

"Our Zoo News"

A MONTHLY CHRONICLE OF NEWS OF
CHESTER ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS.

Price 2d.

Annual Subscription 3/0 post free.

NUMBER THIRTY-SIX.

FEBRUARY 1941.



AMERICAN BISON WITH PIEBALD SHEEP AT CHESTER ZOO.

The American Bison (*Bos americanas*).

The American Bison, often but incorrectly called the buffalo, is considered the most striking in appearance of all oxen.

This specie originally extended over one third of North America and at the beginning of the nineteenth century the total number of Bison in that continent is reputed to have been millions.

About the year 1830 an ever increasing demand for Buffalo robes and flesh soon began to tell on its

numbers, and the construction of the railways across that enormous continent assisted in making great inroads to what was the greatest herd of wild cattle in the world.

It has been said that at one time the total number of Bison in America would exceed the total number of wild animals in Africa. It would be very difficult to prove such an assertion nevertheless, the herd must have been colossal.

One cannot help but wonder why these animals abounded in such great numbers, but the main reason

was, that until the advent of man and his gun, the Bison had very few enemies to contend with.

So great was the slaughter of them that at the beginning of the twentieth century, it looked as if the American Bison would soon become one of the many extinct animals of this world. So serious was the position that efforts were made both in Canada and the United States of America to preserve the few remaining specimens.

In 1908 Congress passed a bill appropriating 40,000 dollars for lands and fencing of the proposed Montana National Bison Range. With this and the efforts of the Dominion Government the American Bison has been saved from extinction.

The American Bison is without doubt a fine handsome beast, particularly the bull with its massive head covered with long hair. It is not nearly so fearsome however as its appearance would lead one to believe, in fact it can become quite tame.

It is curious to note that Bison will stand and face a cutting blizzard, whereas domestic cattle turn their tails to the wind.

The breeding season is usually from July to September, and the calves, which may be one or two, are born from April to June. The cows breed after they attain the age of three years.

The horns of a year old Bison form a straight, conical spike, which continues to grow, with a slight curve at the base, until the animal is four years old, when the males are termed "spike-bulls." As the animal grows older the horn begins to break off at the tip until it eventually becomes short, thick and blunted, and the bull is then known as a "stub-horn."

Towards the end of the winter the coat becomes frayed and shaggy, giving the animal a very unkempt appearance, but by the end of June the whole of the old hair has fallen off. Bison look their best during the late Autumn and early Winter.

The weight of an adult bull Bison will vary from fifteen to twenty hundredweight.

It is on record that the bull Bison has been successfully crossed with the domestic cow, the hybrid proving quite fertile.

Although one often sees Bison in Zoos behind massive bars or rails, they are quite docile if they have their liberty. The Bison in our Zoo live quite amicably with Sheep and Llamas.

The African Grey Parrot.

(*Psittacus Erithacus*).

Of all the parrot family the most popular one is the African Grey. This no doubt, is on account of its remarkable speaking powers. As its name

suggests, the colour is grey with the exception of its tail which is a bright red. The shade of grey varies with individual specimens.

It is to be found from Sierra Leone to the Belgian Congo, and east to Lake Victoria, and is confined to the forest regions.

Its flight is fast and direct. It is an excellent climber, using claws and bill in a most capable manner to climb the large trees of the forest.

The bird is to be found singly, in pairs, or in numbers of about fifty or more. As one writer says, it is only possible to sense their wild freedom when seen in their native land.

The nest is usually made in the hollow of some tall tree. The number of eggs laid is two, being white and a little larger than a pigeons.

Most African Grey Parrots in this country, I regret to say, are confined to a prison cage which does not even permit the stretching of its wings, and it speaks volumes for the bird's adaptabilities when one sees it so confined, cheerfully whistling and imitating various sounds.

Anyone who keeps such a bird should allow it to have at least several hours freedom in a room, but to obtain the greatest pleasure from these birds, they should be given a large aviary where they can fly about and indulge in the antics which they perform in the wild.

One great mistake which many owners of African Greys make is that they are treated as delicate birds, and are not only confined in a small cage, but placed in a warm corner and perhaps covered over most of the day, with the idea of keeping the cold off. Imagine what it must feel like to a bird that is used to wild winds blowing through the tree tops to be kept under such conditions.

Contrary to belief, the African Grey is quite hardy, and provided the process of acclimatisation is done gradually and draughts are avoided, this parrot can live and thrive, and what is more is a thousand times happier living in an outdoor aviary in which it can fly. (For years the African Greys at Chester Zoo have so lived out of doors and one often hears the comment of how well they look. Even during the bitter cold and snowy weather they fly about, whistling and screeching all day long).

