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# **zoo**report

the magazine for friends of the Brno Zoo

## **BRNO**



special supplement

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## Zooreport

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Bali Mynah

Photograph: Michal Piškula

### Last page:

North American Porcupine  
Drawing: Jan Bodeček

UNSALEABLE

## **A healthy home for all inhabitants of our planet**

**Under a green arch of leaves and needles, on walks in nearby and far away forests, in quiet clearings, I have come across many animals. My true calling is a forester and I have a close relationship with nature and to all life.**

I have admired the elegance of the high wild, I have watched herds of rutting deer and seen the birth of their young, with their knees still shaking. I have seen hares fleeing predators, witnessed the cunning of foxes and heard the songs of birds, many of which are threatened with extinction. Naturally, I have always placed priority on animals living free in the wild, but I welcome and am glad that there are zoos, which in many cases have protected and continue to protect nearly extinct species of animals.

### **Zoo Brno improves its keeping**

I highly value the fact that in recent years Zoo Brno has set out on a path to improving the quality of their breeding programs. No regular visitor could fail to notice the huge changes that have taken place in recent years. Runs have been expanded and

new exhibitions established, in which life for the kept animals approximates their natural habitat. Also the comfort of visitors has continuously improved and the zoo has introduced ecological electric carts to transport mothers, children and the disabled. Of the recent innovations, I am most impressed, for example, by the designer's resourcefulness in the beasts of prey pavilion, which is at a European and international level, by incorporating the possibility to see directly into the Sumatran Tiger run from the restaurant, or at the end of the North American Beaver and Wolf run they have succeeded in adding a replica of a Native American longhouse.

### **A place where animals and people are at peace**

I have visited Zoo Brno regularly since childhood. In a flood of green, the animals as well as visitors find peace, for which the extensive area of the zoo - in such unbelievable close proximity to the hustle and bustle of a big city - creates a grand oasis of peace and quiet. The garden and its near vicinity, approximating for us relatively distant alpine and sub-alpine areas, directly provides me with a natural way of movement and, if I have but a moment, the place makes me happy and I am glad to step out into it. The



Stanislav Juránek

flowing terrain is beneficial for people from a health standpoint since every step I take in nature is a step towards health. But it also facilitates close association with nature and its inhabitants. In my childhood - and I am thankful for it - the zoo replaced television for me. Today, it is primarily a place for rest, peace and quiet, a place to meet animals that in the future every person will share in the responsibility for their preservation.

### **Close wishes perhaps for all of us ...**

In conclusion, let me express one giant wish. Let us create in a greater degree such an environment that preserves a natural and healthy habitat both for us and for our animal friends!

Stanislav Juránek  
President of the South Moravian Region

#### **Ing. Stanislav Juránek (\*1956)**

*The President of the South Moravian Region. Born in Brno and after graduating from the Brno Gymnasium on tř. kpt. Jaroše (Captain Jaroš Boulevard), concentrated in mathematics and physics, he worked from 1977 to 1990 for South Moravian State Forests as a worker, a master, a construction foreman and later as a department head. Then from 1981 through 1986, he took external studies at the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Agriculture in Brno and in 1987; he completed a year-long study at the Faculty of Civil Engineering at the Brno University of Technology (VUT) in the highly specialised field of construction. He worked as a department head from 1990 and 1994 at the construction company Ekostavby Brno. In 1994, he became a councillor in the Municipal Office of the Brno-Židenice area, and from January 1997 to February 2001, he was mayor of Židenice. He entered the KDU-ČSL party (Christian Democratic Party) in 1995 and he is currently a member of the nationwide committee for this party as well as a member of its regional committee. He was elected President of the South Moravian Region during a constituent meeting of the Regional Commission on 20 December 2000. He is married and he and his wife, Helena, have three sons - Vojtěch (18 years old), Stanislav (16 years old) and Štěpán (13 years old).*





Adult North American Porcupine

Photo: Michal Piškula



Young North American Porcupine

Photo: Eduard Suchlik

### **Two days after birth, the porcupine climbed a tree**

A pair of North American Porcupines (*Erethizon dorsatum*) brought great joy to the staff at the Brno Zoo when, at the beginning of May this year, they had a cub. The breeding of these rodents in captivity is unique. In the Czech Republic, only the Děčín Zoo and the Prague Zoo keep porcupines. In Europe, their young have only appeared in a few zoos.

