

the magazine for friends of the Brno Zoo

Zooreport

No. 1
March 2024



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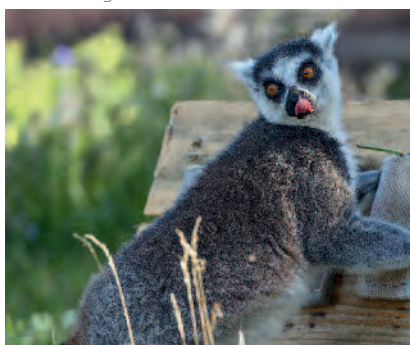
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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

In 2023, we celebrated 70 years since the opening of Brno Zoo. It was a great milestone for us. We not only looked back and prepared a lot of events for you, but also thought about what the future holds for us. All this was also reflected in this year's first issue of *Zoo-Report*.

On the very next page, you can read an interview with the director of Brno Zoo, Radana Dungalová. We covered a number of topics, but the main one was the 70th anniversary celebrations. We also touched on the history of interesting breedings, plans for the future, and the role of zoos. I hope I am not giving too much away by saying that since wildlife around the world is facing many challenges, major losses and species extinctions, our mission as a zoo is to help protect entire species so that our children and their children can still see them.

As part of our 70th birthday celebration, we gave ourselves a gift we have long wanted, one which I firmly believe will be appreciated by our supporters: We have prepared the very first book about Brno Zoo! The publication describes the shift from gypsy caravans to modern exhibits, the most famous breedings, veterinary care, and insights about animal feeding, as well as giving engaging information about the animals and buildings, the historical context, and old and current photographs.

An important moment for us last year was the arrival of a new male gi-



Photo: Matyáš Slavík

raffe from the UK. Khari, as the new resident of Mniší Hora is called, was born on 26 April 2019 at Whipnade Zoo. He was originally due to arrive in 2021, but the post-Brexit situation was so administratively unclear and complicated that his arrival had to be postponed several times. Of course, the situation around COVID-19 also played a role and made everything even more complicated and, more importantly, further delayed. Details can be found on the following pages.

New inhabitants of Mniší Hora are also discussed in the text about the expansion of the bird collection. Nine new species of feathered friends were added to the aviaries at Brno Zoo at the

end of 2023. If you would like to know which they are, just read on.

In this issue, we cannot leave out our activities aimed at saving species and protecting biodiversity. Together with Liberec Zoo, we have deployed radio transmitters onto sea turtles in Indonesia and are mapping the movements of these reptiles in the ocean. The research will provide brand new data that can help to protect sea turtles in the region more effectively.

I wish you pleasant reading, and all the best in 2024!

Michal Vaňáč

2023 was our 70th anniversary year. Thanks to our zoo supporters, we reconstructed the exhibits of corsac foxes and Pallas's cats.

So much happened last year: a whole series of events, renovated and enlarged enclosures, crossword puzzles, a euro banknote, and the first-ever book about Brno Zoo. The director of Brno Zoo, Radana Dungalová, evaluates the year 2023; and, in an interview, she also reveals what awaits us at Mniší Hora in 2024.

We have had a year in which we commemorated 70 years since the opening of Brno Zoo. How did the celebrations go?

We commemorated the anniversary throughout the year, and a lot was going on. We released a special edition of ecological and sustainable souvenirs. The so-called *Stopy* ("Traces") campaign was undoubtedly interesting, as it brought together the residents and visitors of Brno who came upon animal tracks which were accompanied by a QR code. By scanning the code, those interested could learn more about the animals that made the tracks, and could also win prizes in the form of experiential programmes, tickets to our zoo, or trips to other European zoos. We also had exhibitions at Brno Reservoir, Moravské náměstí, and the Urban Centre. The highlight of the celebrations was the September Garden Party, a beautiful celebration for friends of the zoo right here at Mniší Hora with lots of surprises. At that time, we also presented the first-ever book about Brno Zoo.

This year, we introduced a unique app designed for blind visitors. A special portal is available for them, making the content of touch-sensitive educa-

tional panels and information labels in the pavilions and the zoo grounds accessible. It is fully optimised for control and reading by voice output on a mobile phone. The portal was created in cooperation with the Teiresiás Centre of Masaryk University, and follows the success of the first nationwide tactile map for blind visitors to Brno Zoo. We were the first Czech zoo to launch this project.

Can zoo fans take advantage of some of the celebrations in 2024?

