

"Our Zoo News"

A MONTHLY CHRONICLE OF NEWS OF
CHESTER ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS.

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We must apologise to our readers for the reduced size of this issue of "Our Zoo News." The blocks which were intended for the illustrations have apparently been lost in the post and, as time was short, we had no alternative but to publish the News without illustrations.

The summer of 1945 has been a record one for attendances at Chester Zoo but, as usually happens, about mid-September there was a sudden sharp drop, a factor which has always to be taken into consideration and prepared for beforehand. This drop is, of course, accounted for by the fact that about 20th September most children have returned to school after the holidays. Unfortunately, owing to the serious shortage of staff, full advantage could not be taken of the influx of visitors this year. The labour problem is now much worse than at any time during the war and, like many other undertakings, we are hoping for an early improvement. The food situation is in some respects slightly improved, but prices are still very high and the utmost care must always be taken to avoid any waste.

It will be seen from the news from Dublin Zoo in this issue that Shelagh, a Lioness which went to Dublin from Chester Zoo in 1938, has had the misfortune to lose her last cubs. It may interest readers to know that Shelagh and her sister were only a week or two old when they travelled to Chester Zoo by car in a lady's lap. We obtained them, together with some Malayan Bears, in exchange for some birds of which we had a surplus at the time.

They were bottle-fed from birth, and upon arrival at Chester were fed on Lactol, a proprietary food sold for rearing puppies, on which they thrived well. We have found it possible to rear Lion cubs on the bottle at Chester Zoo, but this of course involves a lot of extra work and frequent attention.

Birds, which before the war were a popular feature at Chester Zoo, are now re-appearing, and we hope that by next season we shall have many aviaries again filled with our feathered friends.

Some time ago we mentioned in the "News" that a Silver Pheasant had commenced to change sex. This bird has now, as far as its plumage is concerned, practically completed the change-over and is, almost as brightly coloured as her former husband, but she is not so large nor do we expect her to grow. We have just referred to this bird in the feminine gender, perhaps we ought not to have done. Anyway, we will let it pass this time as a compliment to a very gallant lady who has in past years reared several families in the midst of many dangers, and fought fierce battles in defence of her off-spring.

Two pairs of Reeve's Pheasants have been added to our collection. These will, of course, be kept in an aviary, but we hope to breed with them and, in time, to turn some of the young ones out to enjoy complete freedom.

Golden Pheasants have completely vanished from the Zoo grounds where they have enjoyed their liberty for many years. There are several reasons why this has happened but, as soon as we can, we must introduce this colourful bird again.

Three Cygnets have been added to the collection. The first pair were presented by Mrs. Mortimer, who

obtained the mother swan from Chester Zoo some years ago. The other Cygnet, which is much older than the first two and is fully feathered, had arrived at a prisoner-of-war camp where he was making himself a nuisance, and the Zoo was asked to remove him.

These additions will help to make our new waterfowl enclosure more attractive, as swans are always a source of interest.

THE BROWN BEAR.

Certain specimens may have come from Russia, where this Bear is common, although large numbers still exist in Germany, Hungary, and the Scandinavian countries; in fact, the Brown Bear inhabits most of the countries of Europe and Asia north of the Himalayan range. It certainly inhabited the British Isles up to about the seventh century, after which time it seems to have gradually disappeared as a wild inhabitant of these Islands.

In size the Brown Bear is nearly as large as, perhaps in some cases larger than, the Polar Bear, and its colour varies considerably in shades of brown from a comparatively light brown to almost black.

Generally speaking, the Brown Bear can hardly be termed a sociable animal as far as Bears are concerned, but it is possible to train it to become fairly docile and it is frequently exhibited by showmen as a performing Bear.

As regards intelligence, the Brown Bear is well up to the average for Bears but, as with all other species, individuals vary considerably, and some highly intelligent specimens are to be found as well as some dull and uninteresting ones.

The eyes of the Brown Bear are very small for the great size of the animal, and they appear to be rather short-sighted, relying upon sound rather than sight for the approach of anything.

This type of Bear is perhaps one of the easiest to feed, as it will thrive on almost anything. We have seen specimens, fed almost exclusively on meat, in the pink of condition, whilst others never having tasted meat look equally fit, but the best diet is no doubt a mixed one.

