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# “Our Zoo News”

and Guide.

A MONTHLY CHRONICLE OF NEWS OF  
CHESTER ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS.

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*By courtesy of J. S. Parker, Saughall Massie, Cheshire.*

“Nomad,” of the Children's Hour, feeding the Sea-Lions at Chester Zoo.

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## News Flashes.

Quite a lot of things have happened at the Zoo during the past month. Our Beavers have produced a family, but the babies are very nervous and only seem to venture out late at night when nearly all the visitors have gone, although we know of at least three visitors who have been fortunate enough to see these rather rare and unusual babies.

Other Zoo Babies include two Fallow Deer Fawns, one spotted and one very dark. A very attractive youngster is a Leadbeater's cockatoo which is exactly like its handsome parents. We have four young Lutino Ring-necked Parrakeets, three are all yellow and one is green. We thought that we were going to have some young Macaws this year, as Polly the red and yellow macaw sat on three eggs for about six weeks. Unfortunately she suddenly deserted her eggs and when we examined them we found that two were addled and that the third had a young bird dead inside.

We have had quite a number of new arrivals recently, including four Wallabies, a Llama and some water-fowl. A very exciting addition to the Zoo has just been purchased and we hope that she will be here by the end of this month. "She" is another elephant called "Babar" and we are busily working on the new elephant house so that the newcomer will have a home. "Babar" is not quite as big as Molly but she is very fond of children as we are sure that she and Molly will be good company for each other.

Topsy, the baby chimp, is probably the most popular animal at the Zoo at the present time. She is now at the age when she gets into all sorts of mischief and anything new she must investigate. Every morning before the Zoo is open to the public and of course provided that the weather is fine, Topsy's keeper takes her for a walk around the grounds, and how Topsy enjoys herself! Everyone of course makes a great fuss of her and she can wheedle anything out of any of the Zoo Staff with

her lovable expressions. One morning last week we decided to take a photograph of her on the lawn in front of the house. She was playing around with an old blanket which she refuses to leave and takes with her wherever she goes and we got out our cameras to take a snap of her playing. However, Topsy had other ideas; she took one look at the camera and decided to see for herself the peculiar-looking object. She ran up to us and with one hand tried to take hold of the camera. The other hand was still clutching her blanket but when she found that she couldn't take the camera away with one hand, she dropped the blanket, then stood on it so that we could not take it away from her and set about trying to remove the camera with both hands. We let her take hold of the camera and she examined it carefully but as it didn't make any special noises and she could not see anything very interesting about it, she decided to bang it on the ground to see whether that would produce better effects. It certainly produced effects for we immediately removed the camera from Topsy's grasp! Meanwhile two interested spectators had been watching the performance, namely two guinea fowl. They seemed to take a very dim view of Topsy being allowed the freedom of the lawns which they consider their property and showed their disapproval in no uncertain manner, by making the most hideous screeches. Topsy immediately forgot the camera and turned her gaze on to the noisy intruders. She had never been so near to the guinea fowl before and from the expression on her face, looked as though she thought them most odd looking creatures. She seemed fascinated by them and by the noise they produced, and took her blanket into the middle of the path and sat on it staring with unblinking eyes at the guinea-fowl, who eventually got tired as it was obvious that the newcomer was not going to move, and they wandered away making disgruntled noises to another part of the grounds.

## The Rabbitry.

Something new at the Zoo is always worth mentioning and boys and girls who keep household pets will be most interested in the Zoo's new collection of rabbits.

Almost opposite the last block of aviaries on the way out of the Zoo, the Zoo staff have constructed a very fine modern rabbitry, which has become a favourite corner with the children.

We hope that it will prove educational as well as interesting and that boys and girls who keep rabbits as pets will be able to see how these useful animals should be fed and housed.

The Zoo rabbits enjoy large roomy well-ventilated clean hutches and spacious runs, where they can run and burrow in perfect freedom. All the popular breeds, Silver Rex, Old English, Chinchilla, Dutch, and others, romp in a well-wooded green paddock which has been divided off into long runs by strips of wire netting.

