

# "Our Zoo News"

● A CHRONICLE OF NEWS OF ●  
CHESTER ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS

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NUMBER 128.

JULY, 1958.

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Two Zebroids (Zebra x Horse) having a friendly encounter

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PRICE SIXPENCE

Six copies for 4/- (including packing and postage).

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## Our Zoo News.

It is now nine months since we wrote our last Zoo News, and since then many things have taken place at Chester Zoo, and a lot of work has been put in to prepare the Zoological Gardens for the crowds of 1958.

The Bridge over Butter Hill leading to the farm and the new land was completed at the end of 1957, but as yet little or no development has taken place on the other side. We have however transferred our Ankoli cattle on to the new land and they are using the ramp of one side of the Bridge as their indoor quarters. On the Zoo side the ramp contains two very large bear dens in which at the present time are a pair of Kamchatka bears in one den, and a pair of Russian Brown bears in the other. Work is now far advanced in the construction of the enclosures.

Delay on this building has been occasioned by the fact that towards the end of 1957 we were fortunate in acquiring some land in Birkenhead which was approved by the Ministry of Agriculture as a site for a Quarantine Station. We purchased this property and demolished the greenhouses which were on it, and in their place erected two fairly large buildings, divided into loose boxes, for the accommodation of cloven footed animals which are to be quarantined there on being landed in this country.

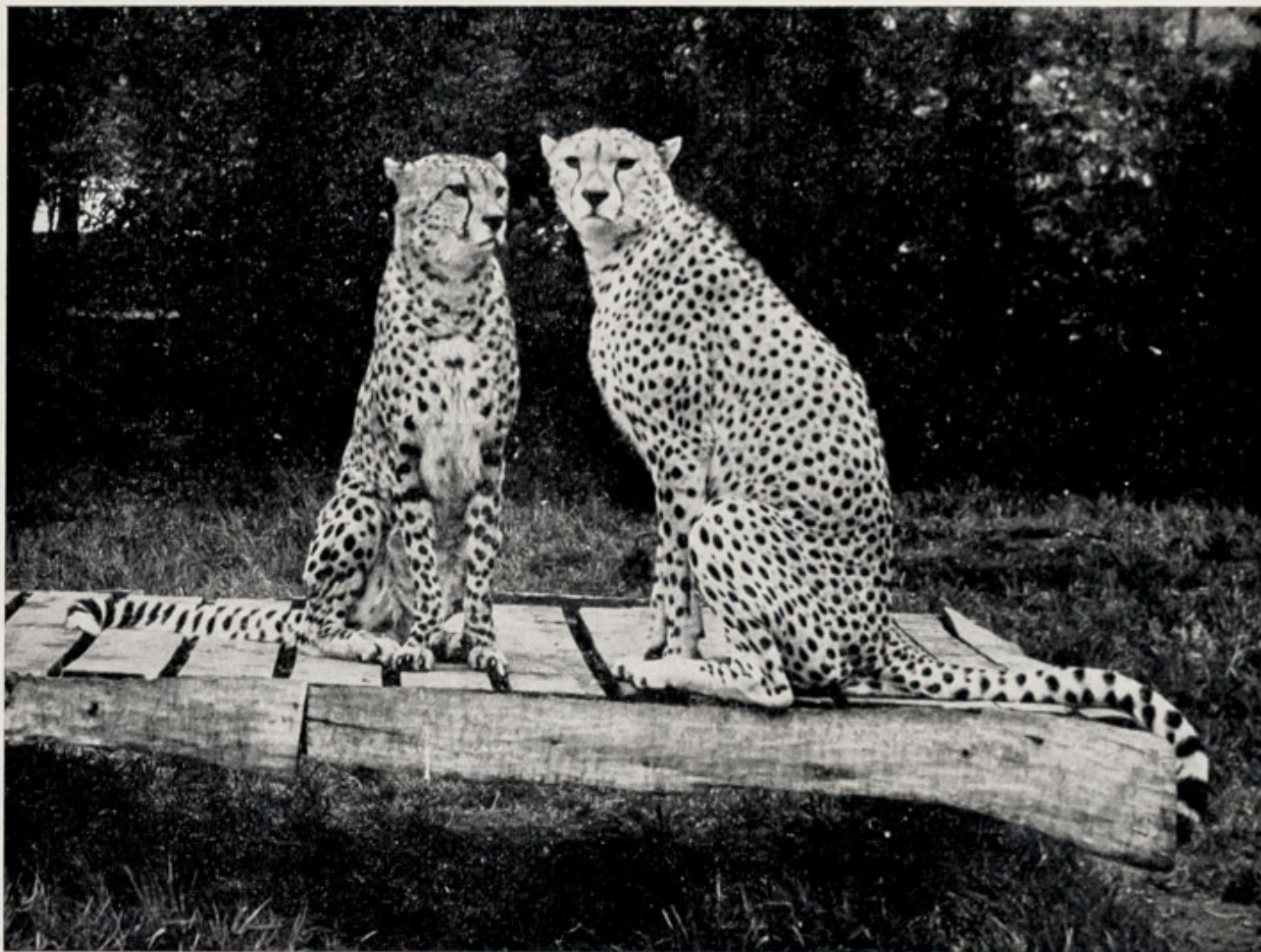
For some years now one of our drawbacks has been that any ruminating or cloven-footed animals have had to be quarantined elsewhere, before coming to Chester, owing to the fact that Chester Zoo is in a rural area. It was impossible to obtain suitable places in Chester, or it would probably be more correct to say that the Ministry did not like the idea of a Quarantine Station in the City of Chester, owing to its close proximity to agricultural holdings. However, we now have this property at Birkenhead where we can accommodate quite a number of animals. At the present time we have three very fine Antelopes in Quarantine there, who will have to stay for 12 months, a pair of Red Lechwe, and a very fine Greater Kudu. We had a much larger collection due to come from Northern Rhodesia but unfortunately the Ministry would not permit the rest of these cloven-footed animals to

