

zooreport

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the magazine for friends of the Brno Zoo

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special supplement
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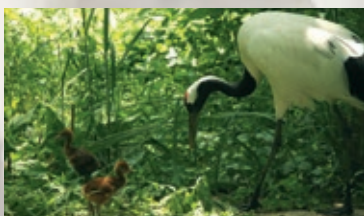
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UNSALEABLE

Brno Zoo takes part in the protection of the environment in Indonesia

These days, there are very few attractions which are more tempting for children than computers or tablets – but they do still exist. For example, a gelada with its hair disarranged like it's just got up, or a calmly sunbathing meerkat, or the ultimate spectacle of a bathing bear – these can make a child stop watching a TV serial episode before the end or leave a computer game uncompleted. And let's admit it – adults find animals entertaining too.

My favourite animals at Brno Zoo are the bears. Perhaps only a few people know that before lions gained their royal position among the animals, it was bears that were appreciated the most by the ancient Celts and Germans. Even though bears' facial muscles aren't very well developed, and therefore it is hard to guess their mood, they are very good at making our face muscles move. I am a very frequent visitor to the new Beringia exhibit at Brno Zoo thanks to the online broadcasting from the Kamchatka brown bear run. When I have a free moment in my busy timetable and I need to switch off and relax, I open the Brno Zoo web pages and let myself be entertained by the bears playing in their pool. Sometimes I have the impression that the fluffy animals must suspect that they are being watched non-stop, and therefore compete to see who can show off with the craziest trick.



Photo: Marie Schmeková

Roman Onderka with Kamchatka brown bears

We all find things of interest to us when visiting a zoo. A modern city zoo is, and will always be, a place where exotic species are scrutinised and their lifestyles examined, and where there are facilities for study and science. At the same time, its importance as a place for spending one's leisure time is increasing, too, and it is becoming a more and more important part of everyday life in the city. However, the zoo also has a social responsibility. Brno Zoo is a very active institution with a strong feeling of duty towards certain endangered animal species. Together with Prague Zoo, the Union of Czech and Slovak Zoological Gardens, and an Indonesian non-profit organization, they have founded a turtle rescue station and an education centre focusing on the field of conservation activities

which serve the local people and visitors on Nusa Penida Island in Indonesia. The Kura Kura Centre ("Save the turtle!" in Indonesian) makes people aware of the danger which turtles face as one of the most endangered groups of Indonesian fauna.

Brno's Zoological Gardens significantly contributes to the image of the city and reflects its inhabitants' attitude to life's important values. The Kura Kura project proves that we in Brno care, that we aren't indifferent. What defines a good modern metropolis is, in my opinion, this "caring", a feeling of social responsibility, of doing something extra which we don't necessarily have to do. We can therefore be proud of ourselves, too, when we visit Brno Zoo – it is our zoo, after all.

*Bc. Roman Onderka, MBA,
Mayor of the City of Brno*



Bc. Roman Onderka, MBA

was born in Brno in 1965. He has been the Mayor of Brno for eight years, after winning the local elections at the head of the Social Democratic Party in 2010, when he was re-elected as the head of the city. He graduated from Karel Engliš University in Brno, specialising in economics and business law, and subsequently graduated from the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme at the Faculty of Business and Management at Brno University of Technology. He considers his greatest success while working for his beloved Brno as the improvement in the economic management of the city, which has long been considered exceptionally successful within the Czech Republic.



The green tape in front of the entrance to the new wallaby exhibit was cut by (from the left) the Mayor of Brno, Roman Onderka, a boy from the Klokánek fund for children in danger and the director of Brno Zoo, Martin Hovorka



The opening ceremony for the new wallaby run also featured a show performed by two men on jump boots



The area between the security doors is decorated with an artificial rock wall displaying copies of aborigine drawings

A new wallaby exhibit has been created in the upper part of the zoo

Brno Zoo ceremoniously opened a new wallaby exhibit on 30th August 2014. The exhibit is new not only through its date of creation but also in its conception. It is a walk-through exhibit, just like the recently opened bald eagle aviary. Entering visitors share the

same area with the animals without being separated from them by a fence or any other barrier.

