



*By Courtesy of Eric Kirkland, F.R.P.*

# Chester Zoo News

THE NORTH OF ENGLAND ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS, UPTON - BY - CHESTER

December, 1962

Price 1/-



## Introduction

With the approach of Christmas, we are taking this opportunity of wishing all our readers the Compliments of the Season.

We wish to thank the following for permission to use the photographs and illustration included in this issue:—

R. T. Bloom, Esq.

E. Kirkland, Esq.

D. Murphy, Esq.

Mr. and Mrs. E. Sorby.

*COVER: Our Cover Picture this month shows two Snowy Owls, apparently rather annoyed at having their photograph taken.*

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### THE PIGMY HIPPOPOTAMUS HOUSE

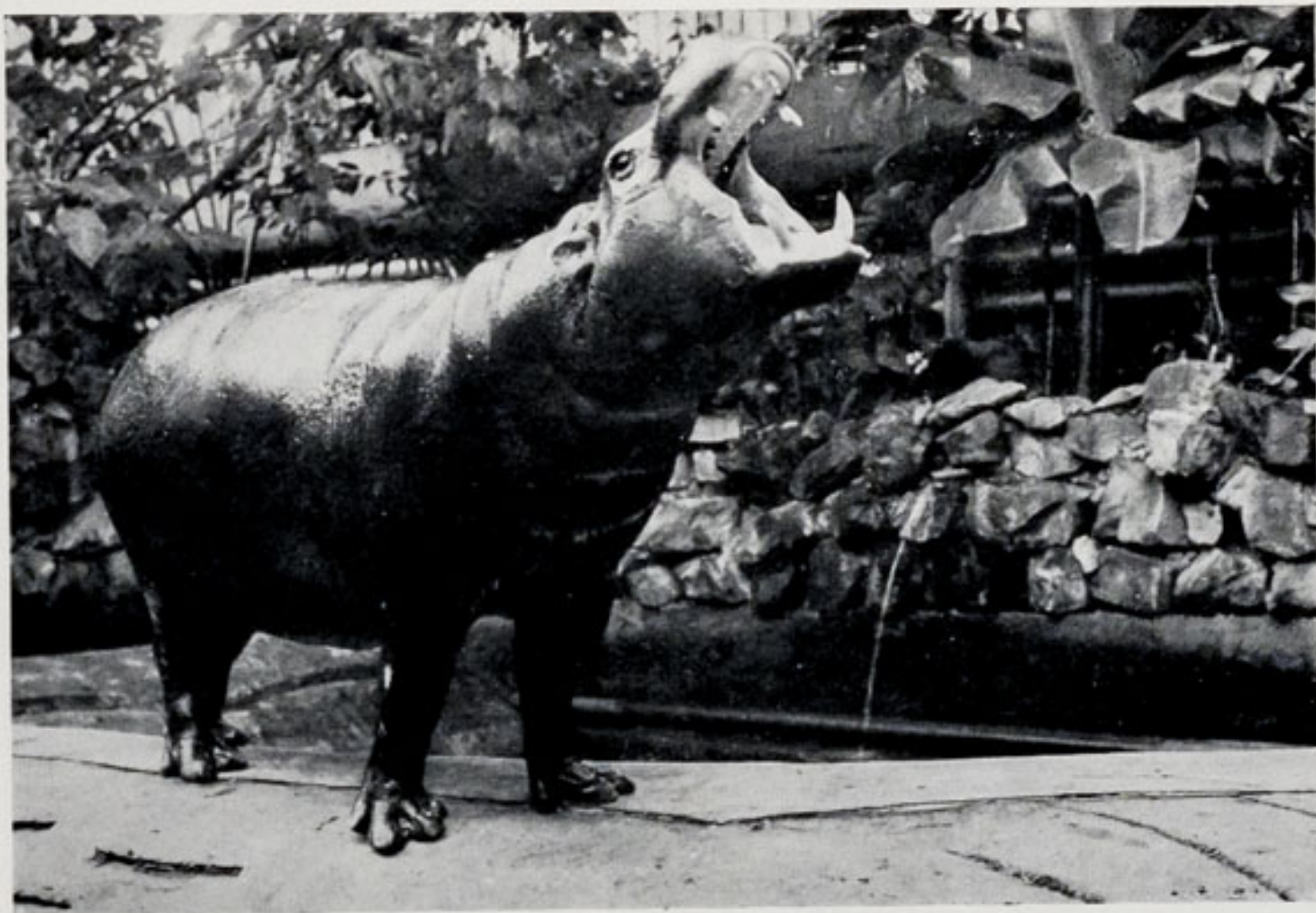
This House adjoins the Nocturnal House and will form part of the completed Tropical House. It is a building some sixty feet long by forty feet wide and approximately twenty feet high — with a synthetic glass roof. The latter is insulated with plastic sheeting to ensure that the temperature never falls below 45° — 50° Fahrenheit.