fly to this country, and it was impossible at the last minute to arrange other transport. With this new Quarantine Station however, we should now be able to build up a very nice collection of Antelopes for exhibition in the Zoological Gardens at Chester.

At the Zoo itself work last winter was concentrated mainly on building the Nocturnal House and the Pygmy Hippopotamus House and these buildings were opened to the public on Good Friday. The layout of this building is rather unique, and something quite different from anything we have seen elsewhere. So far it appears to appeal very much, not only to the public, but also to the inmates of this particular building. The female Pygmy Hippopotamus which was christened Phyllis nearly two years ago had to spend well over twelve months at a building on the farm until we had prepared this accommodation for her. Now she is installed in her new home; she has settled down quite happily and is displayed amidst a glorious background of tropical vegetation.

Passing from this house we enter into the Nocturnal House proper and here are a range of cages which will contain from time to time various animals of a truly nocturnal nature. It is our intention to change them quite frequently as the animals in this particular house will of course be deprived of all natural daylight. During the night their cages are brilliantly lit, and in the morning these lights are turned off and dimmed lights are switched on in their place. This lighting gives a moonlight effect, and the animals become active and move about and feed as though it were night time. Although the animals which are at present in the Nocturnal House have been in for the best part of the winter, we can honestly say that they are in excellent condition and have shown no effects of being in the artificial conditions under which they are exhibited. It is interesting to note that several of the animals in this house have bred under these conditions. Nevertheless it is our intention to replace them from time to time, and let them rest in cages which are exposed to sunlight, for a certain part of the year.

Part of the old original Parrot Breeding Aviaries are in need of repair, and it has been decided that instead of repairing them,



Two Cheetahs in their enclosure at Chester Zoo

they should be dismantled altogether and an entirely new range of aviaries and possibly a bird house built on the site. Several new aviaries in different parts of the Zoo have been added however, so the number of flights are probably just as many as at the end of last season.

