

"Our Zoo News"

● A BI-MONTHLY CHRONICLE OF NEWS OF ●
CHESTER ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS

NUMBER 117.

JULY—AUGUST, 1954.



"Our pair of Lesser Pandas photographed before being released into their large open-air enclosure".

PRICE SIXPENCE

Annual Subscription 4/6 post free

The North of England Zoological Society, ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS, UPTON-BY-CHESTER.

Tel. Chester 20106/7.

Our Zoo News.

Chester Zoo has now reached such proportions that it is impossible for one person who is actively engaged in the administration to have much time to write our Zoo News, as was the habit in the early days. However for a period it has been a very great struggle to publish this little journal regularly, but we now feel that we have one or two of our Staff with sufficient interest and ability to write the news items for this publication.

We feel sure that our many readers will appreciate the difficulties of recording many of the happenings owing to the pressure of work in keeping the Zoological Gardens up to standard.

The Summer of 1954 is rather belated, but despite this the attendance is well up on previous years, and from all accounts the Zoo is becoming more popular than ever.

There have been many alterations during the last few months and the latest has been the erection of a house for the rhinoceros which arrived at the Zoo on 9th July. This house has been constructed so as to be suitable when this animal becomes an adult, and also has a mate. It is proposed to build a fairly roomy enclosure along by the canal and adjoining his house.

It was owing to the rather unexpected arrival of the rhinoceros that work has been delayed on the new Tropical and Ape House, but preparations are now under way and a start is expected to be made during the month of August.

New Arrivals.

BLACK RHINOCEROS.

A visit to the newly erected building behind the Giraffe House will bring you face to face with our baby rhinoceros, Nelson.

There are two definite species of rhinoceros in Africa, the Common or Black rhinoceros, and the Burchell's or White rhinoceros. They are large clumsy looking animals with small eyes and a prehensile upper lip which slightly

juts out beyond the lower lip. Their diet in natural surroundings consists of vegetable matter, but our rhino will be fed on porridge, hay and fresh green food.

Nelson arrived in England on Friday, 9th July, on the Zoo Ship "Laurentian Lake", part of John Seago's collection of animals, and was brought to the Zoo later that evening by road. He is a very friendly little creature and will quickly become popular with the public.

TREE PORCUPINE.

A new arrival with quarters in the Camel House is the quaint Tree Porcupine. This species come from Central and South America, and are equipped with long prehensile tails which they use as an anchor when in the trees. Tree porcupines grow to about three feet in length, the specimen on view being quite young, measuring only nine inches. He appears to have settled down in his new home, and feeds well on the fruit diet provided. He has become very friendly, and has rather surprisingly a great liking for bread which he will take from the fingers and holding squirrel-like, nibble away contentedly.

POLAR BEAR.

"Susie" came to us all the way from Dublin Zoo. She is getting on in years, 27 to be exact, and we rather wondered what would happen when we turned her out with our three bears. We need not have worried, as within 24 hours she was bossing the others around. If any visitor wonders which bear Susie is, she's the one who is always hovering round the door to the den, waiting to be fed. Her Keeper tells us that she is very docile, and is much more to be trusted than Rack, Rubble or Ruin.

EUROPEAN BROWN BEARS.

"Pit" and "Pat" arrived at the Zoo from a New Brighton Circus and we are hoping that these two will settle down to rearing a family. No sooner had we turned them into their pen, when their neighbour, "Little Fella" (our female bear strangely enough) decided to investigate. She loves a fight, and so with much

concentration on her part, and much consternation on the part of the public, she climbed over to have a good row. Much to our amusement Little Fella found she had met her match, and now leads (or limps) a peaceful life on three paws.

GIRAFFE.

Just arrived in the Giraffe House is an extremely dainty lady by the name of "Dinah". Three years old, she has been in Quarantine at London Zoo for the past twelve months.

Dinah, a vine-leafed giraffe, has settled down very well with our other three giraffes, and when fully grown will be larger than George, Goofy and Gussie who are of the reticulated variety, and much lighter in colour.

What Dinah hasn't yet got used to are the Buffaloes in the adjacent pens, and she can be seen most of the time staring curiously at them.

