

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 2 (1975)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Zoological gardens Basle
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907945>

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Zoological Gardens Basle

History

- 1874 Opening of the Gardens on 3rd July
1877 Result of the first collection 41,378 francs
1891 Construction of an elephant house in Moresque style
1910 Opening of the antelope house
1927 Opening of the aviary
1930 Construction of the monkey rock
1937 Catastrophe: foot and mouth disease
1939 Opening of the Sauter Garden
1947 Large animal import from Africa: two giraffes
1948 Arrival of the first gorilla «Achilla»
1953 Opening of the new elephant house
1956 Opening of the new house for beasts of prey
Birth of the first unicorn rhinoceros in a zoo
1958 The first flamingo hatching in an European zoo
Publication of the first number of «ZOLL», the magazine of the Society of Friends of the Zoological Gardens
1959 Birth of Goma, the first gorilla bred in Europe
Opening of the rhinoceros/dwarf hippopotamus house
1960 Birth of an okapi
1969 Opening of the new monkey house
1970 Arrival of five Somali wild asses and three bongoes
1971 Birth of Tam-tam, the first gorilla of the second zoo-generation
1972 Opening of the vivariums
Record: over 1 million of paying visitors (1,091,730)
1974 Centenary

The history of zoological gardens all over the world mirrors man's changing attitude to the keeping of collections of animals in captivity, and to the purpose of such collections; and the older the zoo, the more complete the picture. The human primate has gradually relaxed his egocentric approach and has begun to put his own needs second to those of the animals. In Switzerland the transition can be particularly well observed in Basle Zoo, which is the oldest in the country, with archives full of historical pictures.

Basle Zoo has in recent years become a sanctuary for many species threatened by extinction. Its successes in breeding rhinoceroses, pygmy hippopotamuses and gorillas have won it an international name. The new primates building is the home of an orang utan family that is growing steadily and in 1973 was even able to celebrate the birth of twins. Only a few thousand of these anthropoid apes now survive in Sumatra and Borneo. The famous Goma, the first gorilla to be born in a European zoo, was reared in the family of

Mother Goma with Tam-tam (extreme left) at mealtime.
Migger with his Keeper W. Bayer, on the right Gorilla Kaethy.



the zoo director, Prof. Lang. She is now a mother and looks after her son Tam-tam herself.

Zootechny yesterday and today

Every Swiss is familiar with the bear-pit in Berne, the history of which reaches back into the Middle Ages. The large number of cubs raised there seems to suggest that the bears feel at home, for it is well known that animals will not breed in captivity when conditions are unfavourable. The bear-pit at Berne is spacious, and these big beasts of prey show every sign of being at their ease. Yet it is known that their habitat has hardly changed since the Middle Ages.

Schaffhausen offers another example of the zootechnic methods of the past. The town moat, near the Munot tower, accommodates a herd of deer that have adequate living-space and breed regularly. The custom of enclosing animals in moats or pits is not without its drawbacks, especially from the point of view of the observer, who sees the animals from above and cannot discern their real proportions. The glance falls on their backs and reveals neither their silhouettes nor their size. But in the past man regarded animals only as goods and chattels, as things belonging to him. He did not think of approaching them on an equal footing, he «looked down» on them.

However, kings and emperors kept wild animals at their courts, for instance at Schönbrunn Castle near Vienna and at Paris. It was only about the middle of the past century that the idea of showing them to the common people made any headway. By that time man was already beginning to feel the need for closer contact with nature. The parks in his towns were no longer felt to be sufficient. People wanted to see the animals living, and in order to be able to observe them under the best pos-

sible conditions, zoological gardens were opened near the big population centres.

Not much thought was given at that time to the physiological needs of the animals. The big species were shut up behind strong bars, where they had too little space. A lion had to be satisfied with 10 to 20 square yards, an elephant with about 80, surrounded by thick iron bars through which at least he could stretch his trunk to beg food from the public. The habits and requirements of the inmates were only vaguely known. Many animals were isolated in order to satisfy the curiosity of visitors, who wanted to examine them at close quarters. All that was done was to obtain from the wild the number of individuals that were strictly necessary for stocking the zoo. Nobody at that time thought of the possibility of the various species being threatened by extinction. It was an easy matter to replace animals that died; specialized enterprises were always ready to oblige.

The food for the animals was provided by other gardens. Carnivores were given the meat of oxen and horses that had died or had been slaughtered for the purpose. Ruminants and elephants were fed like cattle on the farm. The monkeys got human food of inferior quality. Consequently the big anthropoids received occasional beer and sausages in addition to bread, milk and fruit. The results were understandably disappointing. Nothing at all was known about essential amino-acids, vitamins and mineral salts. In addition, the food given to the animals was low in proteins.