Upon entering the House one is met with a profusion of tropical vegetation — flowers, shrubs and creepers all blending to give an atmosphere of natural jungle forest conditions. Even the two large animal enclosures are planted with trees and shrubs, growing in beds between rough stone walls. The public passageway is elevated so that one looks down through the foliage to the animals.

Our Pigmy Hippopotamus — "Phyllis" — was born in Washington Zoo and arrived at Chester in September, 1956. She is a real character and a great favourite with Staff and Visitors alike.

Her indoor enclosure has a heated pool and Phyllis spends most of her time, particularly in cold weather, wallowing contentedly. The only signs of life are occasional twitchings of her small ears. Whenever the pool is drained Phyllis vainly tries to prevent the water escaping by sitting on the drainage outlet. Only when the last drop of water has gurgled out will she deign to leave her pool.

Phyllis thrives on a vegetable diet, consuming some four pounds of carrots, ten to fifteen pounds of clover hay (grass in the summer) and quantities of kale, bran and oats each day. So far we have been unable to obtain a mate for Phyllis and in the meantime the second



*R. T. Bloom*

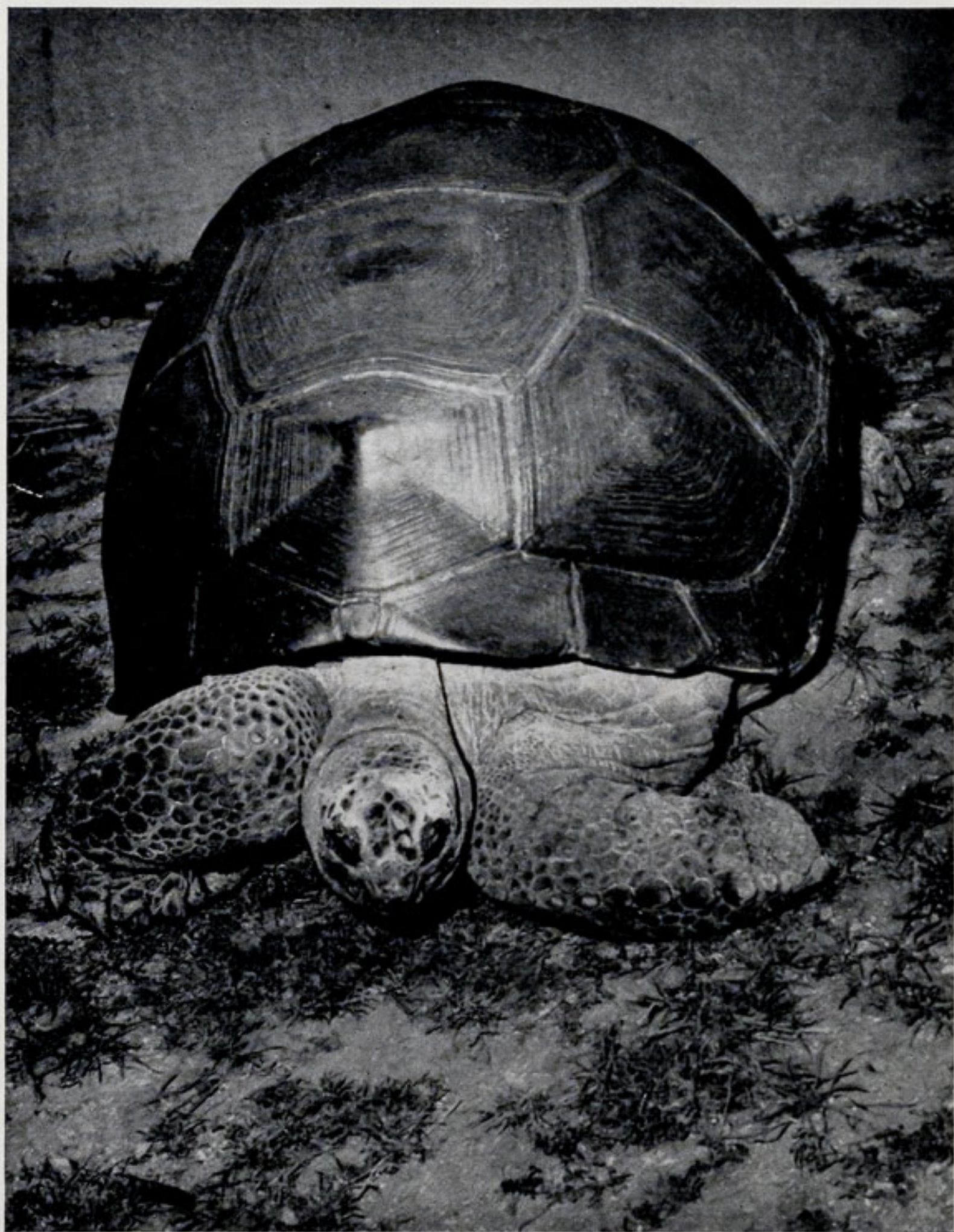
"PHYLLIS" WITH BANANA PLANT TO THE RIGHT OF THE BACKGROUND

pen in the House is occupied by our four Giant Tortoises from the Seychelles Islands.

The four Giants weigh about two cwt. each and make a lovely show in their tropical surroundings. They eat enormous quantities of over-ripe tomatoes and bananas, as well as the usual greenfoods.

Occasionally one of the tortoises will walk ponderously into the deep pool where it will float, completely unconcerned, with two thirds of its shell out of the water and its long neck stretched out like some odd water monster.

It is not possible to tell the age of our Giant Tortoises — they grow more quickly during their early years, but even so the rate of growth is greatly controlled by the food supply. They continue



*E. Kirkland*

GIANT TORTOISE

growing all through their lives and it is known that they live for a great number of years, some reports claiming individuals reaching more than a hundred and fifty years of age.