The small opening celebration was inventively designed, being stylish and impressive from the very beginning. The entrance to the exhibit opened suddenly and a person in jump-shoes, dressed up as a wallaby, burst out. Shortly afterwards, another person appeared, dressed as an animal tamer. He also had on jump-shoes, which allowed him to do somersaults. The jumping men entertained the spectators with a performance of mobility and agility which was very similar to the capabilities of the wallabies.

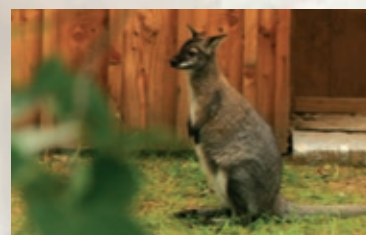
The Mayor of Brno, Roman Onderka, welcomed visitors to the new exhibit. After him, Martin Hovorka (the Director of the Zoo), Ladislav Macek (the deputy mayor for construction), and an honorary guest, high jumper Svatoslav Ton, also took turns giving speeches. Mr Ton, the well-built, slim athlete who has taken part in the Olympic Games, said that when he was in tip-top shape, he could easily jump over the fence of the wallaby run. When asked by the visitors, he answered

that his personal record from 2005 is 233 cm. Then he looked around the new animal-keeping facility and added hesitantly that Brno's zoologists must surely know how high the fence around the wallabies should be.

Young singers from Brno's Klokánek, a facility run by the Fund for Children in Danger, provided musical entertainment for this festive occasion. All of them, including their adult escorts, wore red dresses; only one of them, the wallaby mascot, was brown. It was he who cut the green tape in front of the entrance to the exhibit, together with the Mayor and the Director of Brno Zoo, allowing the visitors to come in.

The new wallaby exhibit can be found in the upper part of the zoo, at the end of the main road leading from the U Tygra restaurant to the Exotarium pavilion. The pedestrian trail, which parallels the road on which the tourist train runs, passes directly through the exhibit when you turn off the trail onto a path leading through the wallaby run. Both the entrance and exit are fitted with special security doors that stop the animals from escaping. Visitors can meet wallabies anywhere in the run, but they mustn't leave the path under any circumstances.

The exhibit covers an area of approximately 3,000 m², and is equipped with a small building containing sleeping quarters for the wallabies, as well as a charming decoration in the form of an artificial rock wall featuring copies of drawings by Australian aborigines. The new animal-keeping facility was designed to house rare rock wallabies. However, negotiations concerning their direct acquisition from Australia are still ongoing; and therefore, visitors can only see red-necked wallabies at the moment.



A red-necked wallaby in front of the sleeping quarters in the new enclosure



Visitors walking along the path leading through the wallaby run

The sandstone Mountains of the Elbe – a landscape of many faces

Forests, meadows, ponds, rock towers, mesas, little rivers, and the last still-unchanged part of the river Elbe – all this can be found in only 245 km² of the Elbe Sandstone Mountains. This protected landscape area forms a compact unit together with the Bohemian Switzerland National Park, covering practically the whole of the Děčín highlands, and boasts a great number of rock formations comparable even with those found in the well-known national parks of the USA.

While the rock formations in America are exposed thanks to the dry climate there, in the Elbe Sandstone Mountains they are to a large degree covered by forests. Erosion has created many forms of rocky relief in this sandstone massif whose diversity is unparalleled in other sandstone areas in our country and even in Europe. The variety of species living there is mainly affected by special environmental conditions, such as the cold climate in the gorges, which enables everything from mountain animals to sub-alpine species to exist at unusually low heights above sea level.

The canyon of the River Elbe is a remarkable work of nature. The valley, which is more than 300 metres deeper in places than the areas surrounding it, is lined with 60- to 70-metre-high rock walls, creating the largest phenomenon of this kind in our country. This canyon is also important due to the occurrence of large expanses of original forests



Photo: Jan Šmucar

The Elbe Canyon National Nature Reserve – the place with the highest biodiversity in the Elbe Sandstone Mountains

(including flowery beech woods), which are home to many animals.

