

zoo report

No. 2 / june 2015

the magazine for friends of the Brno Zoo

BRNO



special supplement

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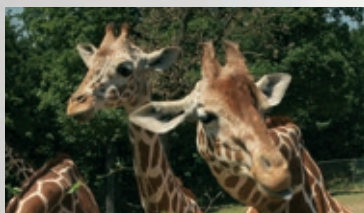
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Zooreport

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june 2015
No. 2/15, volume XVII

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Publisher:

Peleos, spol. s r.o.
e-mail: info.bрно@peleos.cz

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Distribution:

500 pcs in the English version
1,500 pcs in the Czech version

The author of non-attributed texts is:

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Photos by:

Eduard Stuchlík

First page:

Red panda

UNSALEABLE

Zoos exist primarily to protect wildlife

Mankind has always been fascinated by wildlife. Animals were ambiguous symbols worshipped by almost every past culture. Ghosts of the forest, jungle, and prairies took on the form of strong lions, tireless wolves, or large-antlered deer. Humanity drew them on the walls of caves, and carved them in totems and sculptures. Shamans and sorcerers used arcane rituals to acquire an eagle's eyes or a lynx's agility. Magical powers were attributed to animals: Crows could fly between our world and that of the dead; frogs could forecast the weather.

Do you believe that the days of animal worship are over? The opposite is true. If we contemporary Europeans have gods that are not digital, they are animals. Maybe we live in urban jungles, maybe our children never fed hens or played by a pond with frogs. Maybe we really have lost contact with nature. But the bearded savage who fears raging storms and who believes that he acquires the fury of the bear by drawing him on the rock wall with ash still lives inside us. This is why company logos, athletic team jerseys, and advertisements depict animals so often.

Think about the phenomenon of pets! An old proverb says that a dog is man's best friend, and those who have a dog know what I mean. The English poet George Gordon Byron said it beautifully: „The dog has a beauty without vanity, strength without cruelty and human virtues without human flaws.“ The relationship between a man and his dog is about belonging, about friendship that cannot be expressed in



Petr Vokřál with Sid dog

words. If each of us cared about nature as much as we care about our pets, we would certainly treat it better.

Modern man, however, is aware that our planet is an interconnected system, and that we can easily lose what we love. He understands that recalculating everything for economic gain is very short-sighted, and uses various forms of assistance to try to maintain the mystery of wild nature. He seeks to create funds to fight against poachers, to protect forests, and to prevent marine pollution.

Zoos are one of those campaigners, serving primarily as conservationists in the twenty-first century. They help to enable endangered species to survive, some of which are returned to the

wild. Zoos organize a wide range of educational and training programs that acquaint adults and youth with various issues, reasserting the ancient relationship with nature.

Brno Zoo is very active in this regard. It participates in numerous projects and programs designed to protect animals and wildlife. Some are international, such as the Kura Kura Project, fighting to save sea turtles in Indonesia, or a project serving to save Steller's sea eagles in Kamchatka.

Every visit to the Brno Zoo is not only fun and educational, but also a statement that you are not indifferent to the future.

Petr Vokřál,
Mayor of Brno



Ing. Petr Vokřál

was born on January 19, 1964 in Frýdek-Místek. He graduated from a grammar school in Brno and earned a degree in engineering and transport structures at the Faculty of Civil Engineering at the Technical University in Brno. After his studies, he did his military service Kroměříž. His career began in the Research Institute of Engineering Structures. After 1989, he was employed at the Brno City Hall as head of the environmental department. From 1992-2013 he served in various managerial positions in the ASA waste management company. Meanwhile (between 1996 and 1997), he studied management at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland. Since 2002, he has worked in ASA as the Director for Central and Eastern Europe (7 countries) becoming, in 2009, the CEO and Chairman of the Board of the entire ASA Group. He is a member of the ANO political movement, and was elected a deputy chairman in 2015. The General Assembly of the City of Brno elected him mayor of the city in 2014. He is fluent in German and English. He currently lives in Brno Kníničky. His interests include sport, music, and literature.



