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zooreport

the magazine for friends of the Brno Zoo

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Editor:

Zoo Brno a stanice zájmových činností, p. o.
U Zoologické zahrady 46, 635 00 Brno,
Česká republika
tel.: +420 546 432 311
fax: +420 546 210 000
e-mail: zoo@zoobrna.cz

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Editor's office address:

Zoo Brno a stanice zájmových činností, p. o.
redakce Zooreportu
U Zoologické zahrady 46, 635 00 Brno,
Česká republika
tel.: +420 546 432 370
fax: +420 546 210 000
e-mail: stuchlik@zoobrna.cz

Editor manager:

Bc. Eduard Stuchlík

Specialist readers:

RNDr. Bohumil Král, CSc.
Mgr. Lubomír Selinger

Emendation:

Rosalind Miranda

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Eduard Stuchlík

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Eduard Stuchlík

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Greater flamingos

UNSALEABLE

One of the missions of zoos is to connect the keeping with education

After starting work as the environment minister, I realized that I'm no longer just a keen visitor to zoological gardens but also a person responsible for how they fulfil their mission. The Ministry of the Environment is, amongst other things, a central administration office for the operation of zoological gardens: It issues licences for their operation and checks them afterwards on a regular basis.

I consider it important to remind readers that, since 1996, our ministry has been providing grants from the Zoological Gardens Support programme by which it supports and guides activities that contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity in various spheres of conservation activities. It is mainly concerned with providing support to endangered species of fauna worldwide, the keeping of particularly protected species in the Czech Republic, and the keeping of rare and nearly extinct breeds of domestic animals.

Brno Zoo, together with an Indonesian non-profit organization, founded and opened a rescue station on Nusa Penida Island in Indonesia in 2009 for turtles which have been confiscated from illegal traders. An important part of the station is an educational centre for the inhabitants of the island as well as for tourists. It provides information about the most endangered group of Indonesian fauna – fresh water and sea turtles. Together with the Czech Union for Nature Conservation, Brno Zoo has taken part since 2006 in the south Moravian re-introduction project called Protection of Little Owls, and it has also participated in an inventory project for the protection of European ground squirrels in south Moravia in the past. Brno Zoo has been successful



Mgr. Richard Brabec

particularly in achieving reproduction in large predators, specifically its polar bears, and the Kamchatka brown bears which it keeps in a unique set of exhibits called Beringia. Brno Zoo is also involved in the international rescue breeding of Steller's sea eagles and, since 2011, it has been sending the young birds it breeds to other zoos according to the instructions of the rescue breeding coordinator.

It is my belief that zoological gardens should not only fulfil the function of a qualified animal keeping and research institution; their mission should also be the education of the general public and the provision of information to them from the area of environmental protection. I therefore highly appreciate Brno Zoo's efforts in having paid great attention to this area over such a long time, as it

offers about twenty educational programmes to schools of different levels, and its Young Scientists' Station has been educating children and young people for many decades without interruption.

This state-funded institution of the statutory City of Brno places great emphasis on contact with the public, and this is also demonstrated by the fact that it has become the operator of the Environmental Education Centre located in the centre of Brno.

I would like to wish Brno Zoo every success in all aspects of its further development, and hope that it may continue to bring joy and information to its visitors, and satisfaction to its employees through their interesting and praiseworthy work.

Richard Brabec,
Minister of the Environment

Mgr. Richard Brabec

was born on 5th July 1966 in Kladno. He studied at the Faculty of Science at Charles University specializing in geology in combination with foreign languages. He has worked as the director of the Czech Moravian Commodity Exchange in Kladno, in various positions in the financial section of the Unipetrol joint-stock company, as the financial director at Spolana Neratovice a.s., and as the director general of the Lovochemie joint-stock company. Since 2007, he has been dealing with issues concerning European and domestic legislation involving the environment. In this field, he focuses mainly on the emission pass system and the new chemical legislation, REACH, which was issued by the European Union with the aim of ensuring that only chemical substances with known properties will be used by 2020 at the latest, and in such a way that they do not damage the environment or human health. In the elections for the Parliament of the Czech Republic, he was elected as a deputy for the political party ANO 2011. He was appointed the Minister of the Environment by Miloš Zeman on 29th January 2014. Richard Brabec speaks English, French, and Russian.