#### NEW ENTRANCES.

To the visitor, probably the greatest change of all, has been the entrances. For some years past we have felt rather ashamed of the approach to Chester Zoo. The old entrance gates and payboxes were makeshift affairs, which in the case of the main entrance dated back to the commencement of the Zoo 27 years ago. The North Entrance gate boxes were built in a hurry after the second world war, when the crowds began to arrive in large numbers, and these buildings, or rather huts, were erected in a matter of days to cope with the crowds. Now these have all been removed, and entirely new pay boxes have been constructed of concrete. We think that the design is quite unobtrusive and does not detract from

the picturesque entrance to the Zoo. The main function of the new pay boxes is of course to allow visitors to enter easily and quickly, particularly on rush days; they will also provide much better accommodation for the cashiers who have to spend so many hours of the day in them.

The whole of the front of the main House near the main entrance has been altered. Many of the old borders which were overgrown with very old shrubs have been completely cleared; in some places new shrubs have been planted in their place, and in others the borders have been removed to allow more free access of visitors from one part of the gardens to another. We feel sure that the public will appreciate the changes as the entrance is now much lighter and far more attractive.

#### RIDING SCHOOL PURCHASED.

We are happy to say that we have been able to purchase the Riding School, which for some years has been situated right in the centre of the Zoo property. We always hoped that some day we would be able to acquire this

property to enable us to extend our waterways and thus make it possible for visitors entering by the main entrance to walk just a few yards and then board a water taxi to convey them to the far end of the Zoological Gardens. This of course will entail much work and will mean the construction of at least one or more bridges. These need not necessarily be as strong as the one we have recently constructed over Butter Hill, but we do intend to make them as attractive as possible.

We also propose to replace part of the boundary of our Lion Enclosure by an open ditch, so that these particular animals can be seen without bars, wire, or any other obstruction. In addition we intend to construct two or three islands for the accommodation of Gibbons. A further project, as and when funds are available, is to provide accommodation for Gorillas, which will be similar to the enclosure we have for the Chimpanzees, but of course much larger.

### CHIMPANZEE NEWS.

In our last issue we gave full particulars of our new Chimpanzee House and the islands on which the Chimpanzees were allowed complete freedom. We also described the two cases where the Chimpanzees had actually crossed the water. The first occasion was when the Mother attempted to rescue her youngster which had fallen into the water, and she accidentally fell in and came out on the wrong side. The second was when one Chimpanzee crossed from one island to the other, but not out of the enclosure proper.

This is now the third season that the Chimpanzees have been out of doors and despite many provocations, we are happy to say that none of the large Chimpanzees, or the smaller ones for that matter, have managed to get across the water to the public.

A few weeks ago we understand that a visitor to the Zoo was teasing the Chimpanzees across the water, and went off in search of some large stones. This person found a stone and threw it across to the Chimpanzees, who immediately made no bones of the fact that they were going to throw it back to her. The person took refuge in the public passageway dividing the indoor quarters from the islands, and on being seen in this passage by the Chimpanzees, they immediately threw the stone with great vigour at her, and it smashed the armour-plated glass. Within a short space of time, five of our large adult Chimpanzees had escaped through the window and were free! Although these animals are fully adult, the eldest being about 14 years of age and probably the largest Chimpanzee in captivity, they all

remained very friendly and did not attempt to molest anybody. After some persuasion we managed to get them to return to their indoor quarters at the rear. To avoid a repetition of such an incident, we have now introduced a double glazing of armour-plated glass in the public passageway, so that if by any chance a member of the public should once again throw a large missile at the Chimpanzees, and the Chimpanzees in turn attempt to throw the object on to the glass again, it will not break both panes, as there is a cavity between the two. The first pane would of course take the impact which is liable to break the glass. It is remarkable how much this glass will stand. On many occasions we have seen large bricks and stones thrown by the Chimpanzees, but the glass has withstood them all. It is only occasionally when a stone which has a very sharp pointed edge catches the glass that it causes a puncture which immediately shatters it.