THE BEISA ORYX.

A mate for Jill, our female oryx, has arrived, and both are now to be seen in the Zebra House. Jack is slightly larger than Jill, darker brown in colour and with neater facial markings.

GREAT ANTEATER.

Sharing quarters with the Tree Porcupine is a most unusual animal—Henry, our Great Anteater. Henry comes from South America and has already turned out to be quite a pet. On entering his pen he will uncurl (anteaters are nocturnal by nature) and walk with slow measured tread towards you, when he investigates your arm with his long sticky tongue and places his paws with their long curled up claws on your knees. Henry when fully grown will measure four feet in length and two feet in height.

In their natural surroundings anteaters feed on ants, clawing the top of ant hills and as the ants rush to discover the cause of their disturbance, licks them up with his long wormlike tongue. Henry has from the moment of entering his pen adopted a young coatimundi, and the pair are now almost inseparable.

COATIMUNDI.

First a word about the species as a whole. The coati, sometimes called the coatimundi, is a member of the raccoon family, small in appearance with a reddish body and a tail not unlike its cousin, the raccoon. Their distin-

guishing feature is a long nose which is extremely flexible. They roam the South American forests in bands from eight to twenty in number, living mainly in the tree tops and existing on a diet of fruit, young birds, eggs, lizards and insects. They are readily tamed, and are often kept by the natives as pets. Our specimen is a young one and spends most of the time by the wire of the pen staring up at the people staring in. He gets most excited when the Keeper goes in to him, climbing energetically on to his knee if too much attention is taken up by either Jackie, the tree porcupine, or Henry, the anteater.

FRUIT BATS OR FLYING FOXES.

These take their name from their fox-like faces, and from the fact that they eat fruit. Unlike most bats they usually sleep at night, hanging upside down in the trees and feed by day. Fruit bats are found in India, Ceylon, Burma, most of the Pacific Islands and Australia. They are one of the largest of the bat species, and their bodies are covered with coarse brown fur. Our two, which have just arrived, are housed in the Camel House.

BIRTHS.

A great source of attraction to many are the young animals which have been born at the Zoo this Spring. Among them is the baby sealion (mentioned elsewhere), a baby zebra foal, two agouti (one a cross between an orange-rumped agouti and an ordinary agouti), and of course the usual families of deer, donkeys, goats, sheep, and wallabies.

Our young Zebra foal, Patsy, is the offspring of Dolly and Charlie, Charlie being already quite famous in an infamous sort of way. She is often to be seen trying out her as yet slightly shaky legs in the paddock with her mother.

The Reptile House.

To many people the word "snake" produces a shudder and the thought of a long slimy body crawling through the undergrowth bringing with it a violent death. Even so, most of the visitors to the Zoo pass also through our Reptile House, but just looking at labels which inform you that you are confronting a Puff Adder is not particularly interesting, so come with me and pay a brief visit to the Reptile House.

Cage No. 1 is occupied by the Egyptian Cobra, medium brown in colour with faint markings. The name is slightly misleading as

this snake ranges from Egypt to the Natal. They are rather quick tempered, and are the cobras so often used by the snake charmers of Egypt. His pen is shared by a small brightly-coloured non-venomous snake—the King Snake. This snake is a North American reptile and one of the family of constrictors who obtain the name through the fact the species overpower and swallow other snakes.

In the second cage we have a couple of Puff Adders. These are natives of Africa, and their poison fangs are highly developed, small creatures dying almost immediately when bitten. The name Puff Adder is derived from their habit of hissing loudly when disturbed. Not on the whole pleasant creatures, even to look at, so we will pass on to the next cage which contains quite an assortment of animals ranging from baby crocodiles to the three-horned chameleon.

This cage contains Rusty, who has already made a name for himself. He was given to the Zoo by a cargo ship which docked in Liverpool. We were slightly startled by his colour, but even more so when we were told that he had been kept in a rusty tin and fed almost entirely on gin. We had numerous letters all suggesting various ways of cleaning him, but after a wash in cold water twice a day for a week, Rusty returned to a normal alligator colour.

One snake which causes us trouble is the occupant of the next pen—the magnificent Black Cobra. He has a strong will of his own, and is very bad tempered. He also is a native of Africa.