Photo: Jana Hadová

Giant panda at the zoo in Ocean Park in Hong Kong

Environmental protection can also be entertaining

International Zoo Educators Association (IZE) conferences take place once every two years. The last biennial, the twenty second, was held from 2nd to 6th September 2014 in Hong Kong, China. The host

organization was Ocean Park Hong Kong, one of the largest entertainment parks in the world. During 2013, almost seven and half million visitors passed through its entrance to enjoy riding on Ocean Park's rollercoasters, roundabouts, and Ferris wheels, and to experience other thrilling attractions. However, probably the largest attraction there is the Grand Aquarium pavilion, which occupies a total area of 870,000 m².

One of the exhibits in the aquarium pavilion is the Atoll Reef, which houses more than 400 species of sea animals and hosts experiential education programmes. Those interested can dive in crystal clear water together with animal keepers among manta rays, tunas, and hammerhead sharks, and can watch as an aquarist looks after the coral. Children aged 10 and over can snorkel among the reefs. For younger ones, providing they are at least three years old, there is the experiential education programme Nighttime in the Ocean's Depths. After the other visitors have left, children can camp with their parents in the darkened areas of the pavilion and observe the night life at the bottom of the sea. Another exhibit, named the Ocean Theatre, presents a grand show featuring animal keepers with dolphins and sea-lions, and emphasizes the necessity of protecting our oceans and sea animals. Both children and adults can enjoy behind-the-scenes tours of the breeding facilities. Giant pandas An An and Jia Jia are the pride of the

park, and visitors can get information about the lives of those animals, which became the symbol of environmental protection. Ocean Park offers both experiential and educational programmes to pupils and students of all ages all year round. During the holidays, five-day intensive educational programmes focusing on the protection of the environment are organised for children aged four to ten.

Since 2005, Ocean Park in Hong Kong has financed more than 330 conservation projects focused on cetaceans, pandas, and many other animal species. This was carried out via an independent charity, the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, which Ocean Park established together with two local universities. This foundation launched the Panda Conservation Project in 2013 to help clear up the damage caused by an earthquake in May 2008 which affected 83% of the giant panda's original biotopes.

Although Ocean Park Hong Kong is perceived mostly as an entertainment park by its visitors, it emphasizes educating the public, caring for the environment and protecting the original habitats of endangered species of Asian fauna. It is successful thanks to the educational programmes it organizes, the work of its charity, and the money obtained via its own operation.

Bc. Jana Hadová,
Head of the Education Section



Photo: Jana Hadová

An admission to the Ocean Park in Hong Kong

Mácha's Region is the only Czech place where wolves reproduce

The Kokořínsko – Mácha's Region Nature Reserve – was created in September 2014 by extending the original Kokořínsko Nature Reserve to include the Dokesko region. Kokořínsko covers an area of 274 km², with Dokesko adding 136 km². The new nature reserve thus consists of two unconnected parts which have many common features as well as differences.

The canyon valleys of the Liběchovka and Pšovka rivers and some other smaller streams are typical features of the Kokořínsko part of the reserve; while the characteristic elements of the Dokesko part are the flat basins in the catchment areas of the main waterways, the Robečský potok and Ploučnice streams, with extensive water bodies and wetland areas. The relatively high quality of the soil on the flat surfaces above the valleys in the Kokořínsko part enabled many generations of our ancestors to engage in farming activities. As a result, the majority of these areas have been turned into fields. In contrast, in the Dokesko part, the low quality of the soil is exacerbated by waterlogging in the flat basins, preventing the longer-term or more marked development of human settlements. Due to its unique character, the Dokesko landscape is often described as being taiga of the central European type.

What animals can be met there? As far as the Kokořínsko part is concerned, the local fauna is mainly small in size and not easily visible. The wetlands in the meadows by the Pšovka and Liběchovka streams are home to the very rare, small, and inconspicuous Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*), which can most often be found on the stalks of sedge and reeds in waterlogged locations. It is a species of European importance and a critically endangered



A wolf cub caught by a camera trap operated by the Kokořínsko-Mácha's Region Nature Reserve Administration on 1st September 2014



Lake Mácha



A view of the ruin of Bezděz Castle from the wetlands at Břehyně fishpond

species in the Czech Republic and other countries. In the Pšovka, another rare animal can be found – the Danubian spined loach (*Cobitis elongatoides*). This small fish, which lives mainly in muddy, sandy sediment, is one of the many other species of European importance which occur in the nature reserve. As far as the larger inhabitants of Kokořínsko are concerned, let us at least mention the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), which uses crevices in sandstone cliffs for nesting.