Youngsters who go in for rabbits to help to solve Mother's meat problem can see large numbers of very fine specimens bred for this purpose busily burrowing in the grass, surrounded on either side by rabbits with valuable pelts like the Chinchilla and Silver Rex varieties, and families of young Black and White Dutch rabbits which always make the ideal garden pets.

Walking round to the other side of the rabbitry the interested young visitor will find that the Zoo's keepers have provided him or her with the answer to breeding healthy rabbits. If your youngsters die when they are only half grown be sure to visit this side of the enclosure and see if your breeding does have had all the comfort they should have had when the family was young. Here each doe and her youngsters live quietly in a large clean hutch

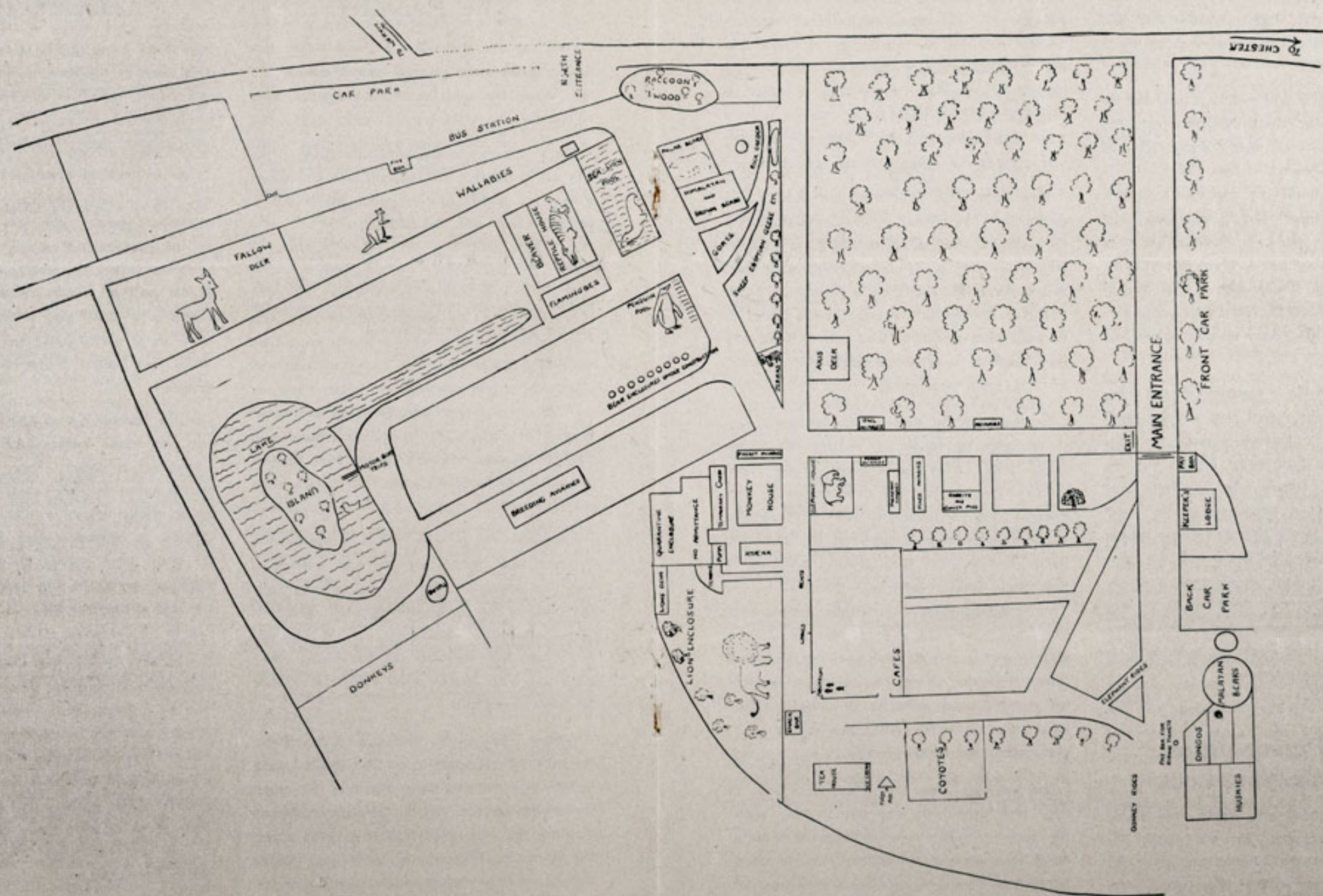
with a small run in front, and their carefully balanced diet—good feeding is most important at this stage in the young rabbit's life—is always placed in clean dishes by the girl in charge. Please note that each mother has a bowl of clear cold water, many young rabbit enthusiasts do not realize that Mother rabbit requires plenty of drinking water.