We've been posting crossword puzzles on our website during the entire year, one each week. When the series was complete, they all remained available at www.zobrno.cz, so even now, anyone can come back and solve them at any time. We have also uploaded historic videos from Brno Zoo to our YouTube channel, and these are also still available.

Have you drawn inspiration from any birthday programmes at zoos abroad?

We always try to find inspiration and improve, and it is true that we look abroad, too. Regarding celebrations, we have implemented mainly things that our own employees have been thinking

about for a long time. Finally, last year presented the ideal opportunity to use and implement them. As an example, the aforementioned *Stopy* campaign linked city institutions and tourist destinations. We are an integral part of Brno, and we are glad that other important organisations got involved and went along with us.

What about the sale of unique Euro banknotes with the motif of laughing wolves?

That was one of the many reminders of the celebration of 70 years of Brno Zoo. We sold them for the first time on 17 November at a special event right in our garden. They are currently on offer in the souvenir shop above the U Tygra restaurant, at the ticket offices, and also in our newly launched e-shop. The collectable banknotes feature the motif of laughing wolves, which has gone around the world in the form of a meme with different text variations. It even has its own page, and many people were surprised to learn that these are wolves from Brno Zoo. We've also used this motif on tourist stamps and on reusable waxed napkins, which are ideal for wrapping snacks for children.

Was it easy to open the zoo 70 years ago?

Although I wasn't there, I don't think so. Brno Zoo was founded by the Regional National Committee in Brno in a decree of 6 May 1950, which designated a suitable place for its construction: the forest of Mniší Hora in Bystrc



Director of Brno Zoo, Radana Dungalová. Photo: Jana Kotoučková

near Brno, which was declared a state nature reserve on 11 February 1950. At that time, the forest had already been assigned to Masaryk University, which wanted to build a botanical garden there. An agreement was made that allocated the valley of the Hluboček stream and the adjacent southwestern slope of the hill to the zoological garden, with a total area of ten hectares; the southern and eastern slopes remained allocated to the botanical garden. The prominent hilltop and the northern slopes remained a reserve. After three years of effort and with a lot of help from volunteer enthusiasts, the zoo was finally opened to the public.

The first animal collection contained 171 specimens of 51 species. Sunday, 30 September 1953 was a sunny day, and approximately four thousand people came to see the opening. The most valuable zoological inhabitant was the wolverine, the only one kept in our country then. Other notable animals in the zoo at that time included a pair of jungle cats.

Which animal has lived here the longest?

The longest resident is the Cuban boa, which has been at Mniší Hora since 1995. That's a real old-timer. The oldest animal here is one of the radiat-

ed tortoises, which first saw the light of day in the late 1980s.

The first successful breeding of a chimpanzee in our country took place in Brno Zoo. Please tell us about that. When was it?

On 15 July 1967, the first-ever birth of a chimpanzee in any Czech or Slovak zoo took place in Brno Zoo. He was named Bipo after his mother, Bibina, and his father, Pong. Unfortunately, Bibina was an inexperienced primipara who had also never witnessed the raising of a younger sibling, as she typically would have had she been living in the wild. She did not accept her baby



and had a delayed lactation, so two keepers took over the care. We know from contemporary records that they lived with the young chimp day and night, sleeping on a deck chair in the pavilion. The baby, although soon vaccinated against tuberculosis, lived in isolation from its surroundings for fear of infection, and visitors were not able to see him for the first time until three months after his birth, and then only through a glass partition. Bipo thrived well. In 1968, he was given a mate, a female named Dadyna of approximately the same age. She was originally from Cameroon, and she lived at the zoo until 2010. Sadly, Bipo's life was short, as he died of a vicious disease at the age of five.

Today, such a breeding approach is no longer acceptable. Natural breeding is encouraged, and the adaptation of conditions and environment to the needs of different species serves this purpose. Sometimes, this is very difficult and expensive.

Brno Zoo is also famous for breeding polar bears. How many have been born in Brno?

In the modern history of Brno Zoo, there have been a total of five bear cubs. All of them were borne by Cora, who has been at Brno Zoo since 2000. The first were twins Bill and Tom, born in 2007. Five years later, Kometa and Nanuk opened their eyes here. The last cub was Noria, born in 2015. More information is on our website at <https://www.zoobrna.cz/zvirata-a-expozice/ledni-medvidata>, which also describes where they are now all located. We want to continue breeding this iconic animal, which is critically endangered in the wild, and

Visiting the zoo is a traditional family activity in our country. But I would like the visit to have an effect other than just the fun of watching animals.