A few weeks after this episode, we had another problem to solve. As would be seen in one of the photographs in our last issue, there was a large mushroom structure on one of the islands, which was made from the top of a pill box, and of hard metal; this was erected and bound by iron on to four large poles. It was put in so that the Chimpanzees could get a little shelter in the heat of the sun, and also that they might climb on it. This of course they did on many occasions and have jumped and thumped on it to such an extent that they made many dinges in the dome, which proved how powerful these animals are. However, one morning recently, the Chimpanzees succeeded in breaking away the cross pieces which were underneath the dome. These were large poles 6 ins. in diameter and had been securely fastened by large bolts to the main structure. As soon as they were broken, a telephone message was immediately transmitted to the office saying that the Chimpanzees had got hold of one of these poles. We immediately went in the car and proceeded to the Chimpanzee enclosure but by that time we witnessed a sight we did not expect. There were five or six large Chimpanzees on top of the house! An eye witness who saw the whole proceedings stated that the largest of all the Chimpanzees got the large pole across its shoulders, walked across to the building in perfect human fashion, fastened another piece to the one it already had, and reared it against the building; he then proceeded to climb up and thus gain freedom on the roof. This Chimpanzee was followed by his companions. The incident occurred at a time when there were many thousands of children in the Zoo but we are

happy to say that the Chimpanzees took no interest whatsoever in them, and of course we instructed the children to keep well away while we persuaded the animals to go back into their own quarters. They took far more persuading this time, and one of them made his way into the Wallaby enclosure and immediately began to climb one of the electric pylons which are situated in this particular enclosure. He had climbed quite a way when he must have felt some electrical induction however, for he came down very rapidly, left the enclosure and went towards his own place.

It was a case of persuasion all the time and the Chimpanzees took a great delight in teasing us as much as they possibly could. We used all kinds of devices to induce them to go forward, but they only mocked us. They discovered a small pair of sloth bear cubs, in their rambles. These animals were very tiny and had been placed temporarily in the outdoor enclosure of the pit where the Pygmy Hippopotamus is kept. The two little bears were quite scared as two hefty chimpanzees began to poke them with their fingers and tried to tease them as much as possible. At the first

opportunity, both bears made one mad dash for the Keeper, feeling that there was security in his arms. The two baby bears were then taken to safety into an indoor cage, but the Chimpanzees thoroughly enjoyed this escapade. They would go into one place and shut the Keeper out, then come out themselves and try to shut the Keeper in. All of a sudden Elmer made a dash at one of his pursuers, caught him by the coat and attempted to hit him on the back, just as he played with his friends. If these blows had actually fallen on the man's back there is not the slightest doubt that he would have suffered considerably, but as the animal held the back of his coat so taught, the impact of the blows were not felt in full. The young man decided that his best way of escape was to jump into the water, and made towards it with the Chimpanzee raining blows on him, but as soon as the animal realised that he would have to follow into the water, he released his hold. However, after almost two hours of freedom, the Chimpanzees were induced to re-enter their own home and the doors were fastened behind them. Workmen were sent on to the island to remove the dome with



The lesser Panda surveys the Photographer from the trees in his enclosure. We are happy to report that again there are young Pandas at the Zoo

the supports from which they had obtained timbers to regain their liberty.

It was remarkable how the animals used their intelligence to get two poles together to rear against the wall to obtain their freedom. On the far island there are several of the large poles bolted together for the Chimpanzees to exercise themselves on and we have now strengthened them with straps of steel, so that they cannot possibly be pulled out by the hefty animals. At no period were the Chimpanzees abusive or even threatening—in fact they seemed to take a great delight in the fact that they were making fools of us. There is not the slightest doubt that they enjoyed this escapade far more than did the Keepers in the Zoo.