Western gray plantain-eaters sitting in an outdoor exhibition



A young western gray plantain-eater

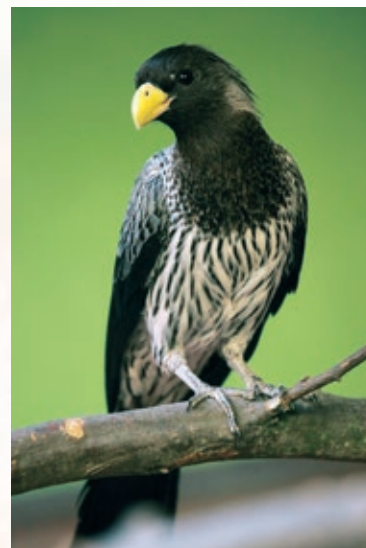
Western gray plantain-eaters multiplied first in Czech zoos

The western gray plantain-eater (*Crinifer piscator*) nestling born in Brno Zoo in February 2015 represented the first breeding of this species in the Czech Republic. Western gray plantain-eaters come from the forests and savannas of West Africa, and can grow to about two feet in length. They are mostly of varying shades of grey, with a yellow beak, and blackish head, back wingtips, and tail.

Our zoo acquired two females allegedly belonging to the eastern gray plantain-eater (*Crinifer*

zonurus) species. After the importation of the birds from the wild, however, we found that they were western gray plantain-eaters. The difference in the appearance of the two species is insignificant: Western gray plantain-eaters have gray stripes on the belly, while the belly of eastern gray plantain-eaters is completely dull grey.

Plantain-eaters from the *Crinifer* genus and five other related genera form the turaco family (*Musophagidae*), formerly included in the order of cuckoos (*Cuculiformes*). According to new research, they are now the only genus in the Musophagiformes order. Its members, mostly medium-sized brightly colored birds, live in sub-Saharan Africa in bushes and treetops. They eat mainly fruits, with occasional insects and snails, though some species (both members of the *Crinifer*, *Corythaeola cristata* genus, etc.) prefer leaves, buds, and flowers. We placed the females in the exposure quarters of our Exotarium pavilion, which communicates with an outdoor aviary. They adapted well to the new environment, although they remained very shy. Since western gray plantain-eaters are rare in zoos, our hopes of their forming pairs were limited. However, in that same year of 2013, we acquired a male from Heidelberg's Tierpark, and he formed a harmonizing pair with one of our females. After about six months, we heard the first mating call; and after about a year,



A western gray plantain-eater has gray stripes on its belly

in the first days of January 2015, the female laid three eggs. The first ended up outside the nesting basket. She laid the second egg on January 9, this time in the basket, and in two days she added another one and started nesting. One chick hatched on February 8, and the second on the next day.

There is little experience with the rearing of this species, which is why we consulted experts in the home zoo of our male and zoologists at the British Cotswold Wildlife Park, which was the first zoo in Europe to have bred western gray plantain-eaters at the beginning of this century.

The adult birds turned out to be conscientious parents. They warmed their offspring, and fed and protected them even from our breeders. To make sure that the restless parents did not harm their offspring, we introduced a quiet regime in the pavilion, primarily by interrupting our technical adjustments to the breeding facilities. Although one chick died, the other remains alive and kicking. In a little over a month, it began to fledge and was able to climb out of the nest and learn to fly. Our chick was clearly past the critical life period in June. We will soon send the young western gray plantain-eater to another zoo.

In the past, this species was bred in Prague Zoo and, for a short time, in Jihlava Zoo. Currently, it is only found in Brno Zoo and Dvůr Králové Zoo. However, it has only been reared in our zoo.

RNDr. Petr Suvorov, Ph.D.,
curator of aviculture

Czech Karst – romantic landscape in the backyard of the capital

The Protected Landscape Area (PLA) Czech Karst, established in 1972, has an area of 132 km², which is roughly one-sixth of the area of the capital city of Prague, on the territory of which it extends with its eastern corner. The name of the area was suggested a century ago by the legendary explorer Jaroslav Petrbok because the area, with its limestone geological substrate, reminded him of karst areas in southeast Europe.

The apt name caught on quickly and helped define the Czech Karst as the largest limestone region in the country. Berounka River and its left-side Kačák tributary forced their way through the deep romantic canyons in the Paleozoic sediments. Peculiar weathering of the limestone allowed the emergence of numerous karst phenomena (for example almost 700 caves). The Czech Karst features a complete series of calcareous habitats, from rocky steppes and rocks through thermophilic grasslands and pastures to shrubs, forest steppes, and forests, with minor wetlands scattered here and there.

The Czech Karst is renowned for its botanical treasures, such as two examples of the Austrian dragonhead, which is endangered throughout Europe. Only in the Czech Karst (and nowhere else) can we encounter the endemic tree species *Sorbus eximia* and *Sorbus barrandienica*. The limestone substrate is good for mollusks – *Chondrina avenacea*, for example, lives nowhere else in the country. The fauna of insects is exceptionally rich: Over 2,000 species of the lepidopteran order can be found here.



