

Zoological Society of London,

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OUR REF.....

YOUR REF.....

copy

As part of our Whipsnade's 21st Birthday celebrations a Garden Party has been arranged for Thursday May 22nd commencing at 3.0 p.m.

The Garden Party takes place in the centre of Whipsnade Park and press and newsreels will be in attendance.

We hope to see there as many stage, screen, Television and B.B.C. personalities as possible, and I certainly hope that I may be able to send you a double ticket for this occasion.

Many of our tame animals will be brought to the Party and there will be an opportunity of seeing the Park under ideal conditions.

Those attending will be guests of the Society and a running buffet and bar will be laid on.

May I ask you to kindly let me have a reply by return, in order that I may send you the tickets.

Yours truly,

Public Relations
Officer.

ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON

THE STORY OF WHIPSNADE

This year Whipsnade Zoological Park celebrates its coming of age. In less than a generation the Zoological Society of London has transformed a derelict Bedfordshire estate into one of the most famous Zoological Parks in the world, and the name of Whipsnade has become a household word. In addition to Whipsnade's achievements in the field of zoological science, it has become recognised as a national institution, where more than half a million visitors find interest, relaxation and entertainment every year.

Whipsnade Today. Before looking back at the highlights of this remarkable story let us first glance for a moment at Whipsnade as it is today. The Park occupies an area of over five hundred acres on the northern slopes of the Dunstable Downs. Its name derives from "Wibba's sneade", Wibba being a ruler of the ancient Kingdom of Mercia, and "sneade" the old English word for a hunting ground. The landscape is well varied, consisting of forest, meadow and downland, and provides an ideal setting for the display of animals in their natural surroundings. The estate is served by several miles of metalled roads and innumerable tracks and paths; recently a road train has been installed to carry visitors to the main points of vantage. The amenities include a well-equipped restaurant, an American bar, numerous buffets and kiosks, and a Zoo shop. One of

the features of the restaurant is the glass enclosed observation room which looks immediately on to one of the paddocks, and enables visitors to eat in comfort while watching a constantly changing panorama of animal life. Llamas, fallow deer and many other smaller animals are so tame that they come right up to the windows in the hope of sharing the visitors' meal.

The range of animals on display at Whipsnade is larger than ever before. Lions and tigers inhabit natural pits on the northern slopes of the downs; alongside them are the polar bears in an enclosure resembling as nearly as possible their Arctic home. In the woods near Whipsnade Gate are found pumas, cheetahs, dingos and a chattering troop of rhesus monkeys, whose vitality and sense of humour makes them a never failing source of amusement. Special mention should be made here of Wolf Wood, where the sinister grey shapes of the wolves gliding through a natural spruce forest provide one of the most spectacular exhibits in the Park. Bison, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, and the great Kodiak bears, the largest in the world, are also on show, while wallabies and some of the smaller species of deer and birds run wild over the estate. Last but not least come the amiable elephants, who give rides to the children during the summer and at other times may often be met ambling with their keepers along the main paths and avenues.

Although less spectacular than the mammals, the birds at Whipsnade also make a fascinating display. Nearly every paddock has its quota of rheas, ostriches, cranes or exotic geese. Peafowl wander at liberty and display themselves

proudly on the lawns, while the flamingo pond by the main restaurant is one of the most beautiful sights in the Park. The British wild birds have their own natural sanctuary and many species breed there every year.

How Whipsnade Began. The Whipsnade of today grew from the dreams of one man, the late Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, then Secretary of the Zoological Society of London. Sir Peter had always been a staunch supporter of the idea, first proposed to the Society in 1903, of a Zoological Park in the country which would serve as a home for reserve stock and also as a kind of holiday camp for the London animals. The fact that Whipsnade has since become much more than this, and is now a Zoological Park in its own right, only endorses the excellence of Sir Peter's scheme.

The Society chose Whipsnade as the site for the new Zoological Park, partly because of its superb natural position, and partly because it was easily accessible from London and the large towns of Luton, Dunstable, Aylesbury and Watford. When first purchased the estate consisted of semi-derelict farmland, unfenced, covered with refuse, and without amenities of any kind. It was the task of Sir Peter and the Society's then Superintendent, Dr. G.M. Vevers, to produce some order out of the chaos. Their first move was to surround the whole area with a wire fence nine feet high and four and a half miles long. This fence was originally fitted with an overhanging section facing inwards to prevent the escape of the animals, but it had later to be turned outwards, for it was found to be more important

to keep the foxes out than the animals in! Roads were made, paddocks laid out, and the old farm buildings were converted into a restaurant. Sir Peter and Dr. Vevers supervised the clearing of the thickets and undergrowth and planting of the natural panoramic backgrounds which are now such a feature of the main paddocks.

Eventually the great day arrived for the introduction of the first animals. The nucleus of the collection was a group of lions, tigers and elephants purchased from Bostock's Circus and Menagerie of which one, the fine old Indian elephant "Dixie", survives to this day. Other animals came from London and from the Duke of Bedford's estate at Woburn. The late Duke was at that time President of the Society, and Whipsnade, as well as the London Zoo, owes a great deal to his generosity, and to that of the present Duke. Other animals were purchased from British and foreign Zoos by the Society, and finally, in May 1931, the new Whipsnade Zoological Park was opened to the public, with Captain W.P.B. Beal as the first resident Superintendent.

