
"Our Zoo News"

and Guide.

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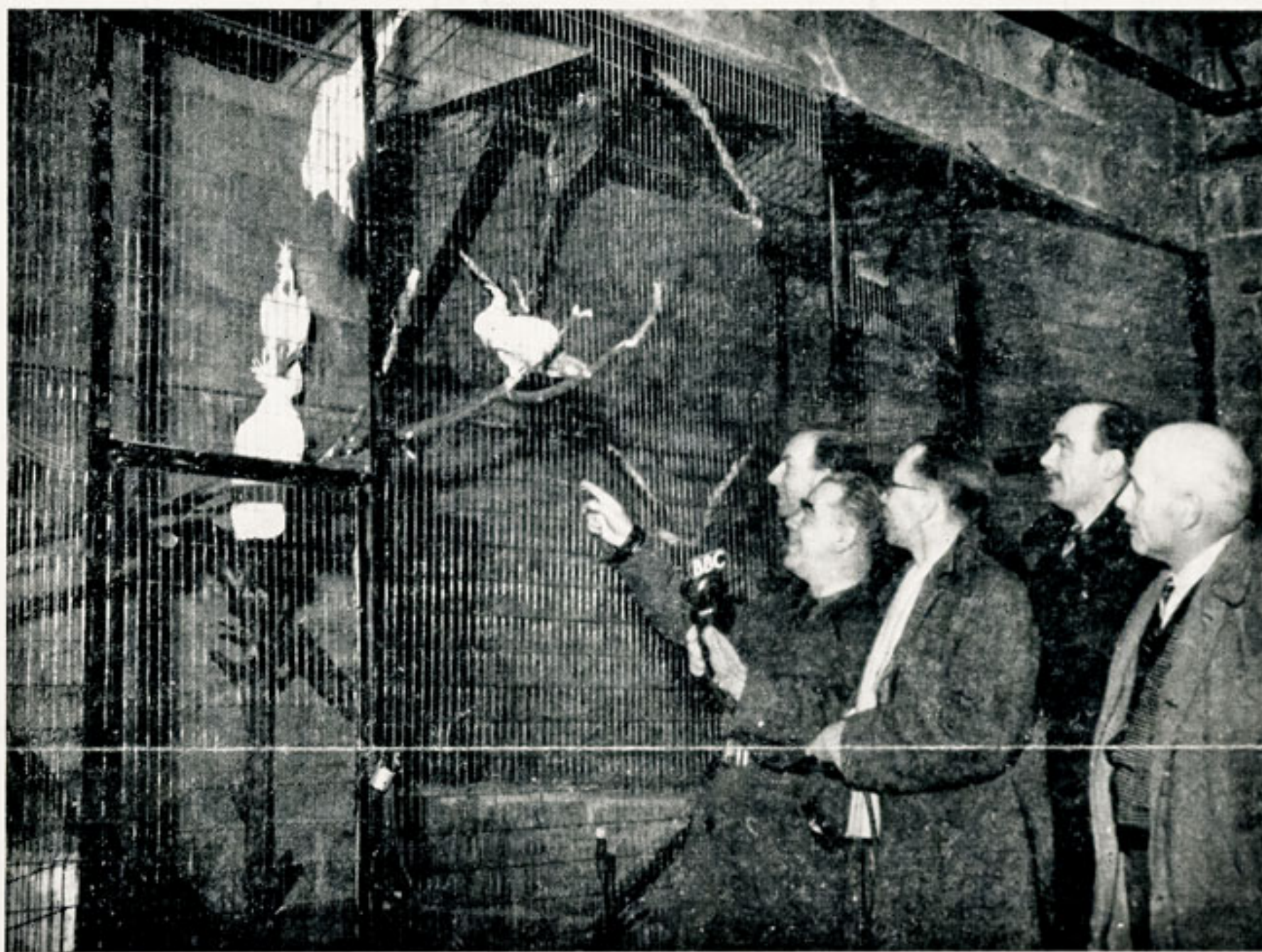


Photo by Chester Chronicle.

A NIGHT VISIT TO THE PARROT HOUSE ON 6th MARCH.

Gerald Iles furthest from the camera with Nomad and Eric Jolly, are seen endeavouring to coax the Parrots to record successfully on the occasion of the B.B.C.'s visit to Chester Zoo to make a "night recording".

The North of England Zoological Society,

ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS, UPTON-BY-CHESTER.

Tel. Chester 1898.

March, 1950.

Spring at Chester Zoo.