Scarce swallowtail, still a relatively frequent inhabitant of the Czech Karst.



Photo by Pavel Špryňar

View of the Czech Karst panorama from the legendary Tetín castle ruins, with its ecological backbone, the Berounka River.

The vertebrate fauna is mainly characterized by species associated with the rugged terrain and karst formations. Over twenty species of bats hibernate in the caves and tunnels of the Czech Karst every year. The numbers of the most common species, the greater mouse-eared bat, have been growing in recent years. (At the beginning of 2015, the recorded number exceeded two thousand individuals for the first time.) A similar trend can be seen, for example, with the lesser horseshoe bat and with the Daubenton's bat. The marten is another common inhabitant of the karst cavities.

Spontaneously overgrown abandoned quarries provide a secondary refuge for the Eurasian jackdaw,

amongst other birds. The dice snake often basks at the Berounka riverbank, and in the dry grasslands we can encounter the smooth snake. Rich forest fauna is also relatively plentiful. This year, a black stork was seen near the Berounka River (in the area below the Tetín). In local forests, this species also nested.

Its proximity to Prague and its position along the busy railway line from Prague to Beroun results in a high number of visitors to the Czech Karst. The main attraction to that area is certainly Karlštejn castle, which was founded by Charles IV. Just beyond the castle grounds, there is well-preserved wild nature, attracting experts and laymen, cavers, hikers, and school groups.

It is certain that without a millennium of human influence, the Czech Karst would not be as interesting as it is today. Nature, however, still requires care: Meadows must be mowed, and pastures would benefit from the return of sheep and goats.

To get acquainted with the area, pay a visit to the oldest preserved marked trail in Bohemia (from 1889), named after the founder of the Club of Czech Tourists, Vojtěch Náprstek. You can descend into the Koněprusy caves (open to public), or perhaps be able to go with experts during their annual census of bats.

Mgr. Pavel Špryňar,

Agency for Nature Conservation and Landscape, Regional office of Central Bohemia

Photo by Pavel Špryňar



The Spirit from the Bottle experiment is based on rapid catalytic decomposition of hydrogen peroxide

The Day of Natural Sciences expanded the range of public events

The offer of educational and entertaining events that Brno Zoo organizes for the public was expanded for the third year by our Day of Natural Sciences. Its initiators and main producers are students of the Secondary School of Chemistry at Vranovská Street in Brno.

On May 1, in various parts of the zoo, the students manned thirteen themed stations equipped with illustrative aids. They demonstrated various experiments and took turns in explaining them to the visitors. The young chemists proved to be versatile, with only one station dedicated to their own science; all the others were dedicated to physics, mathematics, geology, and several biological disciplines.

The chemistry station had a large booth at the plaza in front of the Tropical Kingdom pavilion. The students performed eight different experiments, all sufficiently spectacular. The transformation of copper into silver and gold had to be taken with a pinch of salt, but the alternating colors were spectacular. A copper coin immersed in boiling diluted sodium hydroxide solution mixed with zinc powder took on a silver sheen by the

process of zinc plating. When heated over a burner, zinc penetrates into the copper and creates an alloy, brass, which is golden in color.

The experiment called the Spirit of the Bottle was the most impressive. A graduated cylinder produced billowing white smoke such as can be seen from the chimney of a steam locomotive, covering the chemists' stand and its surroundings with patches of mist. This covered the paved area in front of the pavilion and continued up to the prairie dogs' paddock, attracting curious visitors. (Explanation: The glass cylinder contained dilute

hydrogen peroxide, and the addition of potassium permanganate resulted in a quick, explosive catalysis which released oxygen and water vapor.)

Another experiment called the Magic Bubble demonstrated the change of substance volume during sublimation. The basic substance in the experiment was dry ice (carbon dioxide desublimated at a very low temperature, nearing -80°C). Some warm water was poured into an empty inflatable balloon, dry ice was added, and the mouth of the balloon was knotted. Solid carbon passes to a gaseous state and increases in volume; but even during sublimation it has a very low temperature so that water vapor in its vicinity is precipitated in the form of tiny drops. The balloon inflated and filled with thick white fog.

Mathematics differs from other disciplines in its absolute accuracy of methods and the credibility of its results. Students from the mathematics stand enlivened what some see as a dull science: For example, in the silhouette of a swallow composed of matches, three matches could be moved so that the bird changed the direction of its flight from up to down.