Whipsnade's Early Years. The first day of Whipsnade's life was eventful and dramatic. The Society's most optimistic hopes were not only realised, but exceeded - so much so, in fact, that the situation very nearly degenerated into chaos. In the first place, the roads leading to the Park were entirely inadequate to deal with the volume of traffic they were called upon to carry, for everyone had failed to foresee the Zoo's immense popularity. As a result, by midday, every approach to the Park was crammed with a solid block of motor cars, and the Bedfordshire

constabulary had to be turned out in force to deal with the situation. At the Park itself the staff at the turnstiles were overwhelmed by the avalanche of visitors, and the catering staff found themselves totally unable to cope with the surging crowds clamouring for refreshments; when the gates closed at the end of the day the Park had assumed the aspect of a battlefield after the departure of the opposing armies. Nowadays, of course, all these early troubles have been corrected, and a new road has been constructed and old roads widened so that a visit to Whipsnade is as easily and comfortably made as a visit to the London Zoo. Several of the older members of the staff, however, still recall the excitements of the opening day with a reminiscent smile.

The early popularity of Whipsnade was more than maintained during the years before the war, and in 1937 there was a record entry of 546,418 visitors. The stocks of animals and birds were greatly increased and important progress was made with the development of the Park. Dr. Julian Huxley, who followed Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell as the Society's Secretary from 1935-1942, was particularly interested in Whipsnade, and it is to his regime that the Zoo owes the Gibbon Island and the picturesque Flamingo Pond by the Hall Farm Restaurant. Dr. Huxley was ably supported in this work by Captain Beal, a Veterinary Officer with many years experience in West Africa and elsewhere.

Whipsnade at War. At the outbreak of war Whipsnade became an evacuation centre for many animals from the London Zoo, including the valuable Indian riding elephants. Among the other evacuees, the star was undoubtedly "Ming" the first

Giant panda ever to be shown alive in Europe, who stayed at Whipsnade for several months. In the winter of 1939-1940 the Park was closed, but reopened the following spring and has never been closed since. Even in 1941, at the height of our wartime misfortunes, the attendance figures reached nearly a quarter of a million, which shows how much the refreshing and tranquillizing atmosphere of the Zoological Park was appreciated in those difficult times.

As part of the wartime drive for food, a hundred and sixty acres which had formerly been farmland were quickly put back under cultivation, while to economise in animal feeding stuffs much valuable stock had to be destroyed. Among the animals reluctantly sacrificed were over a hundred Chinese water deer, who made a sad, if patriotic, last appearance as "Roast Whipsnade Venison" on several London menus.

One unexpected problem which the Society had to solve during the war was the camouflaging of the famous white lion, which is carved in the chalk of the Dunstable Downs. The Air Ministry decided that the lion was dangerous because it was a landmark for enemy bombers, and it had to be hastily covered with earth and brushwood. As its outline measures over three quarters of a mile in length, this was by no means a simple task, and the lion's subsequent resurrection after the war took several months.

Whipsnade received some damage several times from enemy aircraft and forty-two bombs fell in the grounds.

Many of these were jettisoned by aircraft lightening their loads during raids on Luton and Dunstable. Fortunately the only direct wartime casualty was the Park's oldest inhabitant - an ancient Spur-winged goose.

Post-War Progress and the Future. Under Dr. Sheffield A. Neave who followed Dr. Huxley as the Society's Secretary from 1942-1952, and the new Superintendent, Mr. E.H. Tong, appointed on Captain Beal's retirement in 1947, the years since the war have seen the variety of animals at Whipsnade still further increased. Although restrictions have necessarily limited the building of new shelters and houses, a few simple modifications to the paddocks have greatly improved the visitors' view of the animals. Several of the boundary fences have been replaced by low barriers and dykes, so that visitors no longer have their vision impeded by wire netting. This device makes possible the illusion that one is actually walking in the same enclosure as the animals and has gone a long way towards realising the ideal of a "Zoo without bars", which Whipsnade's creators hoped it would one day become.

Whipsnade has acquired several interesting additions, including leopards, penguins and sea lions, and giraffes have been bred and reared for two years in succession. An experiment with that grotesque tropical animal, the hippopotamus, has proved that, with care, it can be persuaded to adapt itself cheerfully to our comparatively rigorous climate. The stock of elephants has been increased from two to five, including two babies, "Valli" and "Malini", while other delightful young animals are

"Christine", the llama, born on Christmas Eve, ~~the~~^{and} "Festivia", the giraffe, named in honour of the Festival of Britain. A pack of Cape hunting dogs makes a lively display, and there are magnificent herds of eland and the spectacular Ankole cattle.

New animals arrive at Whipsnade every week, and as soon as conditions permit it is hoped that the Park's amenities may be still further improved. Projects that the Society is particularly anxious to carry out are the building a new Chimpanzee House, a still larger enclosure for polar bears with a really deep pool, and an Elephant lawn. At the moment, of course, these projects must remain dreams, but undoubtedly after the achievements of the past twenty one years Whipsnade can celebrate its coming of age with every confidence in the future.

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