As far as feathered animals are concerned, there are mainly woodpeckers, for example the black woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*), which are dependent on old trees, as are owls such as the boreal owl (*Aegolius funereus*), which nests mainly in cavities made by the black woodpecker. The rock walls themselves provide refuge for other species of birds. You can meet the Eurasian eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*) and the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) in the locality. The falcon and the eagle owl, together with the black woodpecker and the corn crake (*Crex crex*), are the key species for whose protection the Elbe Sandstone Mountains

Bird Area was created. This special protection area covers the territory of the national park. The largest nesting population of peregrine falcons in the Czech Republic, featuring ten nesting pairs, can be found in the Bird Area of the Elbe Sandstone Mountains.

The valley of the River Elbe is also home to the Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*), which has spread to our territory from Germany after its previous extinction here. The European otter (*Lutra lutra*) has colonised not only the River Elbe, but also smaller downstream rivers, and its numbers are growing slowly. In the river basin of the Kamenice River you can see the European brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*) as well as the Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), which was introduced here artificially in 1998 in order to renew the original population. Apart from running water, larger and smaller wetlands can also be found in the Elbe Sandstone Mountains, where rare species of amphibian occur, such as the agile frog (*Rana dalmatina*), the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*), the smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*), and the alpine newt (*Ichthyosaura alpestris*). Many kinds of bird use the still waters as a place to nest or to find food. These include the white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), whose nesting was confirmed in the Elbe Sandstone Mountains area for the first time this year.

Mgr. Eva Mikolášková,

Zoologist at the Administration
of the Elbe Sandstone Mountains PLA



Photo: Václav Šenja

Peregrine falcon with prey



Adult red-crowned crane with seven-day-old chicks



The first breeding of the red-crowned crane at Brno Zoo

This year was the first time that Brno Zoo has succeeded in breeding the red-crowned crane (*Grus japonensis*), a bird from the *Gruiformes* order, *Gruidae* family.

The red-crowned crane nests in northeast China, the adjacent part of Mongolia, and the Russian Far East. It spends the winter in the south of China and Korea. An isolated population which doesn't migrate lives on the Japanese island of Hokkaido. The birds are tied to wetlands

due to their way of life, and such areas are generally disappearing. The population of red-crowned cranes isn't large in the wild: There are only about 2,500 individuals, and their numbers are continuing to fall. The IUCN red list registers this species as Endangered (EN).

This elegant bird, with its typical non-feathered red spot on its forehead and the crown of its head, is a frequent subject in the traditional art of the Far East, where it is worshipped as a holy symbol of longevity and marital happiness. It keeps its mate for life, and can live to 30 years in the wild, or 65 years in captivity. During the beautiful wedding dance, which they perform every year during the spring mating period, the

cranes bow to each other, jump, and honk loudly using a strange apparatus, their S-shaped wind-pipe. It is ossified in certain places, which makes the honking sound so powerful that it can even be heard several kilometres away.

Like most cranes, the red-crowned crane is a migratory species which moves to more southern Asian locations for the winter. During their autumn migration, they flock together. The gathering places usually remain the same for years, and up to tens of thousands of birds of several crane species can be seen at them daily. Young born in the spring undergo the journey to the wintering places with their parents. As they do not have the migration route encoded genetically, they have to learn it from their father and mother during their first journey to the south.

A female red-crowned crane has lived at our zoo since 2005. She was bred artificially at Moscow Zoo, where she was born in 2002. We obtained the male in 2006. He comes from Schönbrunn Zoo, where he was born in 2005 and raised by his parents. In the spring of 2008, we noticed that the cranes were already performing many elements of what is known as the "wedding dance", and that they were singing duets. The synchronization of a pair of cranes can take a very long time, and acquiring two individuals of the opposite sex doesn't actually guarantee anything at all. The birds are capable of staying in one enclosure together for years without any results from their cohabitation, and so it is very fortunate for us that our cranes formed a harmonious pair.



Adult red-crowned crane with one-month-old babies

In the following years, they built a nest on the ground and took turns to sit on the eggs. However, fertilization analyses showed repeatedly that the eggs were sterile. The male can fertilize the female only when he jumps onto her, but this can be a problem for birds kept in captivity because they often have one wing clipped and they find it hard to balance. Such individuals have to learn to mate in an alternative style, which can take several years.

As was her habit, the female sat on the nest again in May. Despite busy construction work at the nearby eagle aviary, both partners continued to keep the eggs warm until, on 4th June, we discovered two little fluffy balls in the nest.