Without doubt, this bird is the best talking parrot on the whole, although individual specimens of other species do attain high repute for linguistic powers.

For many years some severe and cruel methods have been adopted to make parrots talk, all of which are quite unnecessary, for it is the bird's natural instinct to imitate, and if it is happy it will do this without any effort.

The birds at the Zoo all arrived as newly captured, and have not received any tuition to get them to talk, but some are most gifted in this respect. They imitate visitors to such a degree that some people are made to look quite foolish.

To quote one incident. Some time ago a woman with a rather shrill voice kept calling to her husband to come and look at one of the inmates of the Parrot Aviary. After she had gone the man once again walked within view of the Grey Parrots, whereupon, one of the birds, in perfect mimicry of his wife's voice, requested him to come and look at the other bird in question.

For a moment the man seemed nonplussed as he had left his wife in another part of the Zoo, but when the parrot again repeated the command he muttered something about his wife which we dare not repeat and wanted to know how many more times did she wish him to look at the parrot. However he went and as he entered the aviary the bird repeated the request in a much lower voice. The expression on that man's face when he discovered the culprit was a study well worth seeing.

There are many such tales we could tell, but the object of this article is to give some instructive information on this very interesting bird.

Its food consists of tree fruits and seeds, and in the wilds is very destructive to the maize crops. In captivity its food should compose of canary, sunflower and hemp seed, oats, peanuts and maize, with a plentiful supply of soft sweet fruits when available.

Like most parrots the Greys will waste a large amount of food if a mixture is offered them, and it is far better to give one seed at a time and vary it from day to day.

One of the greatest joys you can give a parrot, whether in a cage or an aviary, is some twigs from any non-poisonous tree. It simple delights in pulling them to pieces.

Greys are particularly fond of water and on no account should this be kept from them.

The Month goes by.

The weather we experienced in January was only what was to be expected of this month, but it reminded us very forcibly of last winter's elements, and of the many trials and problems that beset us at that time.

Now that February is with us, we feel Spring is a little nearer, although as yet there has been no outward and visible signs of its approach. The only intimation we have received is that the Griffon Vultures are once

again considering going to nest. They of course are real optimists, for it will be remembered that last year they laid during the severest weather, and what is more, succeeded in hatching and rearing the first Griffon Vulture in captivity. We only hope that success will again crown their efforts.

In our last issue we announced that we were about to receive for the duration of the war, a Tiger, Lioness, Black Panther and Leopard from Bristol Zoo. These animals duly arrived and are in excellent condition.

During January we received, again for the duration, two white Bahrein Donkeys from Edinburgh Zoo, and are expecting before these lines are in print, an Arabian Camel and three Yaks, also, to join the permanent collection two Llamas and an adult male Chimpanzee.

If all goes well, Chester Zoo will have a most interesting collection for visitors in 1941, and we can add the assurance that the Zoo will be well worth a visit.

The Chester City Education Committee are making us an annual grant for the next three years, and in return all schools under their jurisdiction will be admitted to the Zoo on any week day, and will have facilities for educational purposes.

We shall endeavour to make the Zoo as interesting as possible from an educational point of view, and will welcome the co-operation of teachers to make the visit as instructive as possible.

In an endeavour to obtain more new members to the Society we are, for the duration of the war, waiving the first year's subscription of one guinea. Members will **not** of course be called upon to pay this at some future date, as it is a special war time scheme.

Prospective members can obtain full details on request, but briefly they would, by paying one guinea entrance fee, become Members of the North of England Zoological Society, and in return would receive a Member's Card admitting them to the Zoo on any day throughout the year.

The following year when these Members paid their annual subscription of one guinea, they would receive in addition to their Member's Card, twenty tickets of admission to distribute to friends.

From the time they are accepted as Members of the Society, a copy of the monthly "Zoo News" will be despatched to them free of charge. They will also have the advantage of being admitted to the Members' Lounge which is tastefully and comfortably furnished, and where refreshments can be obtained if desired without going into the public cafes.

The Society would be deeply indebted to Members if they would introduce or recommend new members. To those readers who are interested, we urge you

to join NOW. Fill in the attached application form and post it with your guinea to—The Secretary, The North of England Zoological Society, Zoological Gardens, Upton-by Chester.

Zoo Admission Tickets sold in advance.

We are pleased to announce that 2,874 admission tickets have been sold in advance, thus bringing in the total sum of £71 17s. 0d., at a time of the year when it was most needed.

The winners of the prizes for selling the most number of tickets were, first, Mr. R. L. Holt, who sold 400 tickets, and Mr. W. G. Eills was second with 80 tickets. Both these Members very kindly gave the prize money of £3 and £2 respectively back to the Society, for which we tender our sincere thanks.