Giant Tortoises are found only on two groups of islands situated many thousands of miles apart; the Galapagos, which are about five hundred miles off the South American coast in the Pacific Ocean, and the islands in the western Indian Ocean, off the coast of East Africa. Until the islands were discovered in about 1530, the tortoises had no natural enemies and they abounded in their thousands — in many cases each individual island having its own distinct species. Gradually the sailing ships began to call regularly to fill their water barrels, then they started shipping the tortoises aboard in their hundreds, storing them alive until fresh food was required during the voyage.

Later colonies of pigs were introduced to the islands in the hope that they would breed and allow the sailors to collect a supply of fresh pork. The pigs multiplied and did great damage by eating vast quantities of eggs and newly-hatched tortoises.

After a hundred years of ships calling on the islands, many of the various species had been completely exterminated and Aldabra was the only island (in the Indian Ocean) on which tortoises existed in any substantial number. The people who had settled on the Seychelles saw the folly of this extermination just in time — indiscriminate killing was banned and tortoises were taken from Aldabra to many of the other islands. They are again thriving and many farmers now semi-farm tortoises. During this subsequent introduction of tortoises from Aldabra, interbreeding occurred so that now there is only one recognized species of Giant Tortoise in the islands of the Indian Ocean.

### BIRDS IN THE PIGMY HIPPOPOTAMUS HOUSE

Besides the Giant Tortoises and the Pigmy Hippo, about which you have already read, the Pigmy Hippopotamus House is also the home of a number of small birds of several families and species.

The most interesting of these are three Emerald Humming Birds, which were introduced into the House in May, 1961. They are fierce and extremely territorially-minded little birds, and have divided up the House into three "spheres of influence." If one of them dares to violate the invisible boundaries of the other two, it is promptly chased back across the border.