The Wimshurst machine was supposed to demonstrate the emergence of a direct current of static electricity; but the corridor leading to the chimpanzee pavilion, where the physics stand was located, was unfortunately not illuminated by any discharge. It was prevented by moist air. This year's May Day was in fact quite rainy. However, the courageous young physicists were not



The Magic Bubble experiment demonstrates the volume change of carbon dioxide during the sublimation of dry ice

caught off-guard by the weather. They offered the visitors a formula in which it was possible to substitute a known quantity (for example, 100 W) and calculate how many cubes of sugar contain enough energy to light the bulb of the specified wattage. They explained other things as well, for example comparing active and passive houses, and showing why computers at home should be shut down. In their experiment with a so-called Cartesian diver, they demonstrated the difference in pressure transmitting between liquid and gas.

The paleozoology stand was located inside the chimpanzee pavilion. A long table with art tools and accessories allowed children to draw "prehistoric monsters" according to small models of different species of dinosaurs. The models were also used to illustrate lectures. The audience was most interested in how the students were able to refute popular beliefs about dinosaurs, spread by irresponsible directors, in whose trashy cinematographic creations early men meet dinosaurs. The youngest finds of fossils of dinosaurs are about 65 million years old, whereas the first human-like creatures only appeared some seven million years ago.

Five stands were dedicated to zoology. In addition to the aforementioned paleozoology stand, there were others for invertebrates, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

The food specialization stand mainly dealt with metabolism; but people tasting healthy diet canapés could learn, for example, about the difference between vegetarianism, veganism, and



Mammal zoology in the African village stand

raw foodism, and about the advantages and disadvantages of these lifestyles. They were almost shocked to discover that raw foodists eat nothing but raw food, especially vegetables. (Needless to say, they do not eat any meat.) Raw food, as opposed to cooked food, can eliminate almost all pollutants from the body.

There were so many stands at our Day of Natural Sciences that we cannot do justice to all of them in one article. For more completeness, we can add that one stand dealt with genetically modified organisms; the geology station carried out an experiment with a volcano; and, at the

botany station, visitors could see carnivorous plants being fed, and a magician's trick with blue balloons as CO₂ molecules entered into photosynthesis. They could also taste sugarless black, white, red, or green teas. Ingesting sugar is a habit of our society that can be nearly an addiction, and its excessive intake harms the body.

Visitors to Brno Zoo acquired an unusual amount of information and a great deal of inspiration on May Day. Most of them admitted that the greatest experience was to see the enthusiasm and interest of the young people who manned the stations on this Day of Natural Sciences. These secondary school students were able to pass their spirit-strengthening good mood and optimism onto the visitors.



Secondary School of Chemistry students and the Wimshurst induction unit at the physics stand



Art workshop at the paleozoology stand



Only the claws of the wild form of red swamp crayfish are red, but breeders have bred different color variants, such as light red (shown above) or blue (bottom)

The red swamp crayfish, a blatant example of an invasive species

Some major invasive species can be seen not only in nature, but also in zoos. These organisms might have been transported out of their original habitats unintentionally by people. Or, if they were brought purposely, it was usually with good intent. In Brno Zoo we have a blatant example of an aggressive species which, after a well-intentioned importation, began to spread uncontrollably, crowding out the local flora and fauna. We can find it in the Exotic Animals Pavilion, in the freshwater aquarium exhibition dedicated to crustaceans. It is the red swamp crayfish (*Procambarus clarkii*). It is a truly beautiful animal, popular with aquarists; and gourmets also appreciate its delicious meat.

The red swamp crayfish grows to a length of 15 cm, though occasionally one can reach 20 cm. Its basic colors are brown and green with white dots and red claws. Breeders have managed to produce a variety of different colors, from bright red through blue to black, and even completely white. The original habitat of the crayfish is in the southern US and northern Mexico. It lives in humid, regularly flooded meadows, swamps, rivers, slow-moving waters, dams, irrigation systems, paddy fields, and other aquatic habitats. It is an omnivore.

In its original habitats, especially in the American state of Louisiana, where red swamp crayfish is a traditional dish, farms have exported the delicacy around the world since the 1950s. Lucrative farms were later established elsewhere in America, and also in Africa and Asia. In Europe, the first farm of these crustaceans was established in 1973 in Spain. Its importation from Louisiana was organized by the government to boost the economy of outlying areas in southern Spain, and it was successful. However, the red swamp crayfish soon spread almost throughout the Iberian Peninsula, destroying the native crayfish.