Spring has come to the Zoo, the evidence is so abundantly apparent, not only in the swelling and bursting buds of hedgerows and trees shyly showing a tender green that only an English Spring can produce, nor in the glad promise of Daffodils and Wallflowers about to burst forth in all their colourful beauty, but most of all is the coming of Spring noticeable among the birds and beasts with whom we spend so much of our time and whose welfare and progress we watch with such interest and care.

Those of our readers who heard the recent broadcast of G. S. Mottershead on the baby Wallabies, will have learned that their young are as minute as our thumb at birth and live hidden in the female's pouch for anything up to six months after, before the tiny head makes its first appearance. This had just occurred at the time of the broadcast a month ago; now any day the little Wallaby is about to make its complete debut and as a preliminary is to be seen using its Mother's pouch as a window-sill to rest two tiny paws upon, whilst an inquisitive little head gazes wide eyed and wondering upon the exciting world without. There is now no mistaking the baby's desire to "touch down" and explore however timidly, but for a little longer Mother firmly discourages any premature and rash behaviour. In a very short time, with the milder temperatures and sunny days we shall be delighted to see that our Baby Wallabies have feet and can "hop" in a miniature way, as well as tiny paws and cheeky, charming faces.

Another springlike event of great importance concerns the birth of a litter of five lion cubs to Faith, a Lioness of bad reputation as a Mother hitherto. After successfully rearing the large number of eighty-seven cubs in the past, the Zoo has been going through a rather bad patch in this respect for the last couple of years. However, hope rose high with the birth of such a fine litter to Faith and she was segregated and most carefully watched over by the Keeper and Curator in the hope that this time she might be encouraged to "turn over a new leaf". In a way she has but not before four of the cubs were lost—for some inscrutable reason known only to nature, she took a fancy to one little male cub and to date has obviously nourished and mothered him well—he is vigorous and shows every promise of becoming a fine little specimen. It would seem that everyone is interested to hear about and see our babies of all species and as a consequence the lion cub looks like being christened by the somewhat odd name of "Lucky". This is due to the fact that on the occasion of a press enquiry after his welfare and as to his name, a member of our staff remarked "well he hasn't one unless you can call him "Lucky" to be alive. This remark seemed to intrigue the reporter who subsequently telephoned Mr. Mottershead, our Curator, to enquire if he had any objection to them referring to the cub by the name of "Lucky". He replied that "it was certainly an apt title in the circumstances" and we think our readers will agree there is something in this point of view when one considers that the cub has the distinction of being the only one that Mother Faith took a fancy to.

We hope so much to be proudly exhibiting little Lucky about Whitsuntide.

Before we pass on to those babes who survived the winter to thrive and progress in the spring, we must mention the birth of a little kid who arrived two weeks ago and also the remarkable performance of another member of the Goat Colony in giving birth to triplets, of these latter alas only one still survives, but this one seems a strong, healthy little infant. There is also the birth of a Mouflon to record, all wobbly legs picking a very uncertain path by its mother's side at the moment and arousing that unfailing instinct for protection that any sign of baby helplessness never fails to inspire.

This brings us to our baby Chimpanzees who arrived here early in January—as most of our readers are aware—and occasioned considerable anxiety in the rather grim spell of winter weather that followed their coming. Meg, though not too happy at first, seemed always more precocious and inclined to sit up and take notice of her new home than George. Poor little George was very much "under the weather" for a few weeks, but someone has whispered to George about the spring and he begins to amply repay the care and attention he has received. They are both very active and at the present time are competing with our star personality in Chimpanzees "Topsy", for the interest and admiration of the public. No doubt as their training continues they will become an even greater source of attraction to those who find real delight in watching the antics and quaintness we must associate with all the species to be found in the Monkey House. As an increasing number of visitors, tempted by the warm spring sunshine, arrive to pay their regular visit to the Zoo and acquaint themselves with the progress of the two newest members of the Chimpanzee family, it is very well worth while watching the "act" Topsy puts on. She is none too well pleased with the attention Meg and George are claim-

ing and makes a superb effort to keep her "fans" by producing every trick in her repertoire interspersed with frantic efforts to peer along the House and ascertain what success the performance is meeting with—a most lively entertainment resulting thereby. It is to be feared that the Chimpanzees' less spectacular little colleagues in the Monkey House are somewhat eclipsed as a result of so much glamour, but most of us will agree that in the right surroundings all Monkeys have a type of charm all their own and are a fascinating study. At all events our friend the Gibbon is not to be dismissed so lightly, he does not even need the spring to inspire his graceful acrobatic feats and his queer, haunting cry is unmistakable whatever the season of the year.