As well as being fierce, they are also quite fearless. Any visitor wearing a flower in his buttonhole may find a Humming Bird hovering within inches of his lapel — its wings beating so fast that they are a blur. The wing beats are in the region of fifty beats a second, compared with the two wing beats a second of large birds, such as Herons or Storks.

In their natural state, Humming Birds live on nectar from flowers and on small insects. We feed them on an artificial nectar, which is placed in small glass tubes, with an opening towards the bottom. Large numbers of fruit flies are also bred for them.

Very different, though not very much larger, are the little Indian White-eyes, or Zosterops. An insectivorous and fruit-eating bird, they are about the size of our native Wren, apple green in colour with a white ring around the eyes, which gives them a comical nigger-minstrel look.

Originally they were placed in the Pigmy Hippo House to cope with an outbreak of greenfly on the tropical vegetation. So successfully have they accomplished their task that fruit flies have had to be reared for the Zosterops, as well as for the Humming Birds.

The White-eyes are not aggressive towards each other, except when nesting — then the Cock will not tolerate any other bird near the nest. This spring and summer, five or six nests were built, eggs laid and young ones hatched. At least four, and probably more, young birds were successfully reared. It is impossible to stocktake these tiny birds accurately in such a large area.

Finally there is a mixed group of small seed-eating birds of the Waxbill and Manikin species. These include Orange-cheeked and Red-eared Waxbills, Tricolour Nuns or Manikins and Red Avadavat Finches. All are small and all are sociable. They move about, feed and bathe in little flocks and are a new and successful addition to a most interesting corner of our Bird Collection.

#### PLANTS IN THE PIGMY HIPPOPOTAMUS HOUSE

This was the first of our Animal Houses to be planted with tropical and sub-tropical plants. At the time of planting, in the spring of 1958, we were not too sure of its success, having in mind the lighting and heating problems and the problem of introducing plant life with animals. However, the experiment proved to be a great success and encouraged us to continue with the planting of other Animal Houses.

We plant according to the temperature of the Houses and not so much with a view to providing plants from the natural habitat of the Animal occupying the House. In this House we get a large variation of temperature, reaching a minimum of 45° — 50° Fahrenheit on a cold night and rising to 80° — 90° on a hot day.

The wide variety of plants in this House include the following:

Pride of place in the centre of the House goes to a fine specimen of *Datura suaveolens*—it has reached a height of some twenty feet and is as much in width. In fact it has reached the roof and we have

to prune back each spring. It is covered all summer and well into the autumn with large, white and fragrant trumpet-like flowers. It is a sub-tropical shrub from Mexico and thoroughly enjoys the warmth it gets here, extra to that which it normally requires.

Two Banana plants (*Musa superba*)—native to India, have grown and fruited well and with the production of suckers to provide replacements when the parent plant has fruited, we have had fruit each year. The temperature is not as high as it should be for this plant, with the result that we get the fruit truss too late in the summer for proper development and ripening — but it serves its purpose of being of much interest to our visitors.

Crotons, another tropical plant, this time from Malaya, have been given the warmest position in the House — close to the hot water pipes. These evergreen shrubs are grown for their coloured ornamental foliage and vary considerably according to variety.

We have one plant of *Brunfelsia calycium* planted in the trough round the public passage. It is a native of Brazil and has purple fragrant flowers. This is a plant of some rarity and one that we are pleased to possess.

Planted on the wall at the far end of the House is a good specimen of *Monstera deliciosa*, an ornamental climber with large perforated leaves. The stems are furnished with aerial roots, which absorb moisture from the atmosphere and this plant, which is another native of Mexico, has cylindrical pineapple flavoured fruits.

On the same wall and covering quite a large area is the climber *Hoya carnosa* from China. It has a waxy pink and white flower and has flowered more profusely this summer than in previous years, having now reached a more restricted root run.

A *Strelitzia reginae* (Bird of Paradise Flower) can be seen under the Banana tree by the Hippo pool. It is not very happy here, being

too shaded by other foliage and we intend to move it to a more suitable site in another House.

A varied collection of dwarf tropical plants, too numerous to describe in this article, decorate the trough around the public passage way.