Crayfish can escape from outdoor breeding pools (such as irrigation canals) easily. Their

expansion is also supported by the custom of selling them live in markets, or by the fact that fishermen use them as a bait. Red swamp crayfish can move on land (especially in wet weather) at a speed of up to three kilometers a day. They wait through adverse periods in burrows, which they dig to a depth of two meters. In the new environment, they soon establish viable colonies, and they win in competition with native crayfish across the board: laying more eggs, reproducing twice a year, growing faster, maturing earlier, and tolerating polluted environments such as salt water, high temperatures, and lack of oxygen. The red swamp crayfish which now also live in other European countries such as Britain and Germany do not come from Louisiana, but from farms in other parts of the world. They do not yet live in the wild in the Czech Republic, but the risk of their escaping to there remains.

The harm that can be done by red swamp crayfish in areas outside their original habitat also lies mainly in the fact that they carry crayfish plague, against which all American crayfish species are resistant. As well, they disrupt relationships amongst aquatic organisms, voraciously eat invertebrates and plants, and inhibit plant growth by building burrows, as more turbid water reduces light. Their building activity is also detrimental to agriculture, lowering rice production, as one example.

The red swamp crayfish story illustrates the old adage about the road to hell's being paved with good intentions.



Animals were fed by famous actors, singers and athletes

The Zoo's extremely diverse program for Children's Day on June 6 was subtitled "Adults Entertain Kids". The zoo was full of colors, fun characters, and attractions. A long program of dance and theater productions took place on stage at the Children's Zoo. These included children's zumba, Brno City Police work presentations, and the performances of singers and dancers from the elementary school for children with autism.

MC Honza Musil, motorcycle racer Karel Abraham, basketball player Ivana Večeřová, singer Madalena Joao, ice hockey players of the HC Kometa Brno, Brno City Theatre actors Ivana Odehnalová, Jana Musilová, Jakub Zedníček and Lukáš Vlček, Czech TV anchors, and Ivona Jeličová, who is a ballet soloist of the National Theatre Brno and winner of the Thalia Theatre award all participated in commented feedings of bears, tigers, sea lions, giraffes, and other animals. The visitors could see the still-striped tapir cub born this year on February 26; and an opening ceremony for the new range for red pandas took place. (You can read more about pandas on the next page.)



Actresses of the Brno City Theatre Ivana Odehnalová (left) and Jana Musilová feed giraffes during Children's Day in Brno Zoo

Both of our species of eagles have multiplied

Both species of eagles in our collection have multiplied this year. For the first time ever, a bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) was born in Brno. For the bald eagle couple who have lived in the new aviary of our zoo since last summer, we built a nest in February, which the eagles finished and modified. The first egg was laid on March 2, the second on March 6, and one chick hatched on April 12. The female

vigorously defended the nest with her offspring against the male, so we caught him on May 21 and moved him to a different exhibition.

The breeding pair of Kamchatka eagles (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*) was put together by our zoo in 2009 and, two years later, the birds multiplied for the first time when they reared one chick. In 2012, two Kamchatka eagles were born and, in the next two years, the pair bred one chick per year. On May 1, 2015, two young birds appeared in the nest again.

We moved this year's additions of both species of eagles into spare rooms, where they await transfer to other zoos.



Commented tapir feeding (from left): breeder Zuzana Vilšerová, Brno Zoo spokeswoman Monika Brindzáková, and Brno City Theatre actor Lukáš Vlček



Young bald eagle on the nest



Red pandas in the new exhibition

Red pandas inhabit the crowns of tall trees in the new exhibition

Our red pandas were moved into the new exhibition near the main visitor route in June this year. If you take the zoo train up this trail, as you approach the Exotic Animals Pavilion you can see the kangaroo range on your right; and on your left, high up in the trees, you can catch a glimpse of two pandas. In their new, natural situation, your view of them is not restricted by any fencing, netting, or other obstacle.

Pandas can be observed from two different places. Along the train route near the new exhibition there is a wide bridge which serves as a lookout from above. The panda range is built on a slope which is lower than the main route. In the range are tall deciduous trees, over twenty meters

high, in the tops of which the pandas spend most of the day, as they do in their Himalayan homeland. Since their range is, as we said, lower

than the lookout bridge, from the perspective of the bridge the pandas in the trees are roughly at the level of the observer's eye.