Pen No. 5 houses terrapins, a Gharial (which is a native of India and feeds on fish), and a monitor lizard. This lizard is a lovely creature, grey-green with yellow markings, but is rather expensive to feed as he shows a preference for fresh eggs.

Skinks, the occupants of the next cage, are strange animals. They skin in the same way as a snake, and their diet consists of chopped meat, fruit and fresh green stuff.

In the following cage we have a non-poisonous pilot snake, dark brown to black in colour. This snake inhabits the continent of America where it has the nickname of "Black Chicken Snake", coined by its habit of entering hen runs and stealing the eggs.

We now come to the large crocodile pool, which is a work of art in itself. Our two croc-

odiles are happily—for us—placid creatures as we occasionally lock ourselves out of the service passage and have to climb over them to regain the keys. Our method of feeding is to stand hopefully on the bridge with a piece of meat on a stick and click encouragingly. If my lord feels hungry he will slide silently into the water and gently take the meat off the stick. One then has to scramble hastily to cut another chunk of meat before he turns round and swims back.

The largest snake we have is the African Python. Three of them inhabit the next pen, the largest being roughly 18 ft. long with the others not far behind. They are a wonderful show as they lie stretched out along the branches, or in the water of their pool.

The Indian Python is a much smaller constrictor than its next-door neighbour, and is about the only snake we don't have to trap before cleaning out its pen. It is, therefore probably one of our favourites. This python shares its pen with a snake who is definitely our favourite—the Royal Python. This snake, aptly named as its markings are beautiful, attains a length of only four or five feet. Our specimen is quite friendly, allowing itself to be handled.

Another of the large reptiles is the Reticulated Python, and once again we have a rather wicked tempered one. It spends most of its time in the water, but if any tortoise ventures too near, the snake strikes without warning. The tortoises take everything as a matter of course, merely emerging from their shells when everything is clear.

One may think that being a Reptile Keeper is a serious and often dangerous business. It is true that you have to exercise a little more care than usual, but otherwise the work is full of interest and very satisfying.

G. M. Ashby.

Animal Characters.

KENNETH & BARKAH, THE CAMELS.

Kenneth and Barkah are two camels, and there the likeness stops, for Kenneth is a Bactrian camel, and Barkah is a dromedary. Not only in name are the two different, but also in nature and character. Barkah is always ready to pick a fight with his next-door neighbour Kenneth, and with this in mind has bitten a large hole in the wire-netting adjoining their pens.

