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"Our Zoo News"

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"CHESTER CHRONICLE" PHOTOGRAPH

"Hello there! Pit, one of the two bears which formerly belonged to a large circus, waves a friendly greeting across to the four new female sea lions, Selina, Sabrina, Sophia and Sonia, as they are released after their long journey from California into Sammy's pool.

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The North of England Zoological Society,

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Our Zoo News.

EDITORIAL.

The putting forward of the clocks a week after Easter this year affected the attendances at Chester Zoo over the holiday. Nor were they improved by the cold, grey-skied weather we had.

An attendance of 6,788 was recorded on Good Friday against 10,761 last year. Figures for Saturday were practically the same as those on that day in 1954. 7,571 people visited the Zoo on Sunday, 5,789 less than on last year's Easter Sunday, and there were 3,000 less visitors on the Monday than on the corresponding day a year ago, when the attendance figure was 21,285.

Little happened of any consequence over the week-end, except that one of the elephants, Barbar, grew frightened of the crowds and charged through the Zoo. She was soon caught, however, and fortunately there were no serious accidents. But Barbar will certainly not be giving rides for the rest of the season!

In spite of the tread of thousands of pairs of feet past the aviaries during Easter, many of the parakeets started to nest.

A pair of Alexandrines (the largest parakeets in existence) from India, two pairs of Ring-Necked (India), a Ring-Necked and a Lutino (yellow), a pair of Mealy Rosellas (Australia), two Cockatiels (Australia), one pair of Prince of Wales parakeets, outstanding for the beautiful pastel shades of their feathers, and a pair of Barnards, are among the many birds which have gone to nest.

A pair of mallards (wild duck), too, are nesting, and two of the swans, whose home is the pond next to the tigers' enclosure, caused quite a stir when they started building their nest. They insisted on doing this by the valve on the pipe line which connects the pond and the tigers' pool. If they had been allowed to finish their nest here it would have meant no fresh water could have been pumped in for

the tigers. The nest was moved, therefore, more than once, and eventually the swans took the hint and with characteristic dignity and white-winged grace moved their feathers and straw a little distance away. They take it in shifts to sit on the large, imposing, feather bed-style nest they have made together. Surely there is a moral in that somewhere?

One of the Zoo's latest developments is the completion of a comparatively low wall round the large wallaby paddock to replace the approximately 15-foot wire-netting fence. The difference has to be seen to be believed.

Apart from the much better view visitors now have of the wallabies, and the improvement for photographers, our gardeners have garnished the walls with four more quaint-shaped flower-beds, two planted with azaleas and two with rose bushes.

New Arrivals.

COMMON BUZZARD.

On learning that an adult Common Buzzard was caught in a crow trap on an estate in Rhydtalog, North Wales, a party from the Zoo set off to rescue it.

The buzzard had two crows for company and a dead sheep, and doubtless as there was still snow in the district and the bird of prey would have had difficulty in finding food, the sheep had proved too great a temptation.

In a poor condition and very hungry the buzzard, which is a female, was put in with three other buzzards we have and immediately snatched all their nourishment as well as her own. This became a favourite practice of hers, but the other birds soon got wise to her tricks. When each received its food it clamped one foot down protectively on it!

RING-TAILED LEMUR.

A second engineer on a steamship which docked at Liverpool recently brought with him a Ring-tailed Lemur which he had kept





Who could doubt now that spring is really here, for lambs are a real symbol of this season. In our picture one of the keepers hold Candy and Cora, a pair of Soay lambs.



*"CHESTER CHRONICLE" PHOTOGRAPHS.
It's Wallaby Tea-time and both mother and baby (the baby tucked cosily in the parent's pouch) are beginning to enjoy their meal.*

as a pet on the trip from South Africa. The Lemur, which was born in Madagascar some time last year, is quite tame and a great favourite, and goes under the impressive name of Mister Mackay!

WALLABIES.

Three of our fifteen wallabies have babies in their pouches. These animals are born in a very unusual way. When they are very tiny they climb into the mother's pouch and attach themselves to a nipple and remain like this for some time until they are old enough to climb out on to the ground.

ORYX.

The first Oryx (Beisa Oryx) to be born in Chester Zoo arrived in mid-April. It has been called Joey. His mother, Jill, arrived here in October, 1952, and Jack, the proud father, came last July.

The Oryx is a beautiful animal belonging to the Antelope family, and hails from East Africa.