In connection with the Free Draw the winners were as follows:—

Leopard Skin. Ticket No. 2648. Miss L. K. Moreton, Dartmeet, Kingsway, Gayton, Wirral.

Python Skin. Ticket No. 1890. Mrs. Peterson, Dudley House, Bowdon, Cheshire.

Bear Skin. Ticket No. 4692. Mr. P. Garvie, 89, London Road, Northwich, Cheshire.

Members' Subscriptions.—There are still a few Members who have not yet sent in their subscriptions for the year 1941, and the Society would be very grateful if they would do this at an early date.

Members' Tickets.—May we suggest that Members who are unable to make use of their tickets, give or send them to the various camps in the district for the Forces, who we feel sure will be very glad to make use of them. As an alternative, we will be only too pleased to distribute them locally to the Services at Members' request.

Life at the Zoo—2.

By one of the Staff.

January was, I think, the busiest month that I have spent at the Zoo so far. The shortage of labour, the moving of some of our stock, the arrival of new additions to the collection, the numerous jobs which cropped up owing to the weather, as well as the general routine work, all helped to make it an interesting and busy time.

The Tiger, Lioness, Leopard and Black Panther from Bristol Zoo arrived about noon one Sunday in the early part of last month. The week previous we had all been helping to get their new homes ready, but our efforts were well rewarded when we saw to what advantage they showed. They are all very fine specimens. "Bruno," the Tiger, is a magnificent looking animal and is quite friendly.

At the time of writing these notes, our latest new arrivals were two Bahrein Donkeys, which came from Edinburgh Zoo. What these two animals lack in good looks, they certainly make up for in size, and their favourite game is apparently, seeing who can kick the most.

"Charlie," the Penguin, has been moved to the Pelican Enclosure, as it was found that the frost some time ago had cracked the cement in his own pool and repairs could not be carried out right away. He has to be fed separately from the Pelican to ensure that he gets enough to eat, and the gate is opened for him to come out onto the path. He is a quaint little figure and after eating as much as ever he can manage he struts back through the gateway of his own accord, looking like some portly old gentleman who has dined not wisely but too well.

The Lions are certainly in the news this month and have figured in several incidents, the first of which nearly ended in a tragedy.

At the time I happened to be cutting some hay, and glancing casually over the stack my curiosity was aroused by seeing a young man walking steadily across the field towards the back of the Lion House. This in itself would have been insufficient to cause alarm, but for the fact that he carried a gun and seemed to be stalking some animal. Knowing that only the Lions were there, I began to feel a bit worried and hurriedly climbed down the stack to investigate. I rounded the corner of the Lion House just in time to see him taking aim at "Faith's" three baby cubs which were all unconsciously playing in the nearby undergrowth.

Rather shakingly I asked him if he wanted anything, hardly the appropriate words for such an occasion, but I felt a bit nervous about the gun as he was a complete stranger to me. However, they were sufficient to save the lives of the cubs while explanations were exchanged, the reason given was that the youth had mistaken them for young hares. Poor "Faith" would have been "hareless" if anything had happened to her precious babies.

Another afternoon these cubs were playing in the same spot when the Zoo's coke was delivered. The

peace of the day was shattered, however, when the two coalmen came running up, gasping, "There's a leopard out."

A hurried investigation proved however that it was only one of the little lion cubs, which was actually about the size of a puppy. After this the men seemed very unnerved and the final straw came when "Bruce," the Bloodhound, suddenly leaned half-way out of a window and howled to the world at large. They nearly collapsed on top of one another, much to the amusement of the staff.

Unable lately to get their own food, the Bison have been in the habit of coming up to the stack and waiting for their meals. They eat an enormous amount and consume it faster than one can cut it.

The Cow Bison, "Nellie," must have been very impatient the other day for she stepped over the wire fencing—a thing she had never attempted to do before—and began helping herself. The young keeper who had hastily scrambled to the top was marooned as surely as if she had been on a desert island. Perhaps it gave her this impression for she executed various "hula" "hula" dances with great abandon on the top of the stack. This so surprised "Nellie" that she retreated backwards to the peace and quietness of her enclosure.

One of the Lion cages had been whitewashed a week or two ago, and later "Patrick" was discovered to be sporting a white nose. He seemed totally oblivious to the ridiculous look which this gave him, but such frivolity indulged in by the head of a family of fourteen is bound to arouse comment.

It was decided last month to bring "Faith" and her three cubs forward so as to be on show, and this necessitated the moving of the three eight months old cubs to another cage.

They looked twice as big when they came to be handled as they had done in their large cage, and moreover were rather vicious, growling and showing their teeth at the slightest sign of approach on our part. Actually it took three of us to move each cub. The first one certainly lived up to his name of "Spitfire," being the largest of the three, while the last one was the most awkward to get hold of, having by this time become rather apprehensive of the fate of his two former companions.