Photo: Jana Kotoučková

As wildlife around the world is facing many challenges, major losses and species extinctions, the main mission of zoos is to help protect entire species so that our children and their children can see them.

Photo: Jana Kotoučková



The Garden Party also included special guided feeding sessions. Photo: Brno Zoo

to allow others to take advantage of this historic experience of ours, as well.

And were there any special animal babies born last year?

Yes, quite a number of them. One of the first additions was a little margay that was born around the middle of January. Its mother had already raised one baby in Brno Zoo in 2018. One day earlier, we were delighted with a baby anole (*Anolis leachii*), which is so rare in this country that it does not even have a Czech species name. It is endemic to the Caribbean. In all of Europe, only five zoos keep these lizards; and in the Czech Republic, the only one is in Brno. There are only seven zoos worldwide that keep black-tailed stingrays (*Plesiotrygon nana*). Our zoo had already managed a rare breeding of this fish two years ago, and we continued it successfully last year. The large

aquarium in the Tropical Kingdom was thus filled with 22 small and rare stingrays for the whole year. In the previous 12 months, these little creatures had only been seen in two zoos worldwide. More juveniles filled the Exotarium Pavilion, with five small tree skinks (*Egernia striolata*) scurrying around in one of the exhibits. These are a rarely bred species of Australian skink, only found in seven zoos in Europe and in nine worldwide.

What are the zoo's plans for the future?

Last year, thanks to the support of friends of the zoo and many adoptive parents, we completed the reconstruction of the exhibits of the corsac foxes and Pallas's cats (also known as manuls), and we would like to continue this trend. These beautiful beasts have long deserved a new home. Many adoptive parents have also

contributed to their care. However, planning a new exhibit for the zoo's animals takes many years. We need to create an environment that offers the animals the opportunity to develop the full range of their natural behaviours and that supports their instincts. Our aim is not to have domesticated animals in zoos. Even with animals in human care, we must preserve their wild nature. There is a lot to do, and it is very challenging to build such an exhibit, keeping in mind the safety of the animals and also the safety of our visitors and keepers.

And, of course, it doesn't come cheap. It depends not only on how we plan everything but also on what kind of funding we manage to get. We need this crucial support from our founder, but there are many things that other partners can help us with. It is our relationship with them that I would like to develop even more.

And perhaps I should reveal that we have one big surprise coming up next year, which concerns the presentation of the zoo.

Is it still trendy to go to the zoo? How should current zoos change to attract visitors?

I firmly believe that it is still trendy. Visiting the zoo is a traditional family activity in our country. But I would like the visit to have an effect other than just the fun of watching the animals. Historically, zoos have been a showcase for exotic animals. However, as wildlife around the world faces many challenges, major losses and species extinctions, the main mission of zoos is to help protect entire species so that our children and their children can see them. I can't imagine a world without wildlife, and I wouldn't wish it on future generations. To be clear, we help

animals both by breeding them as a backup population and also through so-called in-situ projects. These take place right in their original habitat, where we often protect not only the species itself but also the entire ecosystem they need to live. We also aim to keep visitors and zoo supporters informed about all of this, to give them

a better understanding of nature and its connections and patterns, and to show how they can actively help nature.

Have you always thought about working in a zoo?

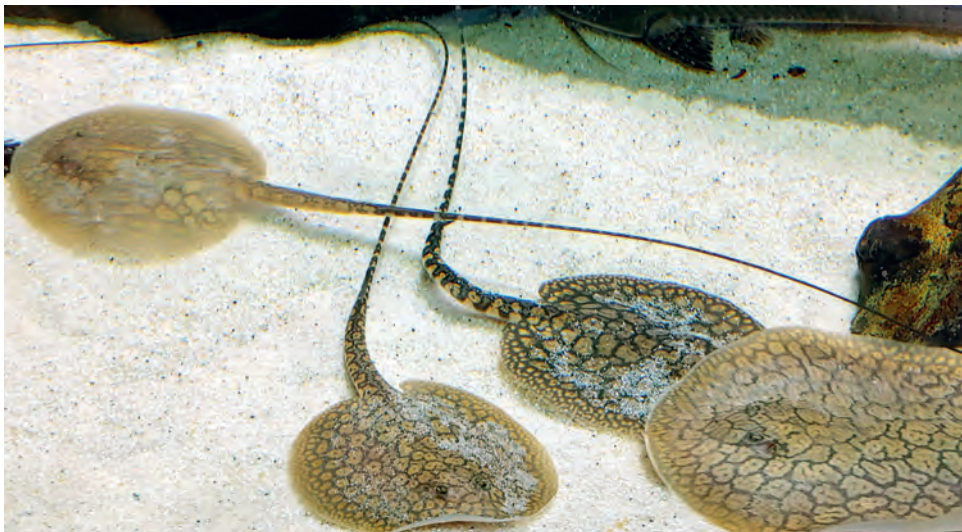
Even as a child, I wanted to rescue animals, but I didn't get much understanding of my desires at home. In those