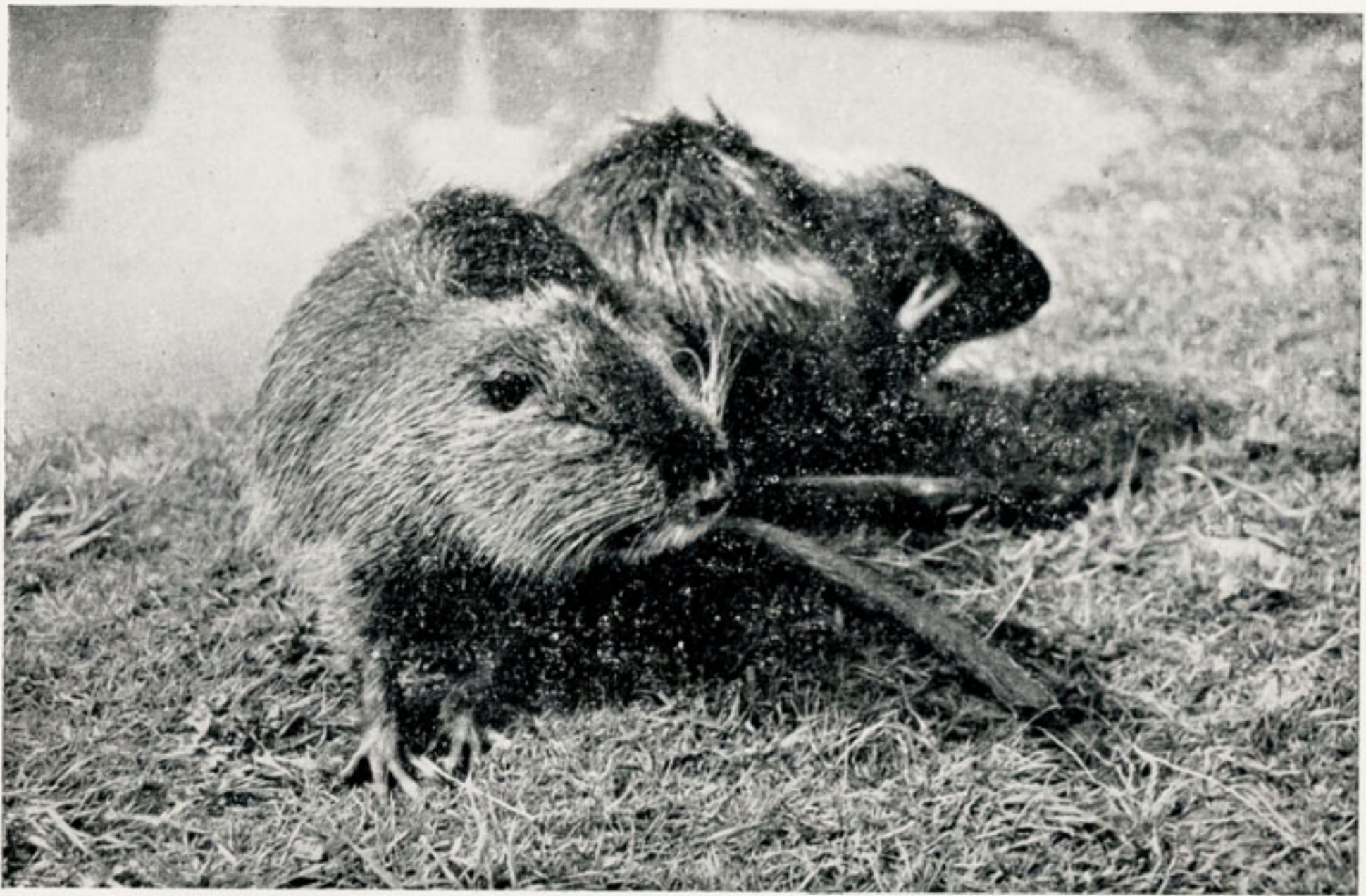


"A Reptile House Keeper spares a few moments to fondle her pet Royal Python".



"On Christmas Eve 1947, Won-lung, a Himalyan Bear, gave birth to a little cub here shown taking his first walk in the Spring sunshine. Paddy, also photographed here, was his father. Now the little cub is much larger than both his parents, and is, in fact, one of the largest specimens in the enclosure".





"A new enclosure has been made for the coypu rats at Chester Zoo".



There are two tigers at Chester Zoo, the above photograph is a fine head study of "Sheika" the tigress.

Kenneth is—on the whole—fairly placid, but he has his tricks such as squashing the unsuspecting Keeper against the walls and having small arguments (one could hardly call them fights) with the llamas who share his pen, but otherwise he is slightly better than Barkah who has an endearing habit of spitting or biting at the least opportunity. The Keeper only allows one camel out at a time for an airing in the paddock, and I'm afraid the most privileged one is Kenneth who kicks up an awful fuss when Barkah is out—pacing round and round the pen moaning sadly, until Barkah is shut up and his own door is opened.

Both Kenneth and Barkah look extremely handsome creatures in their new coats which they have just attained.

POOH AND TOOKY.

Pooh and Tooky are a young pair of monkeys, one a Capuchin and the other a Mona Monkey. Together they get up to all sorts of mischief, and are altogether the greediest of our monkeys. One morning their Keeper decided to whitewash their cage, so turning them both out he set to. By lunch-time the walls were sparkling clean and the water trough scrubbed out and filled with fresh water. Feeling very satisfied the Keeper turned our two rascals into the cage. With one cry of glee they bore down upon the water trough and damping their hands commenced to leave dirty pawmarks all over the walls. What the Keeper said upon returning from lunch is not recorded, but that wasn't all that happened that day. Susan, our crab-eating monkey, had managed to open her door and was busy spring cleaning—backwards and forwards across the glass with the brush which she was applying in true keeper-like style. Poor Susan was most upset when told gently but firmly that her efforts—though doubtlessly well meant, weren't at all appreciated.