Even after this incident, we feel more convinced than ever that the method we have adopted of keeping Chimpanzees is the most ideal way of exhibiting them to the public with safety, and also of keeping the animals in perfect health and good temper.

#### FLAMINGOS.

Last September we imported a number of Lesser Flamingos (*Phoeniconaias Minor*) from East Africa. They were immature birds, little over eighteen inches high, and had been caught on Lake Elementita, in Kenya. Their plumage was still grey, speckled with brown and white; their necks were downy as they were still not fledged, although the black tips to the wing pinions soon appeared. It was not until very recently that the pink hue began to appear, and even now it is but a faint forerunner of the vivid colour yet to come. The adult bird, although considerably smaller than the Great Flamingo which is the one most commonly seen in captivity, is a much brighter pink all over, and the wings are deep crimson. The feet are red and the bill is red with a black tip.

Although so young when they first came, they seemed to thrive on ground-up shrimps, bread, bonemeal, bloodmeal, mineral meal, and to this was added shredded carrot and beetroot. The birds grew very rapidly, but unevenly—some shooting up in height, and some remaining quite small. Several food containers have had to be provided, since bullying occurred persistently in the early days; however recently they have become less aggressive towards each other.

Both the Lesser and the Greater Flamingos frequent the small Soda Lakes which are situated in the Rift Valley of East Africa. The Lesser Flamingo outnumbers the Greater by about twenty to one. All these lakes are very shallow and possess deep layers of mud, and in this the Flamingos stand in their millions, so that the whole lakeside is a bright pink in colour. As the term Soda Lake implies, the

water is of a strong alkali nature—strong enough to seriously burn a man's skin. During the dry season, some of these lakes dry up completely and the soda remains encrusted on the dried up mud, when it is collected and used commercially. Despite all this, some of these lakes contain hippo, and neither these, nor the Flamingos, seem affected by the water.

It is puzzling that these millions of birds can find enough food in these apparently lifeless lakes, but they subsist on a form of algae and plankton. They feed chiefly in the early mornings and at evening time, a habit which they maintain even now at the Zoo. Their long neck enables the head to be immersed upside-down under the surface of the water, and although they will occasionally take to deeper water and up-end like a swan, they normally feed by skimming along the surface with the bill. Both in the wild, and at the Zoo, they can sometimes be seen pivoting round in a small circle, stamping the mud with their feet. Obviously this would disturb any feeding matter and bring it to the surface, where it is taken in and the food is sifted from the waste matter by a wonderful filter inside the bill.

If necessary Flamingos will take to water and swim like a duck. Also like duck, they carry out migrations from lake to lake and when in flight they stretch out the neck forwards and carry their legs straight out behind. They form tremendous V-shaped formations, flying in beautiful patterns against the tropical sky, and making a musical honking call as they fly—a noise similar to the call of the Grey Goose.

The lesser Flamingo builds the same kind of nest as the Greater Flamingo, pushing up a mud mound like a small tower, six to ten inches high and a yard or so apart. This has a depression in the top in which they lay either one or two eggs. The chicks are covered with grey down, but quite soon after hatching they are very largely left to their own devices. There is a theory that to begin with, the adult birds bring supplies of fresh water to the young chicks.

With any population numbering millions it is inevitable that there are considerable casualties, and this results in the lakes being almost continuously patrolled by Marabou Storks, Vultures, Fish Eagles, Hyaenas, Jackals and other scavengers, who quickly clear up any dying or dead birds.

The Flamingos at the Zoo commenced life in an open pen, but as the winter came on they felt the cold too much and were moved to warmer quarters in the new Hippo House. They are now in their new open quarters, together with Cuban Flamingos, Sacred Ibis, Wood Ibis, and African Ducks.



Jimmy the Orang Utan looks at his reflection



After a game, on goes his sweater!



Jimmy on his Trapeze