SOAY LAMBS.

Two of our prettiest babies are Soay lambs, Candy and Cora, who were born here one fine, fresh, cloudless spring morning. As the name suggests, Soay Sheep come from the Island of Soay, near St. Kilda, a small island far out in the ocean off the west coast of Scotland. They are the most primitive breed of sheep in the British Isles and probably little changed from the breed which was kept by man in the Stone Age. They have small horns and short wool with longer hair mixed with it, whereas the domestic Sheep has very long wool and little hair.

CARPET PYTHON.

Easter Sunday, as well as bringing us crowds of visitors, brought us a Carpet Python, which is quite a rare Australian snake.

PUFF ADDER AND ROYAL PYTHON.

London Zoo has presented us with a Puff Adder and a Royal Python. The latter is sometimes known as a "Ball" Python, because of its distinguishing habit of rolling up into a ball as a way of protecting itself.

Animal Characters.

SATAN.

Since his arrival at the Zoo in July, 1951, we have been unable to persuade our very wild tiger, Satan, to leave his inside quarters. The only sign of life during the whole of that time has been the startling amber glow of a pair of huge bright eyes in the darkness.

Until recently, that is. One day his keeper managed to coax him out on to the wide stretch of grass in the open, where a very comely tigress, Sheika, was lying in the sun. Little by little after that Satan became used to the daylight and to the female, and we think that the pair have mated.

Expedition Wallaby.

The yellow van belonging to the Zoo shot out of the main gates and flashed hurriedly into a maze of country lanes. The hunt was on! A few seconds earlier we had received a message from a stunned woman. A wallaby! was out!!! Indeed, it had been seen hopping around in Farmer Rowlands' top meadow as broad as daylight.

Stopping only to make further enquiries, we soon had the situation well in hand. We discharged two brave hunters at the bottom meadow to beat upwards in a circle. The remainder of us drove in another circle round the top field. Excellent tactics!

Half an hour later two very weary figures were observed hopping in best wallaby style over water ditches and viewing the remaining "bush" uneasily. We decided grimly we

ought to have brought our field glasses with us. We greeted the two co-hunters in silence, returned shamefacedly to the Zoo—and tucked ourselves away out of sight.

At 4.45 that afternoon another call came through, however, and a little of our former spirit returned to us. Here was a chance to redeem ourselves. A cage was put arrogantly on the van and one would-be enticer clutched a loaf of bread to him.

This time striding off to the left, we entered a large field banked by a canal, where our young guide had seen this elusive creature (no, creatures, because we had now discovered that two of our wallabies were missing) a few minutes before. The only hedge near us was marked down. We crept up to it. We pounced with a cry upon a small brown moving creature our Egyptian Goose flew indignantly away, hurling "goosey" language right, left and centre.

Then we flung discretion to the winds, and crept off, each one of us, on our own personal wallaby hunt.

An hour later a small green van slunk into the Zoo sheds, its contents, one empty cage, two women, two men, and one boy, sadly eating one unused brown loaf.

Expedition Wallaby had failed!

The Director was busy checking all round the Zoo. Glumly, he turned to the wallaby paddock. It seemed to him that he had been doing nothing but hop round after hopping wallabies for days. Then—what!! no, it couldn't be! Speechless with amazement he stared at two meek brown statue-like forms, waiting, oh so patiently, to be let into the Zoo grounds.

Mr. and Mrs. Wallaby had returned home after one glorious day's jumping through the lazy English countryside.

G. M. Ashby.

Spring Cleaning.

A zoo has to be spring-cleaned just as much as a house, and for the past few weeks we have been very busy, scrubbing and mopping, dusting and polishing. The cages have been thoroughly cleaned, and smell fresh and look tidy once more.

The moving of Jeanie Sweeney, our young Himalayan bear, was included in the spring-cleaning operations. Jeanie had outgrown the cage where we put her on arrival last summer from Calcutta. We could scarcely get her through the door, for she has grown very plump and prosperous-looking. However, she was coaxed into a crate and transferred to the cage which was once the home of the baby lion cubs, and which is bigger—and has a larger door! When she is old enough she will be moved into the roomy bear enclosures.

Our two male Coatimundi, Frankie and Freddie, have shown themselves to be very clean animals—or maybe it was just love of mischief they displayed when they insisted on taking the hose pipes literally into their own hands and spraying their quarters liberally, if not methodically, with water. Not at all a comfortable half-hour for their cage companions, Henry, the ant-eater, and the peace-loving armadillo!