Already on the second day after birth, the young followed its mother and climbed



Photo: Eduard Suchlik

Young North American Porcupine

safely up a tree trunk in their enclosure. After just a few days, it tried to take vegetable nourishment. In the majority of cases, the female porcupine in the wild gives birth to only one cub, which is well developed, as the gestation period is unusually long – 205 to 217 days. The female then nurses it for only a few weeks. It is possible to count on the fact that already by autumn, the young porcupine will be independent in the zoo, the same as it would be in the wild.

North American Porcupines belong to the family of porcupines, which includes twelve species inhabiting North and South America. They are the largest representatives of the family, usually reaching a weight of 4 to 7 kg, exceptionally as much as 18 kg. They can be found in Canada and the USA and as far south as the border with Mexico. They spend most of their time high in the treetops, where it also sleeps, tucked under forked branches. They are adaptable, able to traverse the open tundra or the desert, but preferring forests. They live on leaves, buds, young sprigs, and roots and on bark and needles when the vegetation hibernates (i. e. winter). On the ground, they search for bones and antlers, which they scavenge in order to supplement their mineral intake. For the most part, in winter they take advantage of the hollows of trees or overhangs in cliffs and caves for cover against the elements.

This peace-loving animal never attacks but has developed an effective method of defence. In amongst the fur on its back and tail are several thousand quills about 8 cm long and 2 mm in diameter. When in danger, the porcupine hides its head between its front paws and raises the spines on its back while waving its bristly tail. If anyone touches these prickly balls, hundreds of spines are released that penetrate into the soft tissue of the enemy. Unlike the Old World Porcupine, New World Porcupines have prickles with barbs. When an attacker flinches its muscles, the spines dig deeper into its body up at a rate of 1 mm per hour. If they reach a vital organ, they could cause death. Despite this, the porcupine has many predators, such as the fox and the lynx, but first and foremost, however, the marten. This animal has learned to hunt the porcupine in such a way that its attack flips the porcupine on its back and the marten assaults the unprotected stomach.

A male and female North American Porcupine arrived at the Brno Zoo from the Ohra-da Zoo as an entirely new species in the autumn of last year. They settled into their quarters near the new beaver dam on Mniší Hora in the former home of the raccoons. In the future, the zoo is counting on the porcupines to add their exhibition to the wolf runs and areas for the Canadian Beaver in the complex for northern Beringia animals.

Ing. Jiří Gábriš



### **The most famous animals kept in the Košice Zoo: Bear quintuplets**

We celebrated our eighteenth year in the Košice Zoo on 1 May 2004. In the beautiful natural environment, 288 hectares in area, it is possible to admire 143 species of animals from five continents totalling 802 individual animals. Eighteen years ago, there were 23 species, and, now, when the character of the zoo will be developed further, the number of species maintained will exceed 300.

The construction of runs and housing began in 1981. At that time, the Zoo purchased the first specimens of Hucul horses, which formed the basic herd registered in the gene pool of Slovakia in 1996. The Košice Zoo bred 89 foals of this unique, autochthonous species of horse, which has been successfully bred in Hungary and the Czech Republic.

In 1988, a pair of brown bears was added to the collection. A total of 11 young have been born to them, of which the last, quintuplets born on 6 January 2002, have been registered in the Guinness Book of World Records. They are the most famous animals in the Košice Zoo. Breeding facilities for the nine brown bears are separated from visitors by an electric fence. With an area of more than 1 hectare, and surrounded by abundant trees and bushes, but also with open field space and a watercourse enabling refreshment and bathing for the bears, the area is ideal for



Photo: Zoo Košice

The most famous animals in the Košice Zoo are the brown bear quintuplets born in July 2002

breeding. And it is also the greatest attraction in the zoo. This has helped to increase the number of visitors by nearly 50%.

The original aim of the founders of the zoo was to devote first-rate attention to the custody of predatory birds and owls, as their natural occurrence in the surrounding environment anticipated that conditions would be optimal for establishing artificial breeding there. This aim was never fully realized, so they built the largest aviary in Slovakia at the zoo and we eagerly await a pair of Imperial Eagles bred here to successfully nest. In the vicinity of these predators we keep Snowy Owls, Eagle Owls, and Buzzards, as well as a large number of exotic birds and

waterfowl. Several Blue and Yellow Macaws have also reproduced with the help of artificial breeding methods, as have a number of representatives of water avi-fauna. The Košice Zoo has achieved success with its antelope-breeding program, which regularly sees the arrival of offspring. The size of the run enables most of the animals to breed in conditions similar to their wild habitats, the result of which is that every year we breed mouflon, fallow deer, zebras, ponies, and even mountain goats.