The Penguins.

Visitors have been heard to express concern about the ruffled appearance of the King Penguins, and their apparent poor condition. This condition occurs yearly, the penguins moult, casting off their old coats for new Summer mantles. The health of the penguins during this time is always trying to themselves and rather comical to see, for they stand forlorn and sad as if conscious of their bad impression, and feel decidedly off colour. They lose appetite, and for days will not feed, normal appetite returning when the moult is complete (which takes about fourteen days) and as they will sometimes refuse food it is often necessary to force feed. This is often difficult for the penguin and Keeper. To do this the Keeper advances with slow careful unconcern upon the wary penguin, and suddenly makes a swift lunging grab, pinning down the flippers with one arm, and opening the penguin's mouth and deftly pushing down a herring with the other. This movement would surely draw admiration from a judo expert. Consequently the penguin swallows the herring. This, however, is not practised too often as normal appetite returns in time, and over-running and chasing causes excitement, upset and vomiting, as well as exhaustion for the Keeper.

Three penguins at the time of writing have completed the moult, and there yet remains one to undergo the transformation. Now that they are proud possessors of spruce new gleaming suits they plunge into the water, diving underneath, twisting and turning with the expert grace of all aquatic animals. During the process of the moult they do not venture into the water at all, but stand at the edge, allowing the water merely to lap round their feet.

The other day visitors were delighted to see their prowess and deftness in action. A penguin struggling from the Keeper's grasp escaped and as quick as lightning plunged and swam under water for nearly the whole length



"Alex, a giant tortoise, receives a "rub-up" before being taken out of doors".



"Keepers feeding King Penguins and Sea-lion".

of the lake, so indignant and alarmed was he, and emerged triumphantly out of reach on the far side.

Penguins get to know, and become attached, to their Keeper, and often will not feed from anyone else unless they are equally well-known. Often they are taken outside their enclosure for a walk, following the Keeper in single file, slowly but eagerly, round in front of the Aquarium and back again.

During the course of the year they have been kept in good condition, this cold summer being very much to their advantage. As is generally known, these penguins come from the Antarctic, and these particular ones were captured round about South Georgia, brought over and presented to the Zoo by a Norwegian Whaling Company. It has been noticed that the four penguins have divided off into two pairs, thus giving hope of their nesting like their neighbours, the Black-Footed penguins in the next enclosure.

The Black-Footed Penguin, a much smaller animal and black and white in colour, comes from the waters around South Africa. There are six altogether, and readily pair off, though only one pair have been known to lay fertile eggs. This pair nested and hatched two chicks at different times during the last year. These penguins are about to go into the moult, and have a yellowy dirty appearance, but will soon be seen stockily parading around in their black and white coats.

It has been suggested that they should be placed with the King Penguins, but it was thought they would escape through the wide wire mesh, and if given a chance to escape they will. One day some time ago, one of them managed to squeeze himself through a small gap and walked for miles, ending up at a military hospital. And again this self-same penguin did exactly the same thing, this time reaching the mental hospital, and when he was collected he was found esconced in one of the cells. He has not ventured forth since.

G. J. Wood.

Operation "Tortoise."

Two animals which cause gasps of amazement are the Giant Tortoises from the Seychelles Islands. Large heavy creatures they certainly have a will of their own, and most unfortunately, the strength to carry it out. Our two specimens (dubbed "Alex" and "Shelley") have spent the winter in the warmth of the Reptile House.

One Spring morning not so very long ago, Authority wandered over to the Keeper of the Reptiles and myself, both scrubbing the tortoises clean, and marking them with a speculative eye said slowly but emphatically—"It's time those animals were out enjoying the sunshine". He then wandered out leaving us looking horror-stricken at one another. Since it was obvious that one couldn't put a Giant Tortoise on a piece of string and lead him to the fields, something had to be done. I measured Shelley up in my mind's eye, and rushed round to the Aquarium to get the wheelbarrow.