Here well shaded from the hot sun, these tiny little balls of fluff bring the younger children in droves, and parents often have to be firm when the little ones decide there and then that they want to remain outside the rabbitry and don't want to go and catch the bus home. What could be more lovable to a child than a baby rabbit, and here black, white, silver, golden and chocolate coloured babies romp around in full view of the delighted youngsters.

At the far end of the rabbitry two large hutches and runs house another kind of household pet, Guinea pigs or Cavies. These tiny rodents resemble the rabbit in some ways (although they are not as intelligent) but in most of their habits and certainly in appearance they lean more towards the mouse family. They are not more than ten inches in length and are stockily built, with tiny ears, and of course no tail.

These pretty little creatures are to be seen at the Zoo in many colours, black and white, and yellow being the most prominent colours, although some of them are a greyish brown shade, and they all dash in and out of their hutches murmuring in soft little cries, or grunting loudly and shrieking in the most unmannerly way—it depends on what the argument is about. There is always at least one dam with a family of six or seven young ones parading round the run with her family following in a straight military line behind her.

Guinea pigs are lovable little creatures and do not require much attention but those who go in for



Plan of Chester Zoological Gardens

them should remember that it is essential to keep them warm and dry. Like the rabbit they will thrive well on roots, corn, fresh vegetables and other household scraps.

I wonder if those of you who keep pets ever try to find out anything about their ancestry. The rabbit has always been widely distributed over Europe, but it was believed to have been first introduced to the British Isles by man who brought it over from the continent. Not so many years ago man introduced the rabbit to Australia and New Zealand, and they soon became a serious pest to the farmer, and although various methods were tried to cut down their number, the rabbit still continues to thrive and multiply far quicker than the farmers can deal with them.

The Little Guinea Pig is a stranger to this country, it is found in its natural state all over South America and lives in burrows in much the same way as our rabbit. Long before America was discovered the Incas (people who inhabited Peru) domesticated the Cavy which was to be found in that part of the land. This species later became known as Cutler's Cavy, and it was from this breed that the Guinea pig such as we know it to-day originally came. Dutchmen first brought it back to Europe in the 16th century shortly after America was discovered and now nearly 500 years later the little cavy is still a popular pet.

J. Moffatt.

## Zoo Personalities.

### No. 7. THE FLAMINGOES.

A lady on our staff was highly amused one afternoon some time ago. She was passing the large enclosure near the entrance gate when she happened to overhear two little boys talking. "Oh look, there's the stork that brought me, but I don't suppose it will remember" said one and his com-

panion said excitedly"—and there's the one that brought me." The reason for the small boy's excitement were the two Flamingoes who resided in this particular enclosure during the chilly winter months when their own watery home proved to be too chilly for them, and so they came to share a home with various coloured rabbits, the strutting peacocks and the cheeky chattering guinea-fowl.

These large white birds with their peculiar oval shaped backs are believed by some ornithologists to be associated with the Stork Family so that the little boys were not so very wrong when they mistook them for "The Storks". Other more recent authorities however believe that they are related to the duck tribe, as did the wise men of Persia who many hundreds of years ago christened the Flamingo "Kaj-j-surkh" (red goose).

Flamingoes inhabit most of the warmer regions of the earth but seldom get as far north as the British Isles. Modern Composers of the South American style of Music are world famous for their beautiful tunes describing the beauty and splendour of the Flamingo both in flight and at rest on the water. India's great lakes provide thousands of these birds with a home and travellers describe them as massed upon the waters like floating rose-swept islands or in flight like a fiery cloud in the sunset hovering over the waters against the snow-capped mountains. North America too has a member of the Flamingo tribe but the American Flamingo, unlike its snowy pink-tinged cousin, has a plumage of full vermillion scarlet.

