different types of Owls, and we feel that we could do far worse than devote a short article on these most interesting birds.

The owl is perhaps the most easily distinguished of all birds. Its eyes, which for beauty are unrivalled in any other bird are always staring ahead, and around each eye is a circular disc of radiating feathers which tend to make the eyes more prominent than ever. The flat, perpetually solemn face with its wise expression is known and instantly recognised by young and old alike.

There are probably few people who realize that there are about two hundred species of owls, and they are found in many different parts of the world. Nearly all of them are nocturnal in their habits.

Owls subsist on living prey, and as they are usually only active at night it is very difficult for them to detect their prey without approaching it closely, and to enable them to do this unobserved, they have very soft and fluffy plumage which allows them to make a silent flight. No doubt it is due to this ghost-like flight, their large glaring eyes and the very eerie screeches which they make, that the owls are not appreciated as they might be, for everyone will agree that the sound of an owl on a dark stormy night can

be quite terrifying. Owls feed chiefly on rats, mice, frogs and insects. Anything which an owl cannot digest, such as bones, fur, hair, feathers, etc., are formed into pellets in the stomach and disgorged.

Here at the Zoo we have several species, and without any doubt the most beautiful are two Great Horned Owls, or Eagle Owls, as they are sometimes called. These are both very large, one grey and one tawny, and they came from Canada.

Another very beautiful specimen is an Eagle Owl from West Africa, which has really magnificent brown eyes. Also from West Africa we have a Wood Owl, which is very similar to the English Tawny Owl, of which we have two.

Perhaps the owls which appeal most to visitors are the two Little Owls, as so many people think that these are just babies. Both these Little Owls were captured in England. Strangely enough, this species is more unpopular than any other owl found in England, mainly because it shows a distinct partiality to young partridges and is probably far cleverer than man in picking up these delicacies!

Next time you visit here do spend a few minutes of your time studying the owls—it won't be wasted and you may learn a lot from them for there's a lot of truth in the saying:

"A wise old owl sat in an oak,
The more he say the less he spoke,
The less he spoke the more he heard,
Why can't we be like that wise bird".





Trotsky soon after his arrival at Chester Zoo

TROTSKY.

Ten years ago, before the shadows of the second Great War had begun to gather over us, Lewis's Stores at Liverpool had in their Children's Corner the most lovable teddy-bear; but there was something special about this bear for he was not stuffed but was a real live bear, a rolling brown ball of mischief and a great friend of the many children who passed through the store.

However, just as the boys and girls who played happily with this lovable teddy-bear were growing up into men and women, the little cub was growing too, and although he seemed to thoroughly enjoy his life at the store, it was not long before his owners thought it would be safer to part with him, and so Trotsky came to Chester Zoo.

That was in 1938, and to look at then, Trotsky was the sweetest little bear imaginable with a thick

reddy-brown coat, and a tiny black nose. Small though he was he must have already had quite an adventurous life, and I often wonder what he would be able to tell us if only he could talk. The cub was a member of the European Brown Bear family, huge lumbering beasts which look rather like the American Grizzly Bear and which are found in the cold arctic lands of Russia, the lonely Pyrenees and parts of Germany and Scandinavia. In these districts the Brown Bears live in pairs, feeding on fish, root and insects, occasionally killing sheep and cattle, but it is quite a common thing to see them grazing close to flocks of sheep or goats. The Brown Bear is not as bold and ferocious as the American Grizzly Bear, and does not attack human beings unless wounded and brought to bay with the hunter, then of course they are dangerous, as their strength lies in their powerful forepaws and terrible claws. I should not think for one moment that a mother bear could be persuaded to readily give up her youngster

though, and I sometimes wonder what did happen to Trotsky's mother.

The Brown Bear was many centuries ago to be found in England, and many old prints and tales depict the traveller and his dancing bear, and up to the reign of Queen Anne, the noblemen of England like those of the various continental courts, kept their bears for the so-called Bear-baiting sport.

Trotsky settled down to life in a Zoo very well, and for a while was placed in an enclosure which enabled his many young friends still to fondle him. Then the war came, and the Zoo started an "Adoption" scheme, whereby it was possible to adopt an animal in the Zoo and pay so much a week for its upkeep. Needless to say "Trotsky" was one of the first to be adopted. The war dragged on, and Trotsky's early companions grew up and many of them served in His Majesty's Services; Trotsky grew and grew, and the tiny children who came to the Zoo no longer found a little brown teddy-bear which they could pat and fondle, but watched with awe from a safe distance a huge clumsy but rather friendly creature who still played around with himself and anything else that he could lay his powerful paws on. He was clever too, and soon learnt to amuse the young visitors, and the many strangers in uniform who passed through the Zoo, and became an old hand at knowing just what the visitors wanted, because he knew that it meant an apple and sometimes if there were any American soldiers in the audience, nice sweet candy, for the English children had little enough sweets to spare out of their ration, but they always managed to bring something tasty, and Trotsky always secured quite a large share of the "goody-bag".

By the time 1945 dawned, the Zoo had built a large new Bear Enclosure with large spacious traps and dens, a green hilly playground and bathing pool surrounded by a moat and high wall. Here Trotsky made his home with a pair of Himalayan Bears; there were a few quarrels at first as up to this time Trotsky had only lived with Won Lung, the female Himalayan Bear, and Paddy, the male, was a new-

comer whose intrusion was definitely resented by Trotsky. Paddy, however, soon found that there would be peace only if Trotsky were allowed to be master in his spacious domain and decided to let him have his own way. Once in a while Paddy gets fed up with it all and there is a quarrel, but he is not as heavily built as Trotsky, and as he gets no help from his wife, usually ends up in the moat with a couple of nasty scratches. He sulks for a day or two and keeps clear of Trotsky and then there is peace in the camp once more.

Trotsky does not consider that he asks for much; he just likes to be able to lie full length across the highest peak in his enclosure or to sit up on his hind legs on the same hillock with a piece of stick in the corner of his mouth like a pipe, and his great paws outstretched looking for all the world like an old man. This little display he knows always goes down well with the Visitors and secures some tasty tit-bits.

The Polar Bears reside next door and whenever it is feeding time, the bears can smell the fish, and both Trotsky and the Himalayan Bears are fond of fish. Trotsky comes galloping down his hillock to the wall which divides the two bear enclosures, and Won Lung puts her head over the wall and looks appealingly at the Keeper who sometimes throws her a herring or two. Trotsky does not mind her getting one, but if the Keeper decides to give Paddy one too he has to serve Trotsky first, or else Well after all Trotsky has been here a long time and Paddy only arrived in 1945, and though Trotsky is prepared to give and take, he considers that serving Paddy first is a gross insult.

So if you visit the Bear Pit and happen to see Paddy ploughing his way out of the moat, don't let Trotsky hear you sympathising, he would be most hurt, but he will be there waiting for you, sitting bolt upright on his hilly throne, a grand old man, quite friendly so long as you take care to give him all your attention.

Map of The Zoological Gardens, Chester