Another very recent enhancement to our Bear collection is little Chota a lovely Himalayan Bear now about twelve months old. For a few days she was kept on her own whilst her Keeper got thoroughly acquainted and tried to make friends—something he achieved with considerable speed and efficiency for she was quite soon taking the tasty tin containing her ration of the much loved syrup, straight from his hand in the mateyist fashion. As soon as it was thought advisable she joined two other babies, a pair of young Black Bears and these three can now be seen all playing happily together in their temporary home prior to transfer into a Junior Bear Enclosure, where they can be properly exhibited to their many admirers.

Our Crested and Brush Tail Porcupines are also waiting to "take their bow" and meet their public and the advent of spring brings their "Opening Date" very near. There is little doubt that our visitors will find these small animals as handsome as they are interesting to watch. The Crested Porcupines shoot their tails out in a small fan of brown and white quills and it needs little imagination to envisage the discomfort attaching to an encounter with these nasty weapons of defence.

It occurs to the writer that it would be quite

wrong to conclude this article without mentioning those of our older friends who have earned a special place in our affections. Although the implications of spring may not mean that their "fancies lightly turn to thoughts of love" as the bard has it, this is a difference twixt youth and age equally applicable to the human race. Like we who have enjoyed the spring in England for more years than we care to dwell on, they love the lengthening days, the warm sunshine and the message contained in the gentle breeze that tells of quickening life all about us. Dear old Trotsky, the epitome of the original Teddy Bear, curls up on the highest piece of rock he can find in the main Bear Enclosure and contentedly snoozes away in the midday sun. Lovely Rack and Ruin, the Polar Bears, placidly and peacefully share their miniature mountain and all of a sudden we are furious that this priceless "shot" of their tranquil slumbers has been missed—why is it that we never have the darned thing with us when we could use it to the best advantage????!!!! Even little Oswald our so solitary Penguin, looks a trifle less lonely as he watches somewhat wistfully the unmistakable signs of nesting going on around him among the rest of the bird fraternity.

Most truly SPRING HAS COME TO
CHESTER ZOO.

N. J. BRUSHETT.

The Tiger Enclosure.

As readers will know, we already have in our possession a pair of Tigers. The Zoo has never had Tigers of its own before. During the war one or two specimens were billeted upon us, but from now on we hope to maintain an enclosure of these handsome animals. We have repeatedly stated that in our view, as far as it is humanly possible, our object is to exhibit the animals in natural conditions, which means dispensing with cages. For some months now we have been busily engaged in the construction of a large open enclosure for our

Tigers and we hope to have this completed and in use by Easter.

This enclosure is laid out on the same lines as our Lion Enclosure which has proved not only successful from the animals point of view, but has been very highly appreciated by the public. The area of the Tiger Enclosure is comparable to a misshapen square and is 350 ft. in circumference. A low concrete wall varying from 2 ft. to 2 ft. 6 ins. in height entirely surrounds the whole of the enclosure and on top of this is a welded mesh fence with an overhang. The total height of the fence varies from 14-16 ft. At one corner two concrete dens have been built and space has been left for this number to be increased as the necessity arises.

We have also constructed a fairly large pool for water as Tigers are extremely fond of bathing.

The public will have a good view of the enclosure on practically the whole of three sides, but on the south and east side we have a flower border between the public and the Tigers. We do sincerely hope that this will be respected and that people will refrain from trampling on the beds, as we are striving very hard to make the Zoo not only a place of display for a fine collection of wild animals, birds and reptiles, but also a beautiful flower garden for our visitors to rest in.

When the Polar Bear enclosure is completed there will be an extremely fine elevated view of the Tigers from the top of one of the roadways and we feel certain that even with the introduction of the flower borders, we have left ample space for large crowds to watch them in comfort. How this particular pair will adapt themselves to their new found liberty we do not know. Before arriving at Chester Zoo they had spent most of their life in a circus and were, therefore, somewhat overawed—as we mentioned in our last issue of the Zoo News—when we put them in the large cages in the Quarantine Yard. However, we

have little doubt that they will soon settle down and accept with appreciation their additional freedom.

Owing to the nature of these particular animals it has not been possible for us to include trees in their enclosure, as we did for the Lions. Offsetting this somewhat, on the west side but outside the enclosure there is a good background of trees which will not only provide protection from westerly winds, but enhance the setting of the enclosure generally.

G. S. MOTTERSHEAD.

Vultures.

We have among our collection of wild birds many, whose beauty of plumage and structure must be seen to be really believed. For a change though let us give a little attention to those of our feathered number who are neither beautiful in appearance or habits, namely, the Vulture. Of this bird we have two species, the White Headed Vulture and the Griffon or Fulvous Vulture.