Collectors' Euro banknote commemorating 70 years of Brno Zoo. Photo: Brno Zoo



We want to continue breeding polar bears and to take advantage of our historic experience of rearing the cubs. Photo: Eduard Stuchlík

In 2023, thanks to our supporters, we reconstructed and enlarged the manul exhibit. Photo. Matyáš Slavík



Last year, we were happy to see 22 baby stingrays. Photo: Petr Šrámek

times of deep socialism, it was not easy for my parents to imagine that it could be possible to save animals in Africa or in other remote parts of the globe. But I had quite a colourful life working in the Federal Assembly and as a partner of the Czech ambassador to South America. I also worked for the Partnership Foundation, which taught me that

it is possible to work within a relatively large institution, helping each other and, at the same time, being prepared to change the world into the form in which we want to leave it for the next generations. I got to know wildlife up close on expeditions with my husband. He and I continue to do this, and we try to pass on that experience as much as

possible in the form of books and film documentaries. From there, it was just a simple step to working at the zoo.

Did you like going to the zoo as a little girl?

Yes. I lived in Prague as a child, and my dad took me to the zoo quite often, regardless of the weather. He also knew a lot about animals. I must admit that, at first, I didn't understand why we should freeze for an hour on the small mammal trail until an animal he considered attractive showed up, or at least moved. I wanted to go to one of the pavilions. Gradually, though, I fell under the spell of animal watching, and that fascination has remained with me to this day.

We have published a book mapping the most important moments of the 70-year existence of Brno Zoo

From 1953 to the present, interesting information about the animals and buildings, historical background, future plans, period photographs and engaging current images: The first-ever book about Brno Zoo, which we have prepared for the 70th anniversary of its opening, offers all this.

"The whole world of zoos has changed dramatically in 70 years, and Brno is no exception. The project of a city zoo developed from the pre-war zoo corner to its grand opening in 1953. I believe that, like myself, readers will be able to immerse themselves in the various periods of Brno Zoo's development through the many insights, memories, and photographs of the author of this book," said Radana Dungelová, director of Brno Zoo.

The book describes the shift from gypsy caravans to modern exhibits, the most famous breedings, veterinary care, insights about animal feeding, and, of course, the importance of zoos.

"Animal collections have long been seen as places of entertainment and a showcase of their owner's power. It was only in the 19th century when, together

with industrialisation, an increased interest in wildlife and the emergence of modern zoos arrived. While initially the emphasis was on information about animals, today zoos primarily communicate the need to protect nature as a whole. The main shift has been in the educational aims of zoos. Today, we are witnessing an unprecedented destruction of nature. The list of extinct or endangered species is becoming more and more extensive, and it is therefore obvious that we understand education primarily as the need to change human attitudes and values," added Dungelová.

Education is the subject of a separate chapter that describes everything we offer visitors of all ages. Promoting biodiversity protection and conservation programmes are also very important to

us. In the book, interested readers will learn about how they themselves can help us to care for habitats and protect species.

The book is available in the souvenir shop above the restaurant U Tygra for CZK 340. It was written by Eduard Stuchlík who, together with Matyáš Slavík, took most of the photographs. The historical pictures come from the collections of Miloš Budík or the archives of the Botanical Garden of the Faculty of Science, Masaryk University.

The book is also available in the Brno Zoo e-shop at

<https://www.brno.cz/cs/zoo-souveniry>.



The book describes the shift from gypsy caravans to modern exhibits, and also mentions the most famous breedings, amongst other interesting topics. Photo: Michal Vaňáč

The book costs CZK 340. Photo: Michal Vaňáč

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Khari was born on 26 April 2019 at Whipsnade Zoo, in the UK. Photo: Michal Vaňáč



Brno Zoo Acquires a Male Giraffe

The years of waiting are over: A new male giraffe arrived at Brno Zoo in the summer.