During the first years after planting, it was necessary to spray the plants with insecticide at regular intervals, to control infestation of red spider and greenfly. On the introduction of Humming Birds to the House, spraying had to stop for fear of killing the Birds. We were told that these Birds would keep the pests under control. This was quite true as far as the red spider was concerned and we had no more trouble with this pest — but they had no liking for greenfly and these increased at an alarming rate, as this insect will. To combat the Greenfly, Zosterops were introduced and these soon cleared the insects. Now everyone is happy — the Humming Birds with their red spiders, the Zosterops with the greenflies and we have no further need to spray for any pest in this House.

## GREENHOUSES

Many visitors to the Zoological Gardens see the enormous amount of bedding out which takes place and the floral background in so many of the animal Houses, without realizing that to maintain the vast botanical exhibition, there must be substantial nurseries. Already we have approximately twelve thousand square feet of glass, which is at present being increased by a further sixteen hundred square feet of greenhouse space. In addition there is also an Orchid House.

A large proportion of glass is used for the propagating of bedding out plants. As soon as Greenhouses have been emptied of summer bedding plants, they are immediately planted out with lettuces, tomatoes, cucumbers, etc. These provide food for the Zoo's cafes, as well as for the animals and birds.



*E. Kirkland*

SPOTTED GENET



*Mr. & Mrs. E. Sorby*

"JACK"

### GENETS

These are completely nocturnal animals, living in most parts of Africa and even in certain areas of Europe. There are many species and sub-species, but all are very similar in habits and appearance. They are long, slender grey animals with black spots, the exact colouration varying according to different localities. They have short legs and a long tail, which averages about two-thirds of the body length — making the animals total length in the region of two feet. The head is sharp and pointed with two little white patches on the face, which appear to have an almost luminous quality in the moonlight.

All Genets are as much at home in the trees as they are on the ground. They prey on small birds and small mammals, but they will take some fruit and certain insects, if nothing more to their liking is available.

We also have a cage of Black Genets — these are a melanistic form of the Spotted Genet and are particularly handsome creatures. The pair we have breed very well — usually two babies are born every six months and the young kittens always prove a popular exhibit.

### CHIMP BABY

Our latest baby Chimpanzee was born to Meg on 30th October, 1962. Jack, as the baby has been called, is Meg's fifth baby to be born at Chester Zoo. Unfortunately Meg has again proved to be a bad mother and the little Chimpanzee is being hand-reared. He is an extremely strong and healthy little animal and is growing fast on a diet of baby food.

### OTHER NEW ARRIVALS

Six Husky puppies were born on 30th October and Guy Fawkes Day saw the arrival of one Leopard Cub.

### CHEETAHS

One of the enclosures in the Zoo in which visitors can always see plenty of activity is that of the Cheetahs, near the Waterbus terminus. Chester has three magnificent specimens from East Africa and these are shown in a large grassy paddock which allows them plenty of space in which to run.