Their range is circular with smooth vertical walls recessed below the level of the surrounding terrain. On the bottom of the enclosure, we laid a hollow trunk and set up a feeding place for the breeders to bring the pandas their food, mainly bamboo and various fruits. A branching trail leads off the main visitor route towards the takin exposure, from which it is possible to observe the pandas and their commented feeding. They are not shy, and will take their food from the hand of their usual carer.

Our pandas are a pair. The male was born in 2013 and came to our zoo the next year from Linz Zoo in Austria. The female, one year older, comes from Kristiansand Zoo in Norway, arriving in Brno in 2013. The red pandas inhabited two adjoining aviaries in the Exotic Animals Pavilion when they first arrived here.

The hilly wooded terrain near their new home still has plenty of room for the establishment of new exhibitions. If we manage to build them, the zoo plans to use them to breed, besides red pandas and Indian takins, other wild and domestic animals from the Himalayas, including snow leopards, domestic yaks, eastern kiangs, Pallas's cats, Tibetan macaques, Himalayan blue sheep, Himalayan griffons, Egyptian vultures, satyr tragopans, Himalayan monals, Himalayan snowcocks, and other less-known species.



Inauguration of the new range for red pandas. Deputy Mayor Martin Ander with his daughter is in the middle, with zoo director Martin Hovorka on the right.



Yellow-footed rock-wallabies on one of the four stone elevations installed in the new range for wallabies

Beautiful rock wallabies are finally in Brno

The hair on the ears and front legs of the yellow-footed rock-wallaby (*Petrogale xanthopus*) is markedly yellow-red. It has dark-brown-lined white stripes across its face, hips, and thighs; and its light-brown tail has dark stripes. They are the most prominently colored species of kangaroo, and you can now see them in Brno Zoo.

The yellow-footed rock-wallaby grows to a body length of 60 cm, while the tail can be longer than the body (70 cm). It weighs 6–12 kg, and lives in isolated areas in three Australian states: South Australia, New South Wales, and Queensland. The wild population consists of approximately 10,000 adults. Two females of this species have inhabited the range which Brno Zoo inaugurated in August of last year near the upper part of the main visitor road since the end of June 2015. The exhibition initially hosted red-necked wallabies (*Macropus rufogriseus*), which have now been moved to another location in the zoo.

The new range is walk-through: Visitors may enter and share the space with the animals without

any separating fence or barrier, proceeding either along the paved trail or the one which passes along the wallabies' quarters and range, which occupy an area of approximately 3,000 square meters. The enclosure is equipped with four rocky ridges (rocks are a typical habitat for the yellow-footed rock-wallaby), while the atmosphere of the world's smallest continent is evoked by an artificial rock decorated with copies of drawings of the original inhabitants of Australia, the Aborigines.

The exhibition was designed for marsupials from the group of rock wallabies, but they are rare in zoos; so it took us some time before we were able to find appropriate individuals from Mulhouse Zoo in France. We are continuing to negotiate on importing a pair from Los Angeles Zoo in the United States. The Brno Zoo group of yellow-footed rock-wallabies will then consist of one male and three females.

The genus of rock wallabies (*Petrogale*) includes sixteen species, most of them scarce. For example, the Cape York rock-wallaby (*Petrogale coenensis*) had not been scientifically described until 1992, and only six individuals caught between the years



A yellow-footed rock-wallaby

1981 and 1987 are known so far. Rock wallabies live only on the Australian mainland and nearby islands, but not in New Guinea. They adapted to life on rocky outcrops and steep slopes, moving on the surface by using separate rough pads on their hind legs, which are covered with dense hair. The yellow-footed rock-wallaby climbs trees, eating leaves and fruit, but its main food is grass. Originally, more wallabies of this species lived in Australia and their habitats were connected. The reduction of their habitat and the number of individuals began with European colonization.

Yellow-footed rock-wallabies are still endangered, particularly by strong food competitors – grazing herds of sheep and goats. They are also hunted (like many other Australian animals) by imported predators, of which the fox is especially dangerous, since it can track a resting kangaroo even in the steepest of rock shelters.

In the past, yellow-footed rock-wallabies were popular game, especially for their beautiful fur. In the first half of the last century, the species was brought almost to the brink of extinction. Not only the ban on hunting, but also the reduction of grazing livestock and of the number of foxes had a major effect, and the number of yellow-footed rock-wallabies has started to increase lately.

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a stanici zájmových činností, příspěvkovou organizaci.