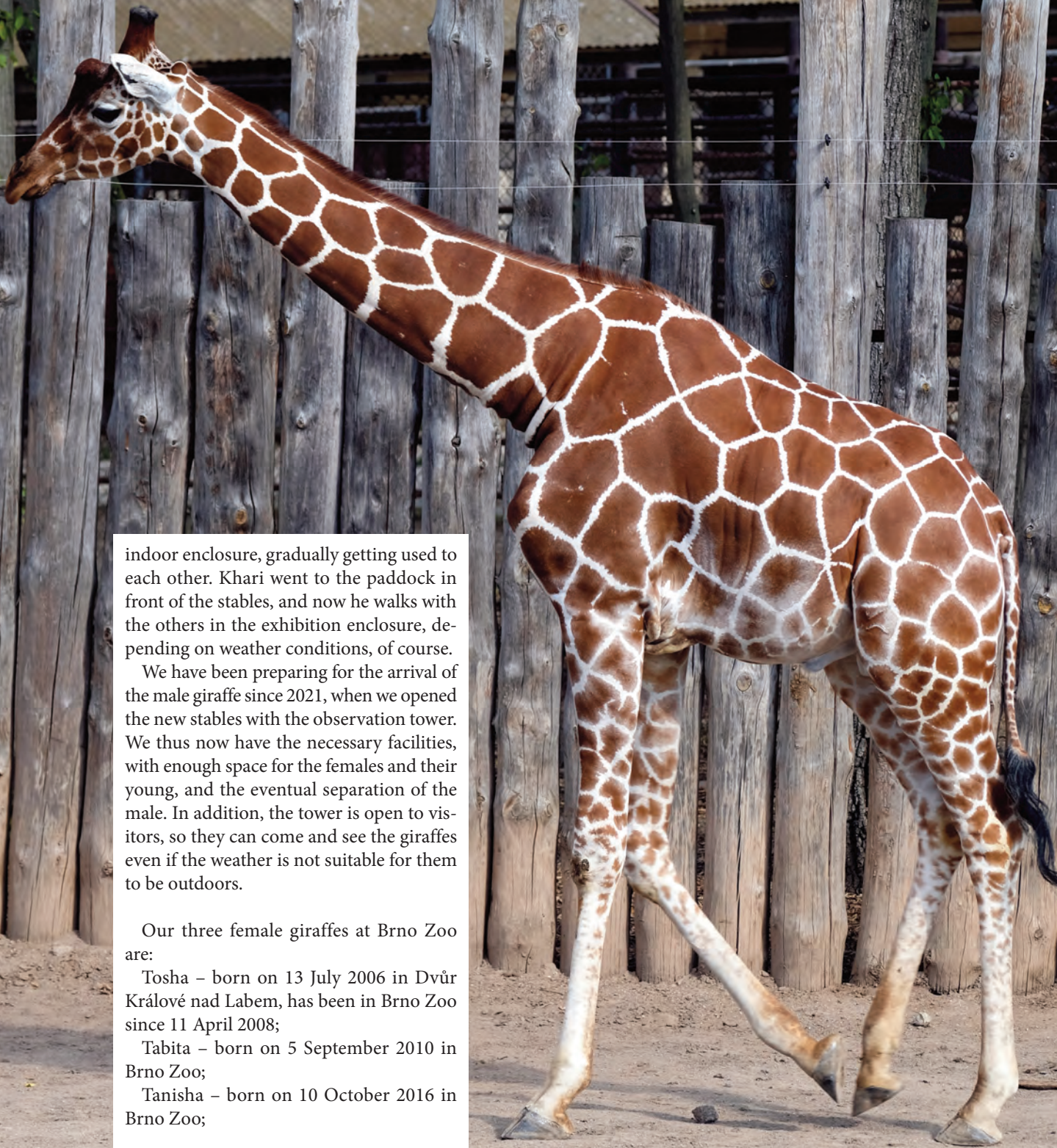
Khari, a new resident of Mniší Hora, was born on 26 April 2019 at Whipsnade Zoo in the UK. He was initially due to arrive in 2021, but the post-Brexit situation was so administratively unclear and complicated that his arrival had to be postponed several times. Of course, the situation around COVID-19 also played a role, which made everything even more complicated and, more importantly, further delayed.