Cranes are very careful parents. In their homeland, most species build their nests in impenetrable wetlands in order to lower the risk of attack by a terrestrial predator. They are very persistent in their parental duties, leading their young around until they achieve the full ability to fly. When caring for their young, they are usually very aggressive and often attack any potential intruder, including humans. However, our birds are relatively calm compared with other pairs. Despite this, we tried to expose them to a minimum of stress during the first days of their babies' lives, and we kept all operations around their exhibit to the bare minimum.

Crane chicks are already semi-independent when they hatch. They come out feathered but



Adult red-crowned crane with three-month-old offspring

their parents go on showing them food very patiently and bring them prey in their beaks for many months after their birth. The young birds observe the behaviour of their parents and gradually learn to hunt for themselves.

The growth of our chicks was surprisingly fast. They had almost reached the size of their parents within three months. However, they still have far to go as concerns their adult plumage. They will acquire it during their adolescent period, which occurs when they are approximately two years old. And so it was that two mainly white birds similar to storks (some visitors thought they were storks at first sight) could be seen moving around their run accompanied

by two slightly smaller individuals which were almost completely reddish brown. The exhibit in the lower part of the zoo by the path leading from the Kamchatka brown bears to the polar bears thus became more interesting. Many visitors managed to work things out, soon realizing that the birds were all from one species, and recognizing which were the young birds and which were the adults.

We are happy that our cranes have proved to be caring parents. Naturally bred young are a prerequisite for the successful continuation of breeding.

*RNDr. Petr Suvorov, Ph.D.,
curator for bird keeping
Ing. Miloslav Walter,
animal keeper*



Adult re-crowned crane with three-month-old offspring



A three-month-old red-crowned crane



A performance by the Abanico dance group



A Swan Lake ballet parody performed by the Mimi Fortuæ ensemble

The tenth Dreamnight at the Zoo

Like many other zoological gardens, Brno Zoo organizes a Dreamnight at the Zoo every year, always on the first Saturday in June. After 6 p.m., when the standard opening hours end, our invited guests - handicapped children - come to the zoo accompanied by their relatives. We often recognize families which have taken part in previous Dreamnights, and it can be seen that everybody has been looking forward to this unusual event for the whole year. The visitors are welcomed by illuminated paths leading to the exhibits and lit-up pavilions where animal keepers are waiting to deliver knowledgeable talks about the animals in their charge. A train decorated with colourful bulbs takes the guests around the gardens, which

are completely theirs alone for this night, and live dance music can be heard emanating from a stage in the upper part of the zoo. Artistic productions by theatres and dance ensembles alternate on the stage. Various other attractions which ordinary visitors cannot see are scattered throughout the gardens. This year's Dreamnight was the tenth to be held at Brno Zoo - minor anniversary which certainly deserves a mention, even if it is slightly late.

From the stage, the director of the zoo welcomed the guests shortly after 6 p.m., and a series of artistic performances followed: For example, the Abanico dance group performed country and western dancing; and the Mimi Fortuæ dance theatre produced a good parody of the Swan Lake ballet, with dancers in costumes representing floating or flying swans and clucking hens. One of the dancers, dressed in yellow, portrayed a new-born chick. A flock of cockerels also appeared, as well as a confused homeless person. This unexpected scene actually suited Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's music very well.

Other attractions were prepared at seven locations within the grounds of the zoo. There was a fire engine with a hose at the small square near the entrance to Beringia. There, visitors could spray a model of a burning castle with a stream of water. In front of the terrarium, there was an ambulance whose crew demonstrated a medical emergency response after

an accident; and there were also two stalls with art workshops where children could make something to remind them of their visit to the zoo. At the falconer's stand near the Exotarium pavilion, visitors could view a Eurasian eagle-owl, a tawny owl, and a barn owl; while at the natural objects stall, they could touch ostrich eggs, deer antlers, and the fur and skulls of predators and other animals. We provided horse rides at the ponydrome near the Children's Zoo as well as on the forest path behind the Indian village near the bison exhibit. Keepers talked about the animals while meerkats, peccaries, keas, ring-tailed lemurs, bison, tigers, and giraffes were fed in their enclosures. And we gave out refreshments and small presents at 7.30 p.m. near the Children's Zoo.