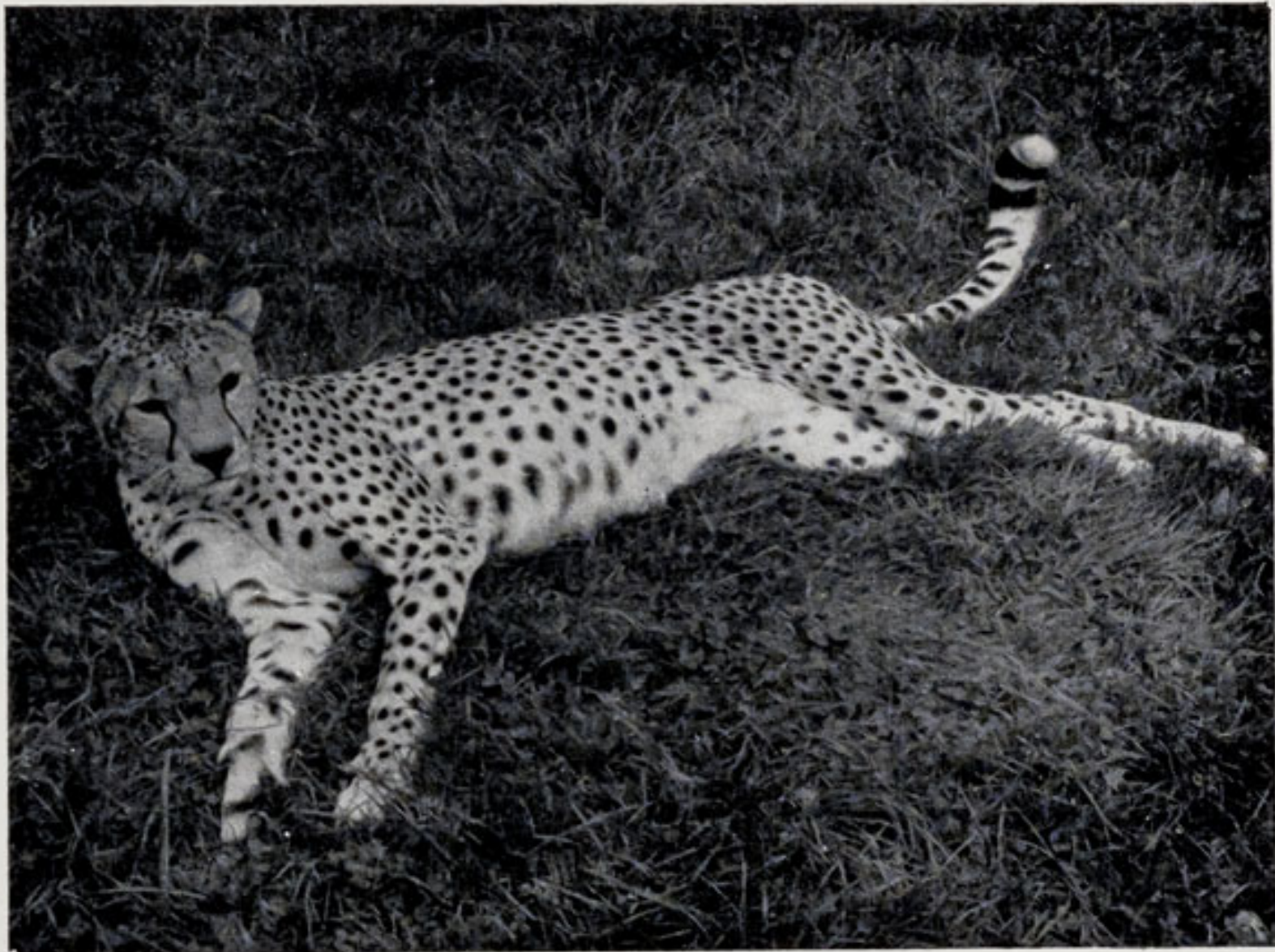
Cheetahs are built for speed with lean graceful bodies and long legs and tail. The tail is well covered with thick fur and acts as an excellent rudder, when the animal turns at speed. They are the fastest of all Mammals and rely on their speed when hunting. At one time they were tested on a Greyhound track and found to clock approximately seventy miles per hour.

Cheetahs have a wide distribution in Africa and were, at one time, found in India; however it is doubtful whether any still remain there in the wild. In East Africa their main prey is Thompson's Gazelle and Grant's Gazelle, although they do kill many other small antelope, hares and birds such as Guinea Fowl.

When hunting, their usual practice is to stalk as close to their prey as possible and then rush the final hundred yards or so. When on top of their victim, they hook the animal or bird with a strong down-ward thrust of their well-developed dew-claws. These dew-claws, unlike the rest of their claws, are fully retractile and form powerful curved weapons for holding their prey.

Cheetahs usually live and hunt in small family groups, but on occasions, as many as seven to ten animals may be found together. Sometimes they hunt singly, but when in a group only one appears to do the running down. They are clever hunters and seem to anticipate the moves of their prey. Frequently they make a capture by running obliquely across the path of the victim, rather than pursuing behind it, as it makes for safety.

They are chiefly diurnal by nature, but in the evenings and certainly on moonlight nights, it is by no means unusual to find Cheetahs still active and probably hunting. For the most part they seem to have no special hide-outs and, although they may hunt the same area for many months at a time, they seem content to settle down in any available bushes, rather than seek more substantial shelter. Their excellent eyesight helps them to avoid trouble



CHEETAH

*R. T. Bloom*

and they hunt entirely by sight. Their hearing is good, but they have a poor sense of smell. If placed at a dis-advantage in any way, possibly chased by dogs, they can and will climb trees, but under normal conditions would not choose to do so.