"It's the first transport of a large animal from the UK after Brexit," said Radana Dungalová, director of Brno Zoo. "We have learned a lot from this. If some-

thing like this were to happen again, it would certainly be easier for us. It was a true war of nerves at times, coupled with a lot of communication across the

responsible institutions in four countries. However, this is nothing compared to how happy we are that Khari managed everything perfectly,"

Immediately after his arrival, Khari went to the stables without any problems, started to nibble, and got acquainted with our resident giraffes for the first time. (We currently keep three females.) Everything went smoothly and without complications. In the following days, the giraffes stayed in the



indoor enclosure, gradually getting used to each other. Khari went to the paddock in front of the stables, and now he walks with the others in the exhibition enclosure, depending on weather conditions, of course.

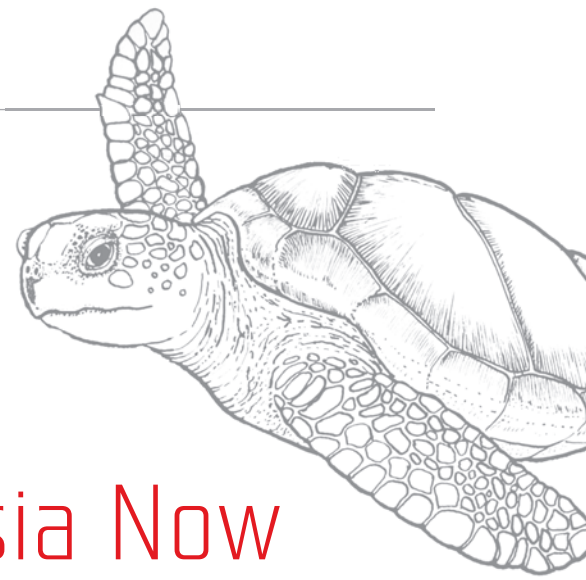
We have been preparing for the arrival of the male giraffe since 2021, when we opened the new stables with the observation tower. We thus now have the necessary facilities, with enough space for the females and their young, and the eventual separation of the male. In addition, the tower is open to visitors, so they can come and see the giraffes even if the weather is not suitable for them to be outdoors.

Our three female giraffes at Brno Zoo are:

- Tosha – born on 13 July 2006 in Dvůr Králové nad Labem, has been in Brno Zoo since 11 April 2008;
- Tabita – born on 5 September 2010 in Brno Zoo;
- Tanisha – born on 10 October 2016 in Brno Zoo;

Our last male, Timon, Tabita's offspring, left Brno Zoo in 2018. He went first to the Netherlands and then, this March, to Germany.

Khari acclimatised very quickly, even in the outdoor exhibit.
Photo: Michal Vaňáč



Sea Turtles in Indonesia Now Have Radios. Thus, we can chart their movements in the ocean.

Brno Zoo and Liberec Zoo deployed radio transmitters to a few sea turtles in Indonesia to map their movements in the ocean. The research will provide new data that can help protect sea turtles in the region more effectively.

Field zoologists from both zoos placed a special GPS radio on each of four adult female green sea turtles at two different locations off the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The data collected will help us to learn more about turtle migration after nesting, and has the potential to help protect sea turtles in the region more effectively.

One of the primary missions of zoos is in situ conservation, i.e., saving endangered species directly in their natural habitat. To this end, zoos carry out many field projects around the world. Liberec Zoo and Brno Zoo have long been active in biodiversity and marine ecosystem conservation in Indonesia. Now they have joined research forces in monitoring the movements and migration of sea turtles in Sumatra. Information on sea turtle movements there is lacking, so the research will provide new and unique information unavailable before.

The first GPS radios were installed in late June 2023 on two female green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) immediately after they laid their eggs on one of the

beaches on the uninhabited island of Bangkaru, located in the Pulau Banyak archipelago. Bangkaru is one of the most important breeding grounds of green turtles in Sumatra. Liberec Zoo has been involved since 2015 in its conservation. The deployed equipment is already providing the first data on the movements of the studied animals. "In three weeks, the turtles have travelled more than 300 km, and both are continuing in a southeasterly direction," says Adéla Hemelíková, a field zoologist at Liberec Zoo who is the head of the research. The radio-tagged turtles are geolocated via satellite every time the transmitter breaks the surface of the water, which happens when they momentarily come up to breathe.