Our specimens come from West Africa and are large white birds with long thin stick-like scarlet legs and long slender necks. One of the strangest things about these birds are their strangely shaped bills. The Flamingo's beak is very large and seems out of all proportion to its head, the beak turns sharply down and is pale pink in colour edged

with black. It is the only bird to feed with its head upside down. When feeding, the Flamingo bends its long neck down and turns its head under the water the wrong way up, and its bill thus becomes a sort of spoon, and it feeds on small aquatic animals, which it finds in the water and small water plants which it scoops for on the river bed with its beak.

Our Flamingoes live largely on a shrimp diet, for we find that it is the shrimp element which keeps the pink colour on their plumage; visitors will have noticed that there is always a bucket near the Flamingoes and you may have wondered what it was doing there. The shrimps are placed in the bottom of the bucket and covered with water so that the bird can feed as naturally as possible. If you are lucky you may see one of them come up to get a feed and you will then see what is meant by it feeding with its head under the water the wrong way up.

The pink tinge on the Flamingo is found on the sides of the bird mostly on the wing feathers, the strongest of which are inky black. Visitors will be able to see the exquisite rose coloured hues on the under-surface of the wings when the birds stretch their wings or beat them on the water.

These birds have exceptionally long thin red legs with knobby knees, are keen waders and are usually seen standing in the water near the edges of lakes or rivers; they are also powerful swimmers in deep water. They fly in much the same way as wild geese, in strict formation with their long necks stretched out ahead and their legs trailing out behind them. When on the wing they utter the same loud hoarse cracked cries as the wild geese.

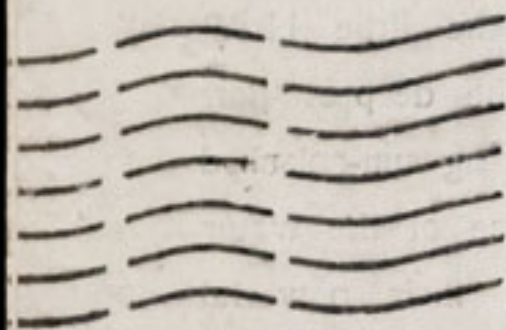
Few visitors will have witnessed the return of our Flamingoes to their summer home. Early one morning just before the recent spell of warm weather, I happened to be going to the Reptile House when I noticed strange happenings at the Flamingo Pool.

Two of the keepers were struggling with two very peculiar bundles of sacking which were anything but still, but after a few hectic minutes, the sacking was off and the Flamingoes were home again.

I was not the only spectator—the four little black-footed Penguins who are housed temporarily in the Flamingo pool, stood in a row and watched too—and when these strange birds with such long legs emerged from the sacking the penguins took a very poor view of it and promptly took to the water (a thing they seldom do in the daytime) and swam vigorously round the pool, as if to say “keep off our waterway”. The haughty flamingoes, however, took not the slightest notice of the little birds’ efforts, and waded straight into the deepest part of the pool; they spread their gleaming sun-splashed wings and began to flay the surface of the water with them, faster, faster, whirred their powerful wings till all that one could see was the faint scarlet hue on their glittering snowy bodies through cascades of crystal water which foamed and surged rippling the unusual glass surface on the pool, while their long white swan-like necks wove in and out like the arms of the dancing ballerinas in the ballet. The four little penguins bobbed up and down like corks for a few minutes and then all marched sailor-like out of the pool in disgust and stood in a row on the bank and blinked in astonishment at this interruption in their otherwise quiet life. Someone else also was watching, the little Straw-necked Ibis who had shared the pool with the Flamingoes last year and who had returned a few days previously, went and stood on the highest grassy mound in the enclosure and kept excitedly calling out his welcome to his old friends in his loud hoarse croaks.

However it was all soon over and the Penguins have now accepted their companions who tower over them in the water, but otherwise do not interfere and all is now quiet again in the pool.

J. Moffatt.



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