The first Dreamnight took place at Rotterdam Zoo in the Netherlands in 1996, when that zoo invited patients from the local children's hospital for a visit which started when it got dark. At that time, nobody expected that this would be the first step towards an extensive worldwide event, the purpose of which is to provide an exceptional experience, unavailable to the average zoo visitor, to children who spend the majority of their time in health-care centres. Other zoological gardens in the Netherlands soon joined Rotterdam Zoo, and later zoos in other European countries and overseas also began holding such events. In our country, the first Dreamnight took place at Děčín Zoo in 2004. It was organised at two Czech zoological gardens - Brno and Děčín - the following year. By 2014 it had already spread to ten Czech zoos. On 6th June 2014, Dreamnight at the Zoo took place at 265 zoological gardens or their partner organizations worldwide.



Barn owl

The Adoptive Parents' Meeting was accompanied by our Indian Weekend

The festive opening of the new wallaby exhibit on 30th August this year was part of the Adoptive Parents and Sponsors' Meeting, which is organized on the last Saturday in August every year as a reminder of the anniversary of the opening of the zoological gardens, which visitors were first able to enter on 30th August 1953.

Among the guests some brand new adoptive parents attracted attention – the inhabitants of Klokánek ("Little Kangaroo"), a facility for children urgently in need of help. On that very day they became the adoptive parents of the red-necked wallabies who inhabit the new wallaby enclosure, and they also played an important role during the festive opening of this exhibit (there is a report about this event on page 4). The children from Klokánek brought the money saved for the adoption to the zoo in a piggy bank and accepted the adoption certificate on the stage near the Children's Zoo where, after the opening of the wallaby run, an entertainment programme took place.

The on-stage programme commenced at 2.30 p.m. and finished after 5 p.m. It started and finished with folk music performed by the Nový Kaskadéři music group, who are the adoptive parents of our Grevy's zebras. Two of our other tried and tested supporters performed on the stage – the Abanico ensemble and Mimi Fortunae dance theatre – also have an adopted animal at our zoo. Other performances included a show on jump boots, which we had also had the opportunity to see during the



Inhabitants of Klokánek, a facility run by the Fund for Children in Danger, received a certificate confirming their adoption of wallabies at the Adoptive Parents and Sponsors' Meeting at Brno Zoo

opening of the wallaby run, a display by Brno Youth Basketball School, a performance by the Bartůňkovi dance school, and a fairy-tale performance by Divadlo Prkno. Enthusiasts from the team which performs the traditional customs and rituals of the Hokoka Blaketu Indian tribe gave a one hour long performance featuring, e.g. an eagle dance.

The "Indians" (together with "cowboys" from the "Western City" of Šiklův Mlýn in Zvole nad Pernštejnem) also took part in the Indian Weekend which was held from 10 a.m. on Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st August at three different locations around the zoo. We could watch archery, the making of headbands and a hunting dance involving



Indian Weekend: a display of skins from hunted animals



Indian Weekend: archery training

children at a stand near the Indian tee-pees, while a small competition involving the recognition of animals and their footprints took place by the entrance to Beringia, where a trapper talked about trapping and shooting from muzzle and breech loaders. There was also an Indian, who taught the visitors archery and tomahawk throwing. At a stand near the terrarium, a cowboy demonstrated horse shoe throwing and performed whip work. The jump boot rental place wasn't lost among the varied range of activities provided by the cowboys and Indians either. Many satisfied customers used its services at a temporary stand near the Exotarium pavilion.



The interior of the new bald eagle aviary

The Experience Trail around the eagle aviary

The new walk-through bald eagle aviary, opened to the public on 5th July 2014, is supplemented by smaller exhibits featuring striped skunks, North American porcupines, and chipmunks.

The route, which leads visitors to the huge eagle aviary and then brings them out of it again, twists and turns in a varied and inventive fashion between artificial rocks. If you approach the aviary from the Indian hut, the first thing you see is a view of the striped skunk run which opens up on your right. After you've had a look at that and then moved forward a few steps, you will come to a glass wall through which you can look into the porcupine enclosure from above and see what's down there, including the dry tree which the porcupines love to climb.