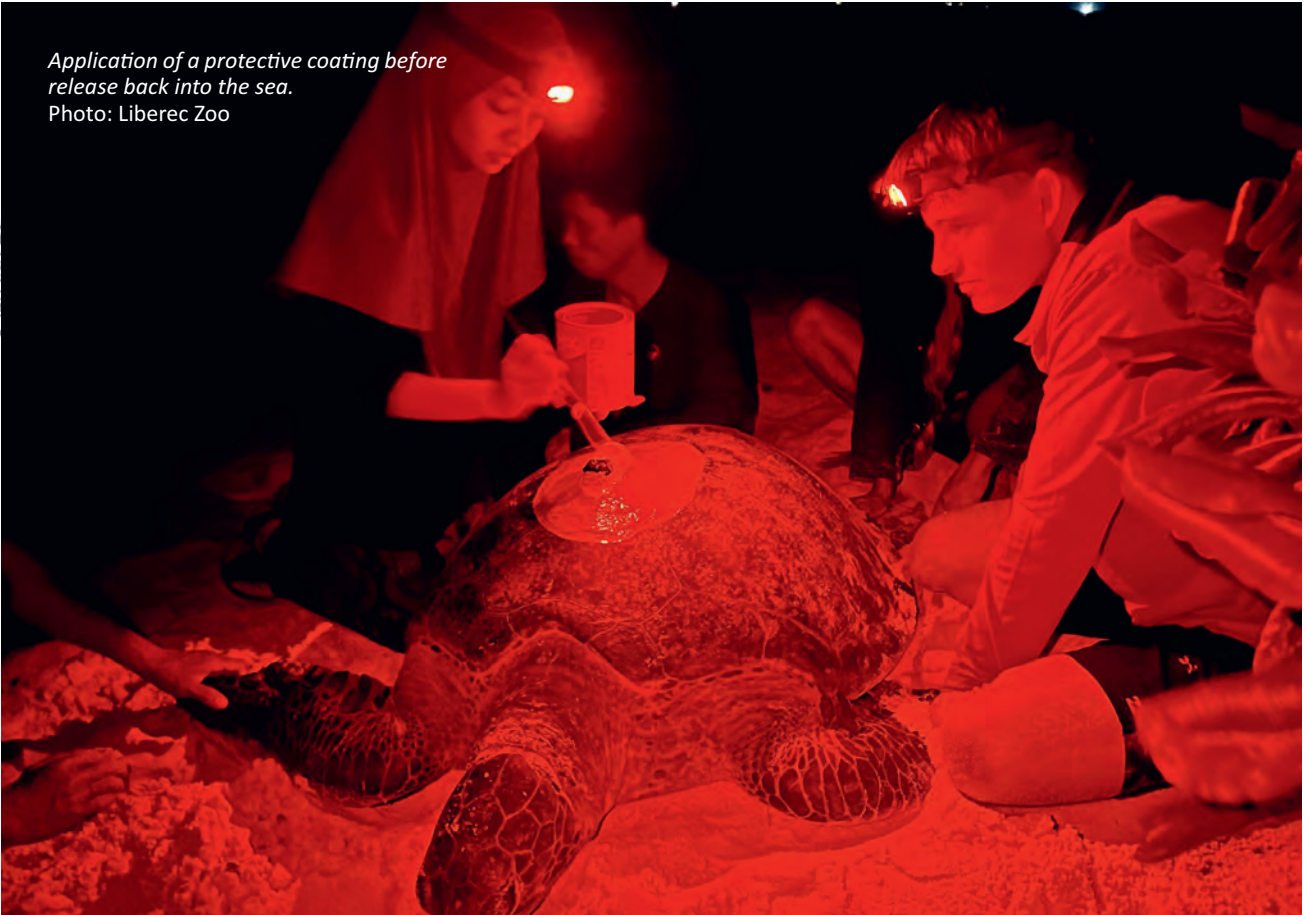
Placing the transmitter on a sea turtle is not a complicated process, according to Hemelíková. "The sea turtles' shells provide a large enough surface area for attachment. Because of the size of the turtle and the relatively small dimensions of the device, the transmitters do not restrict the turtles in any

way in their movements or other natural activities. The entire deployment process took approximately two and a half hours for each turtle, and the animals were released back into the sea immediately afterwards," she added. In cooperation with local conservationists, the Liberec zoologist then placed GPS devices on two more green turtles in mid-July on Pandan Island in the Pieh Marine Nature Reserve on the west coast of Sumatra, near Padang.