Cheetahs have a high pitched bird-like call which carries many miles. It comes from the back of the throat as the animal opens its mouth and gives a small backward jerk with its head. The call is made with apparently so little effort and is so unexpectedly bird-like that many people standing close by would never realise that the Cheetah was the owner of the call. It appears to be used entirely as a means of communicating with one another in the wild; after a short while in captivity it is seldom, if ever, used.

Visitors watching the Cheetahs at feeding time can hear a similar call, which they frequently make when excitedly scrambling for their food. This is not a true reproduction of the call in the wild. They can also utter an explosive spitting noise if annoyed or frightened.

Cheetahs seldom, if ever, take carrion or re-visit a kill and for this reason our Cheetahs are fed mainly on freshly killed rabbits and chickens, with a vitamin supplement.

### AQUARIUM NEWS

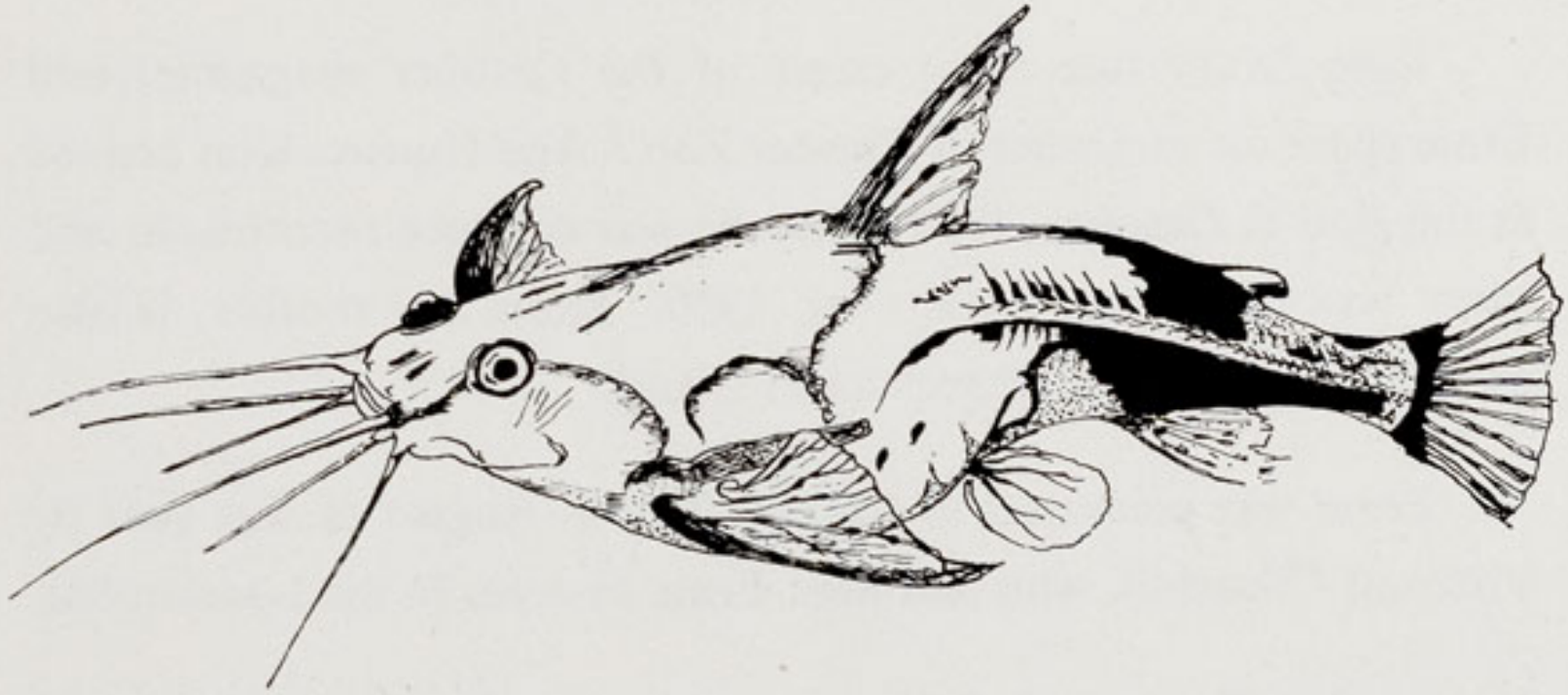
Since last month's article, additional specimens of the following fish have been added to the tropical section; Neon Tetras, Blind Cave Characins, Rosy Tetras, Red-nosed Tetras, Loreto Tetras and Albino Tiger Barbs. One small Puffer-fish was added to the Marine Section and eight Higoï Carp to the cold water section.