Probably the most precious of the treasures to be found in Dokesko is the metapopulation of a critically endangered beetle, rosalia longicorn (*Rosalia alpina*), which is the only such population in the Czech Republic. Here, the beetle is restricted mainly

to light beech overgrowth with a larger number of withering trees. Other attractive inhabitants include the white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and the common crane (*Grus grus*). Several pairs of both species nest in Mácha's Region.

The arrival of a pair of wolves, probably from upper Lusatia, received a lot of media coverage. Tens of these predators live on the German-Polish border. Wolves have made their home in the wider surroundings of the Břehyně-Pecopala National Nature Reserve. In the spring of 2014, a wolf was recorded there for the first time by a camera trap which had been installed by the administration of the nature reserve. At the end of July, camera traps confirmed the birth of at least three cubs. This event signifies the return of wolves to this location for the first time in more than a hundred years, and Mácha's region is probably the only place in our country right now where they reproduce. Their new home is in the Ralsko former army training area, where there are ideal conditions for them: a low human population, a lot of forests, and a large number of animals.

RNDr. Luboš Beran, Ph.D.,
Zoologist for the Kokořínsko – Mácha's Region
Nature Reserve Administration



A water tower visually dominates the African Village. In the background, there is a stylish building with a refreshment stall and seating area with a view of the ungulates' enclosure. It also houses the sleeping quarters for lemurs and flamingos, and has views into their runs

African village huts have been built at the zoo's highest point

The latest exhibit at Brno Zoo is the African Village. It has been built under the main summit of Mniší hora (Monk's Hill), at the highest point of the zoo, where there was previously a viewing terrace overlooking the sub-Saharan ungulate enclosure traditionally known as the Safari.

We ceremonially opened the African Village on 4th October 2014 at 2 p.m. Shortly afterwards, the music group M-Bunda Afrika began beating their drums, and actress Bára Hrzánová christened Naomi the giraffe, which was born on 18th June this year. The christening took

place in the centre of the village and featured a fluffy toy giraffe. Meanwhile, the young animal and her mother wandered around the enclosure with our four other giraffes.

The African Village has several new exhibits with African animals and offers greater comfort for visitors than the previous facilities, providing better conditions for the observation of the zoo's reticulated giraffes, Chapman's zebras, and blue wildebeest, whose shared enclosure was already standing in 1980.

New exhibits with greater flamingos, ring-tailed lemurs, and red-billed quelea have been created in the African Village. We put together the eight-member group of flamingos from animals brought in from Liberec Zoo

and Djurpark Borås in Sweden, while our flock of eighty small red-billed quelea comes from a private breeding facility in the Netherlands. We have also transferred six male lemurs (born at Jihlava and Zlín zoos), which we have been keeping since 2013, from the bottom part of our zoo into the new lemur exhibit.

The village, which you enter through a gate decorated with two hardwood elephant tusks, is composed mainly of eight round clay huts, stylized replicas of buildings used by the rural population of the Kalahari region. A visually dominant part of the village is the globe-shaped water tower which supplies the zoo with service water. It has been standing there since 1973. In order to prevent its



A 'retired' jeep serves as a decoration and an object suitable for children's games



View from a roofed viewing terrace towards the lemurs and the centre of the village. There is an aviary containing red-billed quelea in the background



The lemurs' island

disturbing the authentic atmosphere, designers have dressed it in a new 'coat' which creates the impression that a hot-air balloon has landed in the settlement. A 'retired' jeep has been parked near the balloon 'basket', with a new surface finish, of course. This great decoration tempts children to sit inside and turn the steering wheel.

The largest structure in the village is elongated, with a curved ground plan. It completes the urbanised area of the village. Under one roof, which is covered with straw like those of the other new structures in the village, we can find a fast-food shop with seating and a view of the Safari run; and also the sleeping quarters built for our ring-tailed lemurs and flamingos, with views into their outdoor enclosures. The animals can also be observed through glass doors or windows when they are in their sleeping quarters, so visitors can also see them in winter, when they don't visit their outdoor run.



The building with the main viewing point into the ungulates' run (left), and the lemur and flamingo runs (right)

You can use a second gate set into an interwoven wooden fence to exit the village onto a path leading around the flamingos' lake and the lemurs' island up to a smaller roofed Safari run viewpoint.