We successfully and triumphantly wheeled Shelley to the paddock, and with much panting returned for Alex. Alex, alas, had other ideas than to be wheeled like a baby through the Zoo grounds—he argued with us that no self-respecting tortoise would allow such liberties, and half-way there climbed out. We stood looking at him as he wandered off, but just as he was passing the gate to the field we crept up and with one big heave pushed him in.

At five o'clock that night the Keeper of the Reptiles suddenly appeared and hung about with a mournful air. Upon tackling her it appeared that Giant Tortoises such as ours were too delicate to be left out all night, but happily they could be taken out each fine day, and at nightfall, or the first sign of rain, could be brought in again—by us.

We took to silently disappearing about ten o'clock, but the reproachful look on the other keepers' faces and on the tortoises (when we

surreptitiously sidled back and saw them still in the Reptile House) haunted us—so if on your rounds of the Gardens you see two hunchbacked prematurely aged girls with worried looks on their faces, you can start glancing around for an old battered wheelbarrow and a couple of giant tortoises.

At the time of going to press we are happy to report that Alex (with slight encouragement) now grimly walks half-way to the paddock before thumbing a lift.

Life with the Sea-Lions.

While other animals in the Zoo seem to live uneventful lives on the whole, our sea-lion family lead us a fine song and dance. Hardly a month passes without someone dashing to the nearest phone and bawling down it "Its them sea-lions again!"

One beautiful spring morning Sammy Junior chose to make his entrance into this world in a somewhat unusual way, naturally in keeping with our most troublesome family. The following dialogue takes you back to that morning—noted not only because it's the only fine spring morning we had.

"I see she's had her baby", said the Gardener cheerfully.

"!!!??"

"I mean Sue".

"Oh!" I replied rather faintly, for I hadn't the least idea the sea-lion family were expecting a happy event.

I had passed the pool an hour before, and had only seen Sammy cruising about at one end, and Sue on the bank at the other. But now I came to think about it, there had been a rather harassed look in Sam's eyes as he swam in small circles, keeping very much to himself—and I'm sure if one had offered him a packet of cigarettes he would have taken the lot thankfully.

I ran down to the pool, and there beside Sue on top of the fountain was a small black shape. Half an hour later things had moved. A few of the Zoo Staff and a handful of early visitors were standing round the pool, and someone was busy on the phone finding out what to do with sea-lions who had unexpected babies. He

found out all right. Apparently you remove the male for a period of four months. Our hearts sank. Knowing Sammy of old we were quite sure he would absolutely refuse to cooperate. Our doubts were well founded. In spite of a tempting dish of herrings flapped invitingly by a hurriedly made gap in the fence, Sammy steadfastly declined to notice them. With a sigh we therefore turned our attention to Sue just in time to witness the pup's first dip. It had been rolling nearer and nearer the edge of the fountain platform, until with a splash it disappeared from view. Poor Sue, still very groggy, was over the side in a flash and struggled to the grassy bank with the complaining youngster in her mouth.

By this time some of the Staff had wheeled up a truck, so with the help of a large net (kindly loaned from the Aquarium) the baby seal was transferred into the truck, Sue following anxiously behind.

We turned them both out into the pool opposite the Bird House, and stood back surveying mother and child with that delicious feeling of a job well done. But too soon—a pair of nesting swans were the only occupants of the pool, and papa swan objected strongly to the proceedings. With loud hissings he advanced upon Sue, and for ten minutes chaos reigned whilst the two animals fought to protect their young. Naturally it turned out that Sue was boss. But for several weeks one could hear the sound of minor battles all over the Gardens.

When the cygnets hatched, the swan transported his family to safer territory, and peace came to the Zoo—or so we thought.

Only the other day I was going quietly about my business, when I heard Sue's barking with an unusually insistent note. It appeared that her keeper on his morning rounds had met her half-way across to Sammy, and they were having a slight disagreement as to whether or not she should continue her visit. The Keeper finally managed to show her the error of her ways in leaving her young pup for a brief moment of pleasure, and tranquility once more descended upon Chester Zoo.

As this was only the day before yesterday, I dread to think what may happen next month.

Gillian M. Ashby.