Brown Bears are not so fond of climbing as some species, but they can travel quickly over ground. Like most Bears, if suddenly alarmed they will rise on their hind legs in preparation to meet any attack with their fore-paws, and very powerful blows they can deal although, compared with the Himalayan Bear, the Brown Bear is more inclined to come to close quarters with his opponent and to crush his victim with his great strength.

In Zoos the Brown Bear is usually very popular, always ready for tit-bits, for which he will beg in a most appealing manner. Trotsky at Chester Zoo is no exception, and likes very much to hold the stage to himself. Fortunately, he can only be in one place at a time, so the other Bears get an equal chance to beg and receive tit-bits from visitors.

CLEANING THE BEAR POOLS.

The labour shortage being still very acute, we were optimistic enough to hope that we would be spared the job of cleaning out the Bear Pools, at any rate until about the end of September or early October. On investigation, however, our optimism proved to be unjustified.

It appears that a certain section of the public regard these pools as suitable receptacles for all manner of rubbish, and have been treating them accordingly. Whilst most rubbish is removed by the filtration system, the real cause of all the trouble, and a grave danger to the animals, is broken glass. Scores of glass bottles had been thrown into the water, and the bottom of the pool in the mixed Bear enclosure was littered with sharp pieces of broken glass so that it was impossible for a Bear to put his foot on the bottom without treading on broken glass. It is not to be wondered at that the Bears are continually receiving cuts on their paws.

Without wishing to complain unduly, we do appeal to the public to consider the extra work which thoughtless behaviour entails, to say nothing of the discomfort and real danger to the animals. It is the duty of every visitor to the Zoo to safeguard the animals from injury and the grounds from damage, and to leave with the knowledge that neither has suffered in any way as a result of his or her visit. Please help us to keep the animals happy and the grounds beautiful, so that both can be appreciated to the full by future visitors.

Incidentally, we had our laugh to compensate us for the extra work. During the process of cleaning the Bear Pools, we discovered that the supply pipe (a two-inch iron pipe) was blocked. Efforts to remove the blockage by means of rods failed, and we were beginning to think we would have to dismantle the pipe when someone suggested that we put a pressure of water in the opposite direction to the way it should go. Imagine our surprise when cut came a large common frog which at once swam off across the fountain-pool none the worse for the experience and quite ignorant of the trouble it had caused.

THE AMERICAN BISON.

In all history probably no animal has thrived in such numbers and become suddenly in such grave danger of extinction as the American Bison. Up to about the year 1830, it ranged the American Continent in hundreds of thousands, some writers even estimating the numbers in millions. In any case, the number of Bison in America at one time was so great as to be considered to exceed the total number of all other wild animals in Africa. The construction of the Union Pacific Railway brought about the dividing-up of the vast herd, and at the same time this animal was being destroyed in great numbers for commercial purposes, with the result that about the year 1884 it had become almost extinct except for those preserved in the National Parks. Precautions, therefore, became necessary to preserve the American Bison against utter extinction, and it is now a "protected" animal.

In appearance, the American Bison is the most striking of all oxen, no doubt on account of its massive head, which is covered with luxuriant hair extending right down to the fore-legs and as far back as the withers—sometimes much further. At about six years of age, the horns of the bull Bison measure from sixteen to twenty inches in length, but as time elapses the outer layer of the horn gradually breaks off until, after some years, the horn is left short and blunted. The bull is then known as a stub-horn.

The Bison changes its coat yearly, starting in the early spring, and looks very unkempt during the summer months, but by the end of October these animals are at their best.

The average weight of a full-grown Bison is 1600 lbs., but a bull may attain up to 2800 lbs. Considering its weight and ungainly appearance, one would not expect the Bison to be very agile, but this animal can give an exceedingly good account of itself in covering ground. As a jumper, I have seen him perform some very creditable feats. On one occasion, I watched a Bison clear a fence six feet high, apparently without effort, and a fence from four to five feet is no obstacle at all to a healthy bull.

The Bison breeds freely in captivity and is easily crossed with other oxen, but the only point in favour of inter-breeding is the possibility of improving the hardiness of cattle not so well suited to withstand hard winters.

News from other Zoos.

BRISTOL ZOO.

This has been another record-breaking year, and there seems to be a never-ending flow of visitors.