The huts inside the village have a variety of uses: You can find a teaching room in one of them, while another houses toilets and a nappy-changing area. There is also a hut-shaped aviary which visitors can enter to observe a flock of red-billed quelea, which have thermally insulated sleeping quarters in a neighbouring hut. Domestic animals kept on the 'dark continent' can also be found at the village - helmeted guinea fowl and Boer goats.

The participants in the festive opening day spent a pleasant afternoon in the African Village, which was full of new and exotic experiences. They saw many kinds of African fauna and, while walking between the



Lemurs on their island

original buildings, they heard authentic African rhythms and melodies, and sampled original refreshments - fried insects. We hope that the African Village will become not only a popular visitor attraction but also a place which is suitable for the organization of entertainment and educational programmes for the general public.



The music group M-Bunda Afrika



Actress Bára Hrzánová christened this giraffe Naomi



Reticulated giraffes in the Safari run

The Safari had a facelift

During the construction of the African Village, the adjacent exhibit of sub-Saharan ungulates was improved in many ways, with the Safari run from 1980 undergoing something like a course of rejuvenating treatment. The alterations were successful and were achieved without its being necessary to move the animals elsewhere. Our visitors didn't miss anything either, even though the original Safari viewing terrace was turned into a building site and closed to the public. The zoo created an alternative visitor route which led through otherwise inaccessible facilities up to the stable building. The construction of the village and the alterations commenced in October 2013, and everything was ready by the end of September 2014.

Both our giraffes and our zebras reproduced at the Safari this year. On 18th June, one of our five-member herd of giraffes, Janette, gave birth to a small female early in the morning. When we released the foal into the paddock with her mother, their stay outside was smooth up to the moment when we wanted to return them to their stable. Janette noticed that the builders were active in the vicinity, and she didn't want to go into the stable because she was worried about her baby. The animal keepers had to catch the little giraffe first and push her into the building, after which the mother came to join her baby of her own accord.

This procedure had to be repeated for two weeks at closing time until both giraffes finally got used to having strange people around and learned to walk at least part of the way home without help. Unfortunately, the situation repeated itself when Janette started taking her foal into the shared run. Eventually, everything worked out fine, and our pair commenced returning to their stable by themselves.

There are now six animals in the Chapman's zebra herd, though there were only four at the beginning of the year. The mare Arwen, who was born here two years ago, came back to Brno after a stay of approximately one year at Tábor-Větrovy Zoo. Our expectation that it would

be easy for Arwen to rejoin the group was proved wrong, as her mother, Ajka, started to attack her grown-up daughter in an attempt to retain her position in the herd. She failed to do this, as Arwen was joined by the leading stallion on the second day; so Ajka spent most of the time apart from the herd. The mare Fila, who stayed in the stable with her baby stallion Falco, who was born last year, surprised us all on the morning of 27th July: A freshly born foal could be seen standing next to her. It was another stallion, which viewed us with curiosity. We had to separate Falco from his mother for the night, as she was attacking him.

And what improvements have been made in the Safari run? We kept dividing its large area (7,730 m²) up during the construction of the village so that reconstruction could be started in areas from which the animals were temporarily blocked. We have replaced an approximately fifty-metre-long section of wire fence with a wooden palisade, we've set up two new roofed feeding places, and we've grassed the run. The lake, which takes up 440 m², received a new bottom: The gravel base was covered with a ten-centimetre layer of reddish concrete. The maximum depth of the lake is one metre. The animals drink from it and sometimes also walk through it, albeit in different ways: Our Chapman's zebras stroll slowly, while our blue wildebeest sometimes go very fast; but our reticulated giraffes only enter the lake occasionally.

František Práček,
Animal keeper



Part of the Safari run with new fencing and a new feeding place

Guinea fowl and Boer goats

The African Village exhibit, whose opening is described on pages 6 and 7, is inhabited by domestic as well as wild animals. We keep six domesticated guinea fowl (*Numida meleagris f. domestica*) near the water tower in a run surrounded by a wicker fence, and three Boer goats live in the neighbouring enclosure. The goat stable has one glass wall (facing the visitor route), which is also the case with the nearby flamingo and lemur sleeping quarters.

Wild guinea fowl occupy a distribution area covering almost the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, and they can also be found in some places in northwestern Morocco. Guinea fowl have been kept for meat and perhaps also for eggs since 1500 A.D. in Egypt, and they became a food for the rich in ancient times. After the fall of the Roman Empire, guinea fowl were forgotten in Europe. It wasn't until the 15th century that they were rediscovered by the Portuguese, who brought guinea fowl to Europe from West Africa. Guinea fowl meat is very tasty, and their eggs contain less cholesterol than hens' eggs. However, their low degree of domestication prevents their breeding from becoming more common. Guinea fowl cannot be kept in large quantities, as they like to leave their breeding facilities and lay eggs in various hiding places.

