

"Our Zoo News"

A MONTHLY CHRONICLE OF NEWS OF
CHESTER ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS.

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The Month goes by.

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The year 1940 is now over and we can look back on the many obstacles which we have come up against and surmounted. It has been a year of many trials. The very severe weather at the commencement of 1940 put a big strain on both our finances and labour. We lost some of our best known animals, chiefly because they were getting on in years and could not stand the very hard winter. All our old staff either joined the Forces or went on war work, and we were compelled to fall back on girls.

At first it was thought that this would be successful and facilities were at once provided to enable the new keepers to improve their knowledge. Lectures were arranged and Mr. S. Fearon-Wilson went to a considerable amount of trouble to provide a very instructive syllabus.

It is with much regret that we have to record that the enthusiasm with which these girls started soon began to wane, and one by one they either left or were dismissed, the care of the animals having to be undertaken by other hands.

Only one girl who was with us in 1939 remains at the end of 1940. We also employ a young boy and they constitute our permanent outdoor staff, but for many weeks past a young lady from the office has undertaken both responsible and important work among the animals, and has so efficiently adapted herself to this entirely new work that it is intended to allow her to undertake it permanently as soon as her place in the office can be filled. She has also offered to narrate in the "Zoo News" various happenings, etc., at the Zoo, and makes her debut in this number.

The very serious war news which the country heard in the spring and early summer proved a great

handicap to our gate, and we were left with a stiff uphill climb if we were to keep our heads above water.

Our "Adoption Scheme" was of course a good standby, and helped us considerably. We are also deeply indebted to a number of Chester tradespeople who have assisted us with waste foodstuffs. In particular we would like to mention Messrs. Littlewoods, Marks & Spencers, Mac Fisheries, Wilkinsons and W. Thomas, who have been most generous in giving food throughout the year for the animals.

We have indeed learnt many valuable lessons on feeding animals on most economical lines. Leopards for instance prefer poultry heads to a nice steak of horse flesh, and will always leave the latter and go for the heads if both should be placed in the cage at the same time.

The end of 1940 sees quite a different balance of livestock than previously. Some of the smaller animals which abounded at the Zoo have gradually dwindled from one cause or another, while on the other hand our stock of larger animals has increased. We start 1941 with no fewer than fourteen lions and we may say, without fear of contradiction, they are an exceptionally fine lot.

The Bears, numbering two Polars, one North American, one very large Russian, three Malayan, and one Himalayan, make a very imposing display.

Two more large and very fine animals are the pair of North American Bison, and we feel certain that the cow is in calf. They enjoy the run of a very large enclosure and live amicably together with the Piebald Sheep and Llama.

The Leopards are also a very good show, but our efforts to breed these fine animals have not yet borne fruit.

Of the fourteen Lions eleven of them have been bred in the Gardens, and we are hoping that when the war ends Chester Lions will go out into the world to stock other Zoos.

A problem which is always presenting itself is the repairing of cages and enclosures. The very severe frost of early 1940 played havoc with a lot of cages made of wire and iron, and many could have done with complete renewal, but war conditions made it impossible in several cases even to repair them, and the stock has had to be moved accordingly.

We are about to receive for the duration of the War from Bristol Zoo a tiger and lioness, a black panther and a leopard.

Throughout the whole of the past year we have put the Country's call first and have only done things which would not interfere even in a small way with the nation's requirements for its war efforts, for we realise how important it is that victory should be ours at the earliest possible moment.

Great numbers of children have visited the Zoo since war broke out, and the Society has given every consideration to provide facilities for educational parties. A Zoo such as ours provides unlimited scope for both teachers and scholars, and lessons can be learned to far better advantage by practical demonstration.

We are always willing to co-operate with schools whenever possible, and to help teachers desiring to give a course of lessons on any subject in connection with animals and birds, so that they may impart only true knowledge to the children. It is not always possible for a school for instance, to stock and maintain a suitable aquarium of local pond life. Such a tank could be set up in the Zoo Aquarium filled with whatever subject matter the teachers required for the lesson, and with the facilities to be obtained at the Zoo, it would prove far more instructional.