Early this century a veritable revolution, initiated by the Hagenbeck zoos, began to transform zoological gardens. People realized all of a sudden that they had neglected an essential factor: the environment. Fences and bars were now



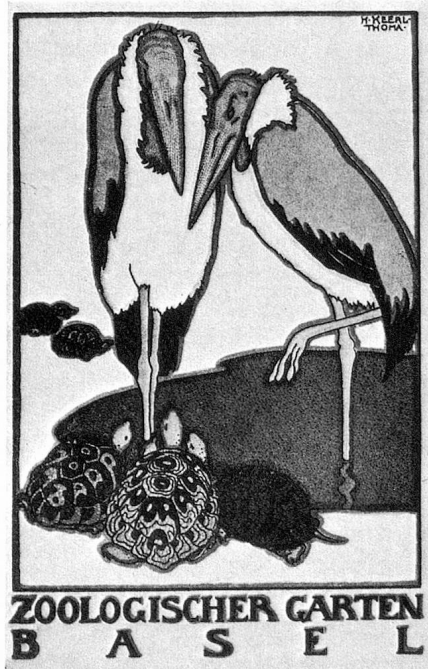
The most successful breed in the world. Keeper P. Waldner.

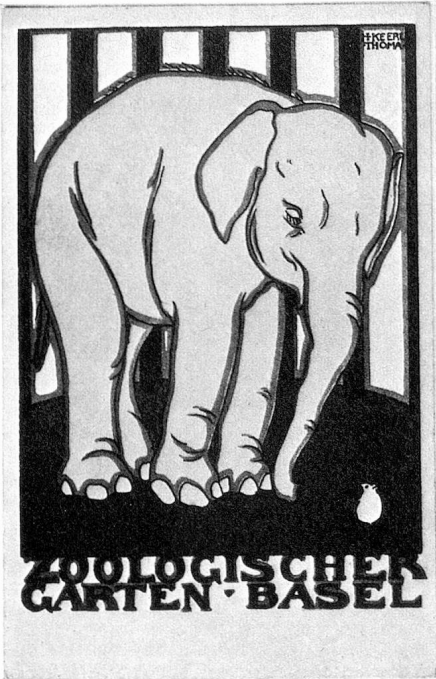
replaced by trenches or moats. In an attempt to reconstruct the original habitat, zebras, ostriches and gnus were brought together in enclosures that copied the African steppe, while nilgais, reduncas and bantengs were placed in a landscape modelled on the Indian savannah.

The endeavour today is to raise solid-hoofed and cloven-hoofed animals in appropriate enclosures, so that each species can live on its own in groups or in families and can therefore breed. No further use is made of the platforms on which animals were once exposed to the view of the public on all sides and were consequently uncomfortable. Animals need spaces in which they feel safe: they suffer from the constant presence of other species and particularly of visitors.

The age of the caged animal is past. Since space is rather limited at Basle Zoo, we have constructed airy and spacious shelters enclosed by light metal netting which enable the animals to enjoy the sun and air and even rain and snow. The tigers bathe even in winter, and the lions climb their tree every day.

For monkeys and anthropoids we have constructed polygonal, air-conditioned spaces with several different levels in which they can use their climbing skills but are isolated from the public by glass walls. A large plant enclosure improves climatic conditions and furnishes a natural space behind





From a series of postcards by Hedwig Keerl-Thoma (1886–1946), a painter and illustrator from Basle. Photo SNTO

the shelters. Formerly, shut up in rectangular cages, the anthropoid apes crouched at the foot of the walls and swayed sadly back and forth in the grip of a veritable neurosis. Today they live in families – the gorillas have already reached the second generation – and therefore have more diversion.

Zoological Gardens Admission Charges

Adults (from 16)	Fr. 6.—
Children (from 4 to 16)	2.50

Party Tickets (charge per person)

– Adults (from 25 persons)	5.50
– Adults (from 100 persons)	5.—
– Persons with AHV identity card (from 10 persons)	3.50
– Children (minimum number 10)	1.80
– Young people from 16–20 (minimum number 10)	3.50

Besides, annual season tickets are available

They are also given things to play with which, together with the meals, break the monotony of the day.

Since nutrition has been brought into line with scientific principles, illness and parasites have been reduced while births have become more numerous and the lives of individuals longer. Some mention should also be made of the progress in zootechny and in veterinary medicine. We are better informed today about the possibilities of mingling various species. Some excellent medicaments enable us to get rid of the formidable intestinal worms and even to use anaesthesia. As a result we have been able to carry out a caesarean on a tigress and to cure a rhinoc-

eros weakened by parasites. The antibiotics, which have been such a blessing to man, also help to protect animals from many infections, some of which might well prove fatal.

The modern zoo is not only a cultural institution; it is also a place of relaxation for humans, a refuge for species menaced by extinction and a centre of investigation and research. Every person who wishes to remain in contact with nature should visit a zoo at least once a year and should note the progress that is being made there.

*Article by Mr. E. M. Lang,
Director of Basle Zoo,
in co-operation with the ONST*

There are always young cats in the house for beasts of prey.



Successful breeding in Basle.