CURRENT STATUS

The transmitters for the research were obtained by Brno Zoo, which was behind the birth of a sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation centre called Kura Kura, on the Indonesian island of Nusa Penida. "We are looking at new approaches to help protect sea turtles, and the transmitters we have obtained for our project with grants from the Ministry of the Environment and the European Association of Aquarium Curators will monitor their movements in an area where this has not been done systematically before. I believe that the data we will be evaluating will help us to better understand the ecology of these animals and to protect this endangered species more effectively," said Radana Dungalová, director of Brno Zoo.

Application of a protective coating before release back into the sea.
Photo: Liberec Zoo



Adélka Hemelíková with the Indonesian conservation team.
Photo: Liberec Zoo



Rescue programmes. Watching sea turtles.



Green sea turtle with radio on Bangkaru Island.
Photo: Liberec Zoo



Brno Zoo has expanded its bird collection with rare and endangered species.

At the end of 2023, nine new bird species were added to Brno Zoo's aviaries. Some are well known to our visitors, but most are endangered and are new to our zoo.

"The addition to the bird collection is no longer just about what the bird looks like, how colourful it is, and if it is attractive to visitors," explained Petr Suvorov, curator of bird breeding at Brno Zoo. "Of course, many birds have these attributes, but our priority is to expand the populations of endangered species."

There are many reasons why bird numbers are declining in the wild. One of them is undoubtedly that migration routes have become more dangerous. In the Mediterranean, for example, up to 25 million birds are illegally hunted every year as delicacies (such as warblers, buntings, and thrushes), for entertainment (honey buzzards, kites, and storks), for sale in cages (goldfinches), or simply for food (quails and turtle doves).

It is that latter category that can now be seen on Mniší Hora. We keep two turtle doves. The male came from the Netherlands, and the female from Germany. "This species is a kind of flagship of the conservation organisation Birdlife International for the dangers that birds face on migration routes. In Europe, many turtle doves are killed every year during migration, and they are heavily

threatened, especially by hunting. For example, an unnamed Spanish hunting company once offered to potential clients the possibility of catching over 200 turtle doves and quails a day," the curator continued, stressing the problem.

Other species facing the same pitfalls in the Czech Republic are also highly endangered. These are the Eurasian golden oriole and the Eurasian hoopoe. We have one female of each species. Incidentally, the hoopoe is also cared for by Brno Zoo in the wild in South Moravia through a rescue programme. This year, we have raised eleven chicks there using our special nesting boxes. The hoopoe population in the Czech Republic is estimated at 70–140 pairs.

On the other hand, the Eurasian stone-curlew has practically disappeared from the Czech countryside. "We have a couple of these birds in the zoo. Both came from Poland, the male from Opole, the female from Warsaw. The Eurasian stone-curlew is not a common species anywhere in Europe. It inhabits steppe landscapes, and has huge eyes for night vision. It also makes a powerful call. There is currently only one wild specimen recorded on our territory," said Suvorov.

The bird collection of Brno Zoo is also richer by two endangered pheasant species. Endemic to Taiwan, the Mikado pheasant is bred in only ten zoological gardens worldwide. We keep one pair in the bird alley above the Administrative Building. A male and female Mrs. Hume's pheasant also make their home in the same place. They are native to Southeast Asia and can only be seen in four zoos worldwide. After several years' absence, the azure-winged magpie, endemic to the Far East, is again on display in the same exhibit.

The demoiselle crane in the Král's Aviary in Beringia is an entirely new species here. "Although not endangered, there are not many in Europe: The largest populations breed in Ukraine and especially in Crimea and Russia. So, they now face dangers associated with war," Suvorov said.

There are currently four more jungle mynas in the facilities. Exceptionally, these do not come from another zoo, but arrived in Brno after an agreement with the Czech Ornithological Society by way of capture from the wild on the territory of Brno. A non-native species in the South Moravian metropolis, it is rare in zoos. We will never know how they came to be in our country.

Some of the above species are thermophilic, so they will appear in the exhibitions only once spring arrives.



Eurasian stone-curlew. Photo: Petr Suvorov

Eurasian hoopoe. Photo: Petr Suvorov

Jungle myna. Photo: Petr Suvorov



Demoiselle crane. Photo: Petr Suvorov

Mikado pheasant. Photo: Petr Suvorov

Turtle dove. Photo: Petr Suvorov

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