He crouched in the corner ready to use teeth and claws to the greatest advantage, while behind him in the next cage stood "Patrick" and "Hope" ready

to defend their offspring. A monkey net was brought to put over his head but "Hope" made a sudden grab with her paws, dragged it through the bars and tore it to shreds. A sweeping brush was then tried which the cub instantly seized upon, and we were thus able to catch hold of him and complete the transfer.

Dignity goes to the four winds at the Zoo. Some time ago when there was ice on the pond in the Bison Field, I decided that I would save someone else a job and break up the ice round the sides. Armed with the necessary implements I walked across the field to the pond, but unfortunately I was misled by the snow which had drifted onto the edge of the ice, and without warning I went floundering in. As if this was not sufficient to damp any girl's spirit, I must in falling, grab at some barbed wire with disastrous results.

My only consolation was that the ice was broken in a third of the time, but even this tiny fragment of comfort was ruthlessly taken from me when I was informed that it had all been unnecessary, as the Bison could have got a drink themselves.

I noticed an article in a well known daily newspaper a few days ago, and which I think was rather inclined to influence the public in the wrong direction.

The writer was of the opinion that several animals in a certain Zoo should be destroyed because of the risk of bombs, but furthermore stressed that it would be a good thing if Zoos were abolished in war time.

We know that we are at war but does this warrant the closing down of Zoos, one of our national assets? (By this I mean Zoos run purely as non-commercial undertakings and on instructive and educational lines). It is so much easier to destroy than to build, and once a Zoo is closed down it is very doubtful if it would ever be restarted again.

Regarding the chance of a direct hit from bombs; if this happened it is more than likely that the animal would be killed outright, or if not, so severely wounded as to render it helpless, but in any case it is very unlikely that the Zoo Authorities referred to in the article have not gone into all this and taken the necessary precautions. With all their years of experience in dealing with wild animals, I am confident that they will know what to do in an emergency, so I do not see why Zoos should be abolished for this reason only.

At Chester Zoo the animals are fed principally on waste foods, or on foods unfit for human consumption. Only the necessary repairs are carried out so that

we do not encroach on the country's supplies of materials. We have carried on through the winter with as little labour as possible, and every effort has been strained to keep our expenses down to a minimum, for always at the back of our mind is the thought that we must not interfere with the Nation's war effort.

Through our Gates we get many hundreds of members of our Fighting Forces. Do they say, "We are at war and this Zoo should be closed." No, certainly not. Their loud guffaws of laughter ring out at the antics of the three Malayan Sun Bears, of the Monkeys and Chimpanzees, the Lion Cubs, and many others. They make jokes over the various notices in the grounds, particularly one which warns the visitors not to tease the animals and which concludes with "Do not run the risk." They ask all sorts of ridiculous questions about this strange animal called the "Risk." What it looks like and why they have not to run it.

They like to watch the feeding of the animals, especially the Lions, and here again their remarks are witty and gay, or else admiration for the animals is uppermost, but always they go away with a

cheery wave of a hand or a smile, after enjoying a few hours relaxation away from the worries and seriousness of their wartime jobs.

No doubt when they get back to their various camps and billets, they discuss their visit, laughing afresh at the mannerisms and quaint ways of some of the animals, for we get many more of the Forces coming to the Zoo, having been told by their companions that it is well worth going to see.

Others of a more serious nature, study and take a great interest in the exhibits, asking intelligent questions about their food and habits, all of which we are only too willing to answer, being pleased to help those anxious to learn more.

Among our many visitors are men on several days leave with their wives or sweethearts, housewives, harassed with the present day problems of rationing, etc., elderly people who confide that their boys are abroad fighting. One and all remark how nice it is to walk leisurely round the Zoo and to forget for an hour or so that there is a war on.

If Zoos can do this, then their existence is justified.



Application Form for Membership.

Full Name
(in block letters)

Address

Occupation

Signature

I desire to join the North of England Zoological Society as a (place X opposite the form of Membership desired).

Founder.
Benefactor.
Patron.
Life Member.

Full particulars can be obtained from the Secretary.

Annual Member (1). One Guinea.
Annual Member (2). Two Guineas.

Members will receive Member's Admission Card.
Members will receive Member's Admission Card and
Twenty Admission Tickets for friends.

Proposed by

Seconded by

The Secretary will be pleased to make all necessary arrangements for the Proposer and Seconder when form is returned if this has not already been filled in.

Recommendation Form.

I suggest the following persons for Membership in the North of England Zoological Society.

Name

Address

Name

Address

Name

Address

Signed