The latter bird stands about 3½ ft. high and its plumage is of an ashy or tawny colour (hence the name Fulvous which means tawny). The head and neck are covered with white down and there is a white ruff round the throat. In flight it sails effortlessly through the air soaring to a great height, where it performs stately evolutions with its powerful wings almost motionless.

This particular specie of Vulture appears to have been a sacred bird among the ancient Egyptians, as it has been extensively portrayed on their monuments and its embalmed remains have also been found.

The White Headed Vulture is smaller than the Griffon and has black plumage with flesh coloured neck and face, a bright orange beak and a tuft of whitish down upon its head.

If a Vulture is suddenly frightened or attacked, it will vomit thereby emitting an over-

powering and most nauseating smell which momentarily throws the attacker of its guard, thus giving the Vulture an opportunity to take wing.

Vultures possess a keen sense of smell as well as excellent sight which enables them to discover their prey from greater distances than other birds. A Vulture flying at great height, will follow a sick or wounded beast until it falls dead, then plunging to the earth will devour the flesh with great speed. Meanwhile other Vultures, although only black specks on the horizon, will have seen the downward flight of their comrade follow promptly in his tracks and although self-invited, join with ferocity in the repast.

Repulsive though Vultures may be they serve a very useful purpose for mankind as they are "scavengers" and in the warm climates from which they emanate, they clear away putrid and decaying matter which would otherwise become a breeding ground for all manner of diseases in a very short space of time.

K. HICKMAN.

News Flash.

Most people will be interested to know that the B.B.C. recording van with Eric Jolly, Gerald Iles and Nomad as commentators paid a visit to Chester Zoo. We believe that this is the first time a serious attempt has been made to record the "night noises" in a Zoo and as we go to press we understand that the effort was so successful it has been possible to make a 55 minute broadcast for the Children's Hour and this is scheduled to be given on 4th April.

By the way Nomad tells us that his 100th broadcast "Wandering with Nomad" takes place in Northern Children's Hour on 17th April next. This very popular nature feature has been running now for nearly five years and we have no doubt, that our readers will want to make a date with their radios for the occasion.

A Night at Chester Zoo

— BY —

Nomad of the B.B.C.

I have always wanted to spend a night at the Zoo to see how the animals behaved when not under the gaze of the public; so when Mr. Mottershead welcomed my suggestion and Eric Jolly said he would bring along the recording car of the B.B.C., I knew we were in for an interesting evening. We had Gerald Iles of Belle Vue Zoo, also in the party.

As the sun set, the mist thickened into a fog which damped the activities of the various animals like a blanket. An owl in the distance was the only sound that broke the silence of the early evening as we prowled round with a portable microphone. The lions in their enclosure were awake and although they produced some fierce growls when we tempted them with meat, nothing would induce them to roar for the benefit of listeners. The Guinea Fowl perched high in a tree, likewise refused to cry out despite our efforts to disturb them: the Dingoes, the Coyotes and the Huskies regarded us with interest but remained dumb.

We thought things might liven up when the full moon rose at about 10 p.m. so until then, we went into the Reptile House and the Aquarium to record a brief talk on their inmates. Then on to the Parrot House where we soon had a noisy chorus on the disc demanding to know why we had disturbed their sleep by switching on the lights.

In the meantime the two sea-lions sleeping on the edge of their pool had been awakened

by our torches and conversation. A few herrings had them barking loudly; so loud in fact that we hoped they would wake up every other animal in the Zoo. The next call was on the Beavers—we could see them as dark silent shapes swimming about, so we hung a "mike" on the railings of their Lodge and went away. By this means we secured a recording of their gnawing wood and of stripping off the bark upon which they feed. We believe this is the first occasion on which this sound has been recorded.

About this time we became aware of the unmistakable smell of a fox; an unwelcome visitor to the Zoo who had killed a couple of Penguins a few nights previously.

The bears were in their dens, asleep; the hyaena padded ceaselessly round the enclosure but was mute; that great tawny cat, the puma lay stretched along a branch, fully alert. We wanted his peculiar wailing cry badly; but what could we do about it? Finally a realistic imitation of a backyard tom-cat did the trick and the Puma's unearthly cry was duly recorded on the wax disc.

The elephants were sleepy but when the lights went up started to munch hay contentedly; but the Porcupines became really angry, rattling their quills and grunting fiercely at having their sleep interrupted.

Time passed quickly and it was 2 a.m. before we returned indoors to make final recordings and, I must add, make short work of very welcome refreshments. This is only a brief account of a most interesting night. We hope you enjoyed our recordings in Children's Hour on 4th April, as much as we did making them.