Due to their increase in size, it was necessary to move the Piranha, Electric Eels and African Knife-fish to larger tanks, where they will remain until next winter.

At the time of writing, we have an interesting and varied collection of tropical Catfish, numbering some forty individuals. Most of these are inclined to be secretive, lurking furtively among the plants and only occasionally coming into view when darting across the front of their tanks. The observer will have to search carefully if he wishes to see all.

The most active and attractive individuals belong to the genus *Corydoras*. They are small, inquisitive fish, rarely exceeding three inches in length and apparently the victims of constant hunger. They may be seen at almost any time of the day, grubbing around in the gravel with their bewhiskered noses, searching out the smallest particle of unwanted food and eating it rapidly. There are several different species of *Corydoras*, ranging in colour from dark brown to black and white.

One of the most unusual Catfish and one which is rarely observed is the "Talking Catfish," *A. spinosissimus*. This Amazonian fish occasionally buries itself in the gravel, with only its eyes and mouth showing. This is one of the few fish that will make a noise—emitting a croaking sound when disturbed. The specimen in the Aquarium has become very tame and consequently it is necessary to lift it out of the water before it will voice its disapproval and hop back into the tank.



*D. Murphy*

"TALKING" CATFISH

There are many other species of Catfish on view, including two eight inch specimens of *P. plècóstomus*, which, because of their large appetites are moved from tank to tank, eating a lot of the debris and acting in much the same way as a vacuum cleaner!

### FURTHER NEW ENCLOSURES

There is considerable activity in the area beyond the new Rhinoceros House at the present time. This is due to the construction of several large enclosures, surrounded by Ahas (sunken fences), which will give visitors an uninterrupted view over a wide area. These enclosures will accommodate a varied collection of antelope, deer and cattle. The ground, which was perfectly flat, has been made undulating, to provide protection from some of the stronger winds and, at the same time, to display to better advantage some of the animals which will be contained in the enclosures.

### MAINLY ABOUT ERNIE

Kim, Mary (see front cover of the October magazine) and Ernie share an enclosure in Chester Zoo's Ape House. Kim arrived at the Zoo in October, 1960, when he was eighteen months old and Mary was born here in October, 1959. Babu, her mother, is also on show on the older Chimpanzees island.

Ernie was presented to Chester Zoo in August of this year by Viscount Churchill, who had kept Ernie as a pet in his London flat.

At first Ernie missed the constant human companionship to which he had been accustomed and refused to leave his sleeping quarters with the other Chimpanzees each morning. It soon became clear that Ernie was afraid of Susie, who then shared the enclosure with Kim and Mary. Susie was immediately transferred to another Chimpanzee group — to Ernie's obvious relief.

From the day of his arrival Ernie was "mothered" by Mary. She made repeated attempts to play with Ernie and would take him in her arms when he cried with fright at Susie's more boisterous advances.

With the removal of Susie, Ernie was quite happy to spend the morning in his indoor enclosure, but in the afternoon he cried to be allowed to return to the sleeping quarters. Now, three months after his arrival, Ernie is completely adjusted to living with other Chimpanzees and perfectly at home in Chester Zoo. Fortunately, at four years old, he was young enough to settle down quickly.

Although Ernie still prefers to play with Mary, who is a very gentle animal, he can more than hold his own with the lively Kim. Occasionally Ernie's Keeper gives him a cigarette, which he enjoys and prefers to smoke through a holder. Mary strongly disapproves of this habit and sits in a corner her nose wrinkled in disgust.



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