The Lion has Two Wives.

For several weeks Achilles, our magnificent lion, who came to us in 1948 at the age of two, was allowed to look through the grille at Princess and Coronation, the two lovely lionesses in the adjoining enclosures!

On March 23rd, we went a step further. We opened the door between the two cages, and Achilles, Princess and Coronation got together.

Achilles seems to be devoted to his two mates and the sentiment is certainly reciprocated.

cated. The females are jealous of each other and if the one seems to be displaying just a little too much affection, if there is just a little too much rubbing of noses, the other intervenes, and there follows a little bickering match, which is fascinating to watch, and which ends with Achilles, "king of the forest" showing that he is also master, as it were, in his own house, and dismissing the unruly couple with one look and a lofty gesture of the paw.

Sea Lion Saga.

Our sea lions continue to be "in the news". Their story occupies no mean single-column, three-line space in the newspapers, either.

First of all the four new females from California were in the lime light.

They say that "women are the cause of all the trouble". That certainly can be applied to Selina, Sabrina, Sophia and Sonia. Paying our regular morning visit to Sammy's pool one day we were startled at what we saw; swimming round with Sammy and the "girls" was Sonny—born in the Zoo only last May—and Sammy's son and heir!

Our surprise knew no bounds because when we put one of the female sea lions with Sonny in his own pool on her arrival, Sonny was far from pleased. He had been thoroughly spoilt, of course, and resented the presence of a stranger, who appeared to be the current centre of attraction, too. He was very aggressive with the friendly little Sophia, and extremely childish. Sophia was so upset by her cold reception that she left him and joined Sammy and her three former companions.

Everything was going to be fine now, we thought; Sammy had plenty of scope for showing his authority; his wives were settling down splendidly; and Sonny had got his own way.

It must have been just a matter of bachelor principles, however, as far as Sonny was concerned, and it was to be the last childish thing

he did. Sophia had left her mark, for it must have been loneliness after she had gone that made him break through the fence, rejoin her—and grow up.

Little did we think the time would come when Sonny could be accused of trespassing on father's territory and even carrying on a mild flirtation with one of papa's harem in front of papa's very eyes. What extremely bad taste!

The very next day, when a lorry driver for a Liverpool transport company told his foreman that as he was passing through Upton village on his way back to Liverpool he saw a seal crossing the road, sceptical looks, we are sure, were not lacking!

Nevertheless, the man was emphatic, and as he knew Chester Zoo to be close to the village the foreman thought he had better just check up and rang us early that morning. Shortly afterwards, an Upton builder phoned and said his wife had looked through the window, and thinking she saw their dog struggling in their nearby two-acre eight-foot deep pool she had gone down to the water's edge to get him out. Running back to her husband with a face like a ghost's she had exclaimed: "There's a sea serpent in the lake"!

On investigation we found that the "sea-serpent" was none other than Sonny. Sammy must have hounded him out of his enclosure and his son had obviously left the Zoo altogether, flipped along the road for over a quarter of a mile, and then into the pool, whose owner wanted him removed as quickly as possible, chiefly because he had stocked the pool with fish and Sonny was having a grand time throwing long, gleaming, silver bream up into the air and killing them off rather rapidly!

The adventurous little sea lion was enticed out of the pit and after doing penance for a few days in an inside cage he was put back in the pool with Sammy, who was apparently so numbed with shock at the sudden return of

his not-particularly-welcome son that he forgot to take steps to remove him again.

Ah, we thought, peace at last! We were optimists.

Exactly a week later, in the morning, another disconcerting discovery was made. Sophia had disappeared. Whether she was being capricious and wanted to show Sonny that she had no intention of remaining at his beck and call, we do not know.

Her loss was reported by one of the keepers at about 7 a.m., and a careful search of the Zoo grounds and the neighbourhood outside the Zoo boundaries ensued, but at midday she had not been found.

For the past few days Sophia had been living in Sonny's pool—alone. This had been newly fortified and Sonny was about to be put with her again. However, in spite of the fact that Sophia is only small, she managed to scale the wire-netting.

At about 1.30 we had news of her. She had been seen by three men at Picton Gorse—three quarters of a mile away from the Zoo. Sitting under a sign post, she looked as though she were wondering which way to go next.