After you have enjoyed watching the spiky porcupine up in the bare tree, a trip through the aviary (information about this can be found in the previous ZooReport) awaits. Visitors pass through a metal gate, a curtain made from plastic strips closes behind them, and they find themselves among eagles. From the observation area, which is covered by an artificial overhang, you look across the surface of a pool which is connected to an artificial stream, and you have a view of almost the entire giant aviary, where we keep a pair of

bald eagles. They were acquired from Liberec Zoo, where they have already bred.

The most western location where bald eagles are found is the Aleutian Islands. Their range extends across Alaska and Canada to the Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon archipelago off the east coast of Canada, and then south across the whole USA and the north of Mexico. These eagles usually live near large bodies of water or on the coast, and their diet mainly consists of fish. The bald eagle, famous as the national bird and state symbol of the United States of America, was on the edge of extinction in the USA in the latter part of the 20th century (though it remained widespread in Alaska and Canada). After conservation measures



The aviary is accessible via a double entrance with a drape made of plastic strips

were taken, their numbers rose and, in 2007, they were removed from the list of endangered species.

After leaving the aviary, the visitor route is bordered on the right by the hollow trunk of a massive fallen giant sequoia tree (it is, of course, only an imitation), with openings cut through it allowing visitors to look into the chipmunks' quarters. We are still negotiating the acquisition of these North American squirrels with other zoological gardens. To the left of the visitor route, you pass a second point from which one can see into the porcupine enclosure, this time from below. After that, the Experience Trail returns to the route leading from the Indian hut to the Canada lynx run and the other enclosures on the western slope of Monk Hill.



When approaching the aviary from the main road, you will head gently upwards past the North American porcupine exhibit (the view in is in the centre of the picture) and then past the chipmunk exhibit. There is a second view of the porcupines after passing through the aviary but from above

Striped skunks and North American porcupines

In the North American porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*) exhibit, which forms a kind of supplement to the bald eagle aviary, only one animal can currently be seen, a female obtained from Antwerp Zoo. We are still negotiating the acquisition of a male porcupine with other zoos.

North American porcupines live in coniferous, mixed and deciduous forests in Canada, the USA and northern Mexico. They are rodents from the Erethizontidae family, often called tree or New World porcupines. They look rather similar to Old World, ground-dwelling porcupines, but they are actually only their distant relatives, being genetically closer to the South American caviid family (*Caviidae*). Unlike Old World porcupines, North American porcupines have shorter and more pliable spines and are able to climb trees, the buds of which are the animal's favourite food. The North American porcupine, whose body is covered by long brown hairs with white ends, has developed a specific method for protecting itself against predators: 3–15 cm long and 1–5 mm wide spines (known as quills) grow on the upper part of its tail and partially on its back, tipped with hundreds of microscopic backward-facing barbs. These quills work their way under the skin easily, but it is very hard to get them out and they can get even further into the body of the afflicted attacker when its muscles contract. On meeting a potential predator, the porcupine turns its back



North American porcupine

and raises its quills in order to threaten it. If the attacker doesn't back off, it gets a hit from the porcupine's tail (or the porcupine reverses into them), the quills come loose and stick in the target. If these spines remain in the wound, they can cause inflammation or even death. Most predators are aware of this, and prefer to avoid porcupines. Only wolverines (*Gulo gulo*) and fishers (*Martes pennanti*) are able to hunt porcupines in such a manner that they manage to bite and eat them without being harmed by their quills.

Another exhibit complementing the huge new bald eagle aviary contains a pair of striped

skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*), predators from the skunk family (*Mephitidae*). Animals of this species are known for their ability to spray a stinking liquid to defend themselves against their enemies, which mainly comprise horned owls, hawks, coyotes, lynxes, foxes and dogs. Skunks are able to spray an oily secretion from two large scent glands located near their anus for a distance of several metres. The fluid contains sulphur and its indescribable stench can be smelt from a great distance away. The striped skunk is adaptable, inhabiting prairies, forests, agricultural land and human settlements from southern Canada to the north of Mexico.



When approaching the aviary from the Indian hut, you will see the striped skunk exhibit first



Striped skunk

Visit our newest exposition!



**African village,
festively opened on October 4, 2014.**



The village offers a restaurant with a view to the exposition of giraffes, zebras and blue wildebeest, a lake of flamingos, an aviary of weavers, domestic animals of Dark Continent and other attractions.