On 6th September "Alfred," our Gorilla, entered upon his sixteenth year in the Gardens. He now weighs approximately 32 stone, as compared with 27 pounds when he arrived at the Gardens. At the present time, he is probably the best known animal in the world. Thousands of American Service men and women visited him during their stay in Bristol and surrounding districts, and it would be very interesting to know how many photographs of this wonderful animal have reached the United States. One American soldier who was particularly interested in Alfred corresponded with us, and this led to letters passing between us and the Philadelphia Zoo, who supplied us with full details of all Gorillas exhibited in the United States and other interesting information.

We are looking forward to the time, which we trust is not far distant, when it will be possible for us to replace some of our stock which has died during the war. In the meantime, we are increasing our efforts to add to the attractiveness of the Gardens—a policy which has undoubtedly pleased our public during the past few years.

MAIDSTONE ZOO PARK.

By the time these notes appear in print the 1945 Zoo Season will be drawing to a close (we close for the winter at the end of October) and it has been so far a good one, the attendances up-to-date being almost double the figures for the same period of 1944. This, to a large extent, can be attributed to the freedom this season from Flying Bombs and V2 Bombs, and the basic petrol ration, which has given car owners the privilege of making short excursions. I look forward to the 1946 season with confidence.

Sunday, September 2nd, was a great day. The Misses Elsie and Doris Waters attended the Birthday Party of their namesakes, the two Burmese Elephants, and undertook to carry a message from the Elephants to their "relations" in Rangoon where the Waters Sisters are shortly going to entertain the troops. A large decorated chocolate cake was cut and partaken of by the Elephants, the cake being unfit for human consumption.

New arrivals include a Wallaby, two Sparrow-Hawks, a Barn Owl, and a Ring-necked Parakeet.

DUDLEY ZOO.

Another season nearly over and, thank goodness, the last of the war years; may it soon be the end of restrictions and the filling-up of forms! Everything points to our having had a really good season. The fact that petrol is now available for the man with a small car, and for the Coach Proprietors, has greatly increased the number of visitors and brought many parties to our Zoo.

We shall soon be busy repairing the ravages of the weather and the six years of war in so far as we can find labour to creosote our Bird Aviaries and re-wire them ready for new birds which we hope to obtain by next year. We also hope our two Cafes will be de-requisitioned in the very near future, so that we can prepare them for a full catering programme next season.

A Japanese Ape was presented to us recently, which is quite an attraction, and we have other gifts in view.

Our Directors are alive to the fact that we require much new stock and we are working in this direction, but it is not so easy as one would imagine, shipping space being one of the big difficulties.

DUBLIN ZOO.

Now that the war is over, we are looking forward to the time when our new stock will be arriving. Already we are making arrangements for the reception of animals from India, Burma, and Africa. But, after taking a census of our stock as it stands at the moment, we feel that we have done very well in maintaining a pretty good level as regards selection and health, the latter having had perhaps more attention during the war than in pre-war days, knowing that we had little chance of replacements of any kind. An example of this is the case of one of our Pythons who had a serious misadventure while in the Python Pool prior to shedding his skin. In the centre of this pool is a tree, to help him during his "slowing" period. Unfortunately, on this tree was a small broken bough with a sharp point, and somehow the Python caught himself on the sharp point sustaining a large open wound in his stomach. Whilst being taken out of the pool for examination, his struggles forced the intestines out through the wound (to the size of a football) without bursting the peritoneum. The wound was "T"-shaped, three inches each way, penetrating not only the skin but right through the flesh. The

Superintendent, by holding the intestines in his two hands, gradually managed to return the tubes gently to their former place within the stomach. M. & B. was dusted on the wound which was then bandaged with Flexoplast. To prevent him rubbing the Flexoplast bandage off, every projection of any kind was removed from the pool and the Python then put back into the water. That was two months ago and we can now report that the wound is almost completely healed.

We have had our unlucky days too. Only this month, one of our Lionesses "Shelagh," who came from Chester Zoo, gave birth to two cubs, eight days prematurely, and would not nurse them. They were, therefore, taken away from her, and an attempt to hand-feed them was tried without success. Possibly, their little digestive organs were not fully developed. On top of this, "Shelagh" surprised us all by giving birth four days later to another cub. Being still four days premature, we immediately tried the cub with a foster-mother bitch Labrador, again without success; the cub would not feed from either the foster-mother or from the bottle, and died the next morning. The longest we have managed to keep a Lion Cub alive on the bottle was three months; all went well at first but towards the end of three months the cub began to fail rapidly and nothing we could do was of any avail.

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