The writer has often seen in some schools an accumulator jar filled with various pond insects for Natural History lessons, but it has been entirely impossible for the class to distinguish anything. At the Zoo a proper tank is prepared, specially lighted, and if required magnifying glasses are fixed so that the children see at once what object they are supposed to be studying.

Soon after the outbreak of war, many teachers who had been evacuated visited the gardens with the scholars, and it was surprising how ignorant some of the teachers were of certain animals and their habits. Many actually thought that young lion cubs were leopards because they showed spots. Others believed a leopard was a tiger, and so one could enumerate, but perhaps the most common error was between the Pelican and Penguin. It was astonishing how they mixed these two birds up.

Probably the most frequent shortcoming was not knowing what a certain animal or bird lived on. They would offer peanuts to a purely fish eating bird and when it took no notice they would tell the children that it was not hungry. Had its correct

food been offered, all would have been truly amazed by the rapidity and capacity of the bird, and would have learnt something of its habits.

The running of a Zoo as an educational centre is not always a financial success, and that is why we have to ask for assistance, but when we beg, it is not for any personal gain but simply to maintain what has become a public institution, and that is why we are doing everything possible to preserve the collection during the war, for should the Zoo for any reason have to close down it would never rise again.

Starting a public Zoo is always a difficult undertaking. Apart from the very heavy financial cost there are so many obstacles to be overcome before the Zoo itself is properly established, that very few people will saddle themselves with such a burden.

The fact that this Country can only boast of four non commercial Zoological Gardens speaks for itself. London and Bristol were both established over a hundred years ago. The Scottish Zoological Society started the Edinburgh Zoo in 1913, and ourselves in 1934. During the last century many of our great cities have made efforts to provide a public Zoological Gardens such as those already mentioned, but none have succeeded.

We therefore ask all our friends to give us whatever support they can and help us in our efforts to maintain the Zoo.

Some readers whilst willing to help the Society, feel that their money should be loaned to the Government. This can be overcome by giving such invested money to the Society who would undertake not to cash it until after the war.

Zoo Admission Tickets sold in advance.

Last winter we sold in advance nearly 2,000 admission tickets at half price, and offered in connection therewith a Free Draw for a Leopard Skin.

The receipt of this cash in the winter months is of great help to the Society, and we do most earnestly ask all readers to sell as many as possible this winter.

A special offer is made to the two sellers of the most tickets and three very good skins are put up for the Free Draw. The Bear Skin was that of "Sammy," the once popular Malayan Sun Bear at the Zoo. Unfortunately he escaped when a large snow drift enabled him to climb out of his enclosure, and defying capture, aided by the winter weather, had to be shot for safety sake.

The Draw takes place on the 18th January at the Annual Meeting of the Society. Please sell as many tickets as possible and return the counterfoils by the 11th January, 1941.

"LIFE AT THE ZOO,"

BY ONE OF THE STAFF.

During the latter four months that I have been working at the Zoo I have come into greater contact with the animals. My previous experience of them was from behind the barriers and I merely looked upon them as a collection of animals and birds. A very fine one 'tis true, but of their likes and dislikes, habits and ways of living I never really considered.

From earliest childhood I showed a love of animals, in fact at one time my one ambition was to be a lion-tamer. Needless to say this dream never came true and I am quite sure it never will. I used to explain at great length to my Mother that it was "all done by kindness." How true those words were I realise now.

In working with animals, especially wild animals in captivity, kindness is essential, likewise a sympathetic feeling towards them so that one is always seeking ways of making them more comfortable, worrying over them when they are sick, and feeling a pang of sorrow when like all living creatures they must leave us.

Prior to coming to the Zoo over nine months ago I worked for nearly seven years as a Shorthand Typist in one of the largest and most up to date firms in Liverpool, leaving soon after the outbreak of war. In that capacity I was employed at the Zoo, but since—due to a shortage of staff—I came in closer touch with the various exhibits, I have decided to concentrate wholly on this part of the work as soon as it can be arranged, and it is my hope that we will be able to open an "Information Bureau" where visitors may obtain general information on the various exhibits which interest them most.

I realise now that I have worked amongst the animals how much more interesting they can be when one observes them closely.

Naturally many incidents occur in the day's work and I would like to relate a few of them, together with notes on different animals, in each monthly issue of the "Zoo News."