Boer goats were bred by European settlers in South Africa in the 1940s by cross-breeding the local Bantu goats with European and Indian goats. The fur of Boer goats is short, and is reddish brown on their heads, ears, and neck. The remaining parts of the body, including the blaze on the head, are white in colour.



The domestic guinea fowl run surrounded by a wicker fence. The guinea fowl sleep in the two huts in the middle

People found fried worms tasty

During the grand opening of the African Village, we offered stylish refreshments to our visitors – fried insects. Mealworms (the early stages of the mealworm beetle) were transformed into a golden treat in the frying pan, along with field and banana crickets, and migratory locusts. Some portions were covered in chocolate; but even the insects without chocolate coating disappeared quickly. There was nothing left for the cook, who talked through a micro port about the worldwide importance of such nutrition while he was frying. Perhaps insects are the food of the future in Europe too as, containing up to sixty percent protein, they are superior to any kind of meat.



Guinea fowl



Boer goats



A cook prepares fried insects for guests at the ceremonial opening of the African Village



Fried locusts covered in chocolate



A hut used as the sleeping quarters for red-billed quelea (left), and their aviary (middle)

Red-billed quelea, the most numerous birds in the world, at the African Village

At the end of September, we released a colony of eighty small songbirds, red-billed quelea (*Quelea quelea*), into one of the eight huts at our new African Village. They came to us from a private breeding facility in the Dutch village of Monster near Rotterdam.

The *Ploceidae* family contains over one hundred species from seventeen genera. The majority of the species occur in sub-Saharan Africa, though some live in Madagascar or south Asia. They are smallish birds, usually the size of a sparrow, with a short, strong, conical beak. Most weave grass and leaves into globular or oval nests with a single opening, hanging them in the branches of trees and bushes; but some species build large, shared nests with several openings, creating huge nesting colonies.

Red-billed quelea inhabit the whole area south of the Sahara, with the exception of rain-forest regions. They live in gigantic colonies in sparse forests, steppes, and savannahs, and

they don't avoid human settlements. It is the most numerous bird species in the world, with an estimated population exceeding 1.5 billion pairs. It can take an almost unbelievable five hours for the birds of one colony on the move to fly over observers!

They feed mainly on grass seed. However, almost any given biotope offers such food, though not uniformly distributed. Therefore, quelea try to search for it tactically: In the morning, the flock divides into smaller groups which gradually "comb" the terrain. During this activity, they can fly up to 50–70 km a day. They can seriously damage crops when searching for food, and are considered to be a prime agricultural pest which is as dangerous as the plant-eating locust in some parts of Africa.

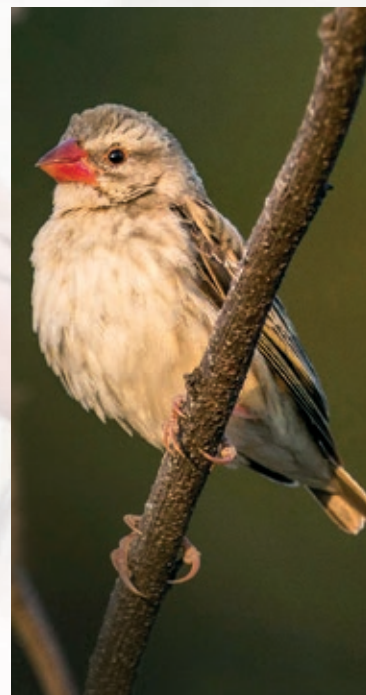
During the reproduction period, the males change their appearance: The colour of the feathers around their eyes usually becomes dark and creates a black facial mask, though the mask can sometimes be white. The chest and head of each individual bird changes colour differently, ranging from slightly yellow to bright red. For the rest of the year, the males resemble the females, which are greyish brown. Birds of both

sexes usually have red beaks, but the colour of the females' beaks changes to brownish yellow during the nesting period.

The majority of males build woven nests on the thorny twigs of bushes. They then offer their nests to females, but not all of them end up being used. The females lay two to four light blue eggs that incubate for nine to twelve days, with males taking a minimal share in the incubation. Eggs can be laid more than once per year. Parents feed their hatched young with caterpillars and insects for several days, after which they start to bring their offspring seeds as well. Growth is very fast: Young birds are completely independent in about sixteen days and reach sexual maturity after one year of life. During the five-week reproduction period, a colony can easily double in size. The average lifespan of the red-billed quelea is two to three years in the wild, extending to several tens of years in captivity.