We set out to find her, and meanwhile Sophia crossed the road, walked up a side-lane, and traversed a large field, from which she was chased by her three discoverers into a deep ditch by the road.

"Well, I've never seen a sea lion in this field before", said an amused farmer.

We lost a little of the faith we had in Sophia and wondered whether we had been prudent in christening her by that name. After all, "Sophia" suggests dignity and decorum.

Lilliputian Zoo.

A fierce lion in your dining room? A graceful giraffe on the mantelpiece? Chimpanzees and rabbits the size of peas. Impossible! you may say.

But if you look in the windows of the Zoo souvenir shop—there they are: tiny models of all the animals in the Zoo. You will even find waving palm trees and fencing to make cages.

Many boys and girls collect these models to start their own small zoos at home, buying an animal each time they visit us. Kind ones—and these seem to be many—purchase them to take home to "Mum, who couldn't come", and young Americans buy a selection to send to the "folks back home". I was confused when one American asked me for a "sack" to put them in, until I realised he wanted a paper bag!

Of course, there are post cards and gifts for Dad and all the family; a very interesting brochure with good photographs makes the ideal memento to be looked at long after the visit. There is something to please everybody who wants a small keepsake to "take away".

Lastly, let me mention the bottles of aspirin we stock especially for "Mums" feeling jaded after the long walk round!

M. Rimmer.

Badger for a Pet.

Badgers are among the shyest animals in existence and rarely leave their homes (the correct term is "sets"), except at night. We were surprised to learn that the male badger which was presented to us recently had been kept as a house pet for about twelve months by a young corporal and his Rumanian wife in their army barracks house at Imphal, near York.

Out shooting one day Mr. Eddie Ainsley found the animal, then only a baby, in a gin trap in a wood at Naburn, near his camp. He took the badger home and then to a vet., who treated a very swollen hind leg. Robin (he was christened that by his affectionate foster-parents) was fed with milk from a bottle by Mr. Ainsley's wife, who eventually nursed him back to strength. Meat was then introduced

into his diet. Robin was extremely tame and used to climb out of the box in which he slept, by the sitting-room fire, and walk about the house and when Mrs. Ainsley took him out for walks he made no attempt, while he was convalescing, to leave the warmth of her shoulder, and later allowed a collar and lead to be fixed to him, so that he could walk on his own four feet.

Now fully grown, Robin was loathe to leave Mrs. Ainsley, of whom he was especially fond, but he settled down very well in the large, tree-shaded sunken pool called the Donkey's Nest—with a female badger for company.

Mrs. Ainsley, on the other hand, did not settle down at all well. She missed Robin so much that after two visits to see how he was getting on she asked if she might take him home again. He said a last farewell to his newly-found girl friend, and once more nestling into the familiar shoulder of his mistress he was carried off to York and back to the fireside.

Incidents in the Life of Two Keepers.

. . . . Confronting us on the side of the service passage was a large, very interesting box. Being female, and naturally curious, we decided to investigate. It was not until the lid was half off that the terrifying thought struck us: we were in the Reptile House! Here the large cases littered all over with labels reading "with Care" and "Livestock" should be, we knew, treated with respect. With a sigh, therefore, we started to scrub out one of the pens.

Half an hour later in bounced the boss. "Seen the new poisonous lizard"? he enquired happily.

"No", we answered, with a thankful note in our voices, "we haven't".

The boss started over to the mysterious box with obviously but one thought—to remedy our ignorance—and we, the keepers, backed away. We're rather fond of lizards, actually, in fact we have a perfect pet answering to the name of "Pineapple", but poisonous? . . .).

The boss stared silently at the empty box, and looked slowly round. We—the keepers—looked away quickly. After all, we'd had half an hour of it. It was time for us, the keepers, to go.

"He must have got out", said the boss, with startling accuracy.

The head keeper of the reptiles came in and a thorough search was begun by the boss and the head keeper of the reptiles, while we—the keepers—offered exceedingly helpful advice (from a safe distance). Eventually, the boss, with a loud cry, pounced on a swiftly moving creature. We—the keepers—with an even louder cry almost disappeared from human sight.

A look of disgust spread over the boss's face.

"This lizard isn't poisonous. It's only a common gecko!" and with a "tut" of annoyance he stamped out of the Reptile House, while we—the keepers—gathered our tattered nerves together, and wondered whether to start on the Green Mamba cage.