Some exhibits show more affection than others, and get quite friendly with their keepers. This is more marked in the birds, who will often fly on to your shoulder and playfully peck your ear. The parrots are always willing to greet you at any time of the day with a chorus of "Hello's," whilst one, "Cocky" by name, continuously requests you in no polite tones to "Come 'ere." His next command is to "Scratch Polly" or "Shake hands," and many an unwary visitor has done this only to receive a very painful bite, whilst "Cocky" jeers derisively at having caught yet another one.

The Lions and such like I always treat with the respect that they command. They do of course get to know you and show great interest in your movements when in sight, but I hardly think this comes under the heading of affection.

I am particularly fond of "Renee," a leopardess, and she is the first one I visit in a morning. My greeting of "Hello, old girl," is met with either a stony silence or else a vicious snarl and a baring of teeth. It may be that she objects to being called "an old girl," especially as she is one of the handsomest animals in the Zoo, or perhaps it is her way of showing affection towards me, but this I very much doubt.

To a number of animals it is largely a case of "cupboard love," and to them the word "keeper" means "food."

To my mind the feeding of them constitutes a pleasure. I was quite thrilled when I fed my first animal, which incidentally happened to be, not the lions, but a little brown and white rabbit.

There is however, quite a lot to learn about feeding. Some foods would be unsuitable for certain animals, whilst they in turn express their likes and dislikes in no uncertain manner. In some cases the diet must be varied so that the animal does not tire of it too easily, also the quantity must be carefully watched.

Part of my job is to see that no food whatsoever is wasted, even though this does constitute waste food unfit for human consumption.

Owing to the war substitutes have had to be found for some of the animals. For instance, the Malayan Sun Bears who previously lived on condensed milk, sugar and other sweet things, now get a mixture of cooked coarse oats and bread, and this has to be of a certain consistency and temperature.

When they hear the sound of their bucket all three bears, "Sally," "Roger" and "Teeny," balance themselves on the inner wall of the enclosure, craning their necks and waving their front paws in the air. Then on all fours they make for their feeding trough. "Teeny" always gets there first and eats twice as fast as the two larger bears. Nothing will induce her to slow up until every scrap has been disposed of, and even then she is not satisfied until she has carefully inspected the floor around in case any should have spilled over. Their table manners are not of the best, apart from the noise they make, a boxing match often ensues between "Sally" and "Roger"—little "Teeny" lets nothing interfere with her appetite.

Removals seldom lack interest where the animals are concerned, as one is never quite sure how the animal is going to take it. Sometimes it is a case of seeing who has the most patience, but curiosity nearly always prevails.

A short while ago it was decided to move "Eve," the North American Black Bear to quarters adjoining the "Chimp House." She was persuaded to travel along a specially constructed pathway to her new home, and all went well until she decided to throw her weight around and push over part of the barricade, but by this time she was safely inside although not in the cage. Defiantly she marched up and down the passageway and charged at anyone who attempted to get too close. Having tired of this game the spirit of adventure then bestirred her, and she decided to explore what was around the corner. This fitted in with our plans and with no further trouble she calmly walked into her new home, to settle down quite happily with "Won Lung," the Himalayan Bear.

Meanwhile "Trotsky," "Eve's" former companion was registering disapproval in the centre of the courtyard. He did not believe in the old saying of "ladies before gentlemen," and got into the crate first, so there he had to remain until the removal was accomplished. "Trotsky" now has the whole cage to himself, which he approves of as he doesn't

have to share titbits or admiration from the visitors.

The other day having occasion to pass the Chimpanzee Cages I noticed that "Big Boy" had by some means, got hold of an iron bar and was amusing himself by making holes in the wall and working out the mortar with his fingers. On being asked to give it up, he stood upright holding it like a spear and lunged at me through the wire netting. He then offered it to me but immediately I took hold of it he snatched it back. I got tired of the game first.

As it was just on feeding time I went off to get something for them. Coming back I explained to "Big Boy" that I would exchange the food for the bar, and I was rather amazed by the rapidity with which he did this, as I had had little hopes of the ruse working.

During this time "Mary Ellen" had been a very disinterested spectator, but immediately I was in possession of the bar she screamed so loudly that I was only too glad to make my departure. And so life at the Zoo goes on.