The huts into which we released the quelea serve as thermally insulated sleeping quarters. Except for the cold part of the year, the birds will mainly use the neighbouring spacious outdoor aviary.

RNDr. Petr Suvorov, Ph.D.,
Curator for Bird Keeping



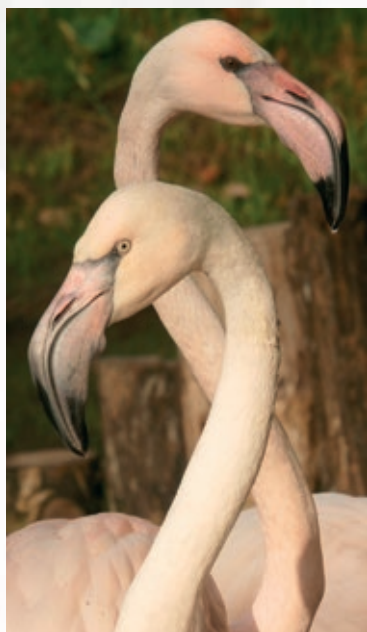
A red-billed quelea female. Her beak is red in colour except during the nesting period

Flamingos are back in Brno Zoo again

Brno Zoo has returned to breeding flamingos after many years. From 1971 to 1997, the zoo kept a group of greater, Cuban, and Chilean flamingos in one of its three water bird exhibits. However, during the construction of Tiger Rocks, the water bird runs had to be closed down. In the present exhibit in the African Village, there are eight young greater flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*).

At the beginning of September 2014, we carried out the difficult transfer of the first part of the new breeding flock, bringing five individuals from Borås Zoo in southern Sweden. We placed them in spacious facilities with a water tank, where they adapted to their new environment during the completion of the outdoor exhibit. Acclimatisation took about ten days, during which the birds behaved completely naturally and started to accept food. We brought in the other three flamingos at the end of September from Liberec Zoo. We are planning to extend the group to approximately thirty individuals.

Greater flamingos inhabit an extensive area of the warm regions of three continents, Europe, Asia, and Africa, where they seek various environments with brackish, salty, or fresh water. The birds which live outside tropical regions are migratory. According to IUCN data, the world population oscillates around 500,000 adult individuals. In Europe, we can find greater flamingos in locations around the Mediterranean



Greater flamingos



The flamingos' lake is decorated with boats which have been hollowed out from a tree trunk. In the background, there is a feeding place for water birds; while in the centre there is the roofed viewing terrace that overlooks the Safari run

Sea, the only exception being an artificially located colony which has been nesting in the Zwillbröcker Venn nature reserve on the Dutch-German border since the early 1980s. The population there consists of two species – greater flamingos and Chilean flamingos (*Phoenicopterus chilensis*). However, American flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) and small flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*) individuals have also been spotted there, nesting inland, then flying to the Atlantic coast to spend the winter. The introduction of flamingos into the wild at a location where they do not belong should not have been done, partly due to the risk of cross breeding between the greater flamingo and genetically related species from the American continent.

Flamingos don't have any anti-predatory mechanisms. Their flocks' great numbers and their tendency to nest in muddy terrain which is inaccessible to four-legged predators protect them against enemies. Flamingos change feathers completely during nesting, and therefore cannot fly for a certain period, during which hiding in wetlands is their only chance for survival. The main components of their diet are crustaceans, molluscs, annelids, water insect larvae, and small fish. They filter food through their fleshy tongue, a method which works on the principle of a pressure pump. In captivity, special granules are used for feeding.



Our group of greater flamingos now consists of eight birds

Flamingos are monogamous even though they live in large nesting colonies, which can contain several species. The success rate of reproduction increases with the size of the colony, as the individual pairs stimulate each other. The nest takes the form of a clay mound on the ground. Both parents take turns to sit for 28 to 30 days on the one egg laid, and both parents also take turns looking after the chick. Older young birds gather together in larger groups, reaching adulthood at around the age of three.

Beautiful, elegant flamingos, popular with visitors to many zoological gardens, are luckily no longer missing from Brno Zoo.

RNDr. Petr Suvorov, Ph.D.,
Curator for Bird Keeping

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