The Košice Zoo is linked to seven EEP projects; it is a member of the Slovak Association of Zoos (SAZZ), and the Wild Animals Vigilance Euro-Mediterranean Society (WAVES) in cooperation with zoos in Hungary and in the Czech Republic.

The administrator of the zoo is the city council. The poor financial condition of the City of Košice has forced the zoo to engage in its own business activities, seeking financial as well as general sponsors, adoptive parents, and arranging for financial revenue. One such activity has enabled the welcoming of new animals every summer under seasonable conditions.

*Ing. Karol Seman, CSc.,  
Director of the Košice Zoo*



Photo: Zoo Košice

Himalayan Tahr





Aviary in the hall in front of the souvenir shop



Crested Wood-Partridge

### The aviary in the Service Centre is complete

The aviary in the Visitor's Centre has been transformed into a small exhibition of The Fauna of Indonesia linking the hall of the U Tygra restaurant with the souvenir shop on the upper level. Until recently, only a pair of

Prevost Squirrels (*Callosciurus prevosti*) was located there. In May of this year, however, the Brno Zoo expanded the aviary with a horizontal section in the hall in front of the souvenir shop. In the new space, separated from the squirrels by a screen, appeared four species of birds acquired from the Plzeň Zoo: among the perches and branches fly a pair of Bali Mynahs (*Leucopsar rothschildi*); on the artificial cliff, Red Colored-Doves (*Streptopelia tranquebarica humilis*) have built nests, and the ground floor is lively with Hooded Pitta (*Pitta sordida*) and Crested Wood-Partridges (*Rollulus roulroul*). The small pond in the bottom of the aviary has been stocked with Spiny Turtles (*Heosemys spinosa*). In the restaurant salon, glass forms the walls of the aviary with metal wire in the upper sections.

The Hooded Pitta, a songbird from the Pitta family, lives in primary and secondary forests, in mangrove growths, and also around the plantations and orchards of Southeast Asia. It lives on insects. It is the most common species of Pitta, occasionally kept in captivity. It grows to a length of approximately 19 cm.



Head of a Crested Wood-Partridge

The Crested Wood-Partridge once inhabited the primeval forests of the Malaysian Peninsula, Borneo, and Sumatra, where it can still be found at elevations of 1200 m above sea level. Its food includes seeds, fruit, large beetles, ants, and small snails, occasionally scrounging the leftovers of wild pigs – it eats what the pigs leave behind. This bird, from the order gallinae and the family of pheasants, grows to a length of 26 cm.

The Red Colored-Dove is a subspecies of the South Asian Dove from the order of the soft-billed, family of pigeons. Its habitats are Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Assam, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, and it has been introduced into Sulawesi. It inhabits open countryside with trees and bushes, primeval forest, and dry lowlands. It feeds on grass seeds and other plants, as well as cultivated plants, such as rice and corn.

While the three species noted above are found in the wild, the Bali Mynah, endemic to the northern parts of the Indonesian island of Bali, is one of the most endangered birds in the world. These songbirds from the starling





Photo: Eduard Stuchlik

Hooded Pitta

family grow to a length of up to 25 cm and weigh up to 90 g. They were first named in 1912 when the ornithologist Walter Rothschild imported them to England. They lived in an area occupying approximately 30,000 hectares and their forty-member flock could be seen both in the monsoon rain forest, as well as in dry acacia savannas. They feed on various insects, primarily ants and termites, seeds and fruit. The number of Bali Mynahs has never been very high, but at the beginning of the 1960s, there were still several hundred in the wild. Now, the wild population, surviving in an area of 4,000 hectares in Bali Barat National Park, is critically endangered and strengthening the species through breeding in captivity has unfortunately not been very successful. An estimated 125 to 180 birds lived in the sanctuary in 1984. That number then declined to between 12 and 18 individuals in 1990. Subsequent reintroduction raised the population to between 35 and 55 maynahs, but another decline followed. Data from April 2001 notes only 5–6 wild Bali Mynahs. In zoos and at private breeders, it is estimated that there are two and a half thousand birds.



A couple of Bali Mynahs



Photo: Eduard Stuchlik

Red Colored-Dove (background: Bali Mynah)

Their disappearance in Bali occurred immediately after the discovery of the species, as traders quickly satisfied the wishes of collectors longing for rarities. Mother Nature has decorated this Mynah with an effective method of marking, more or less in a word: the body is predominantly covered by white feathers, only the end of the wings and the tail are black, and a blue swath stretches across the eye. The attraction of the bird was also increased by the fact that it can

imitate the human voice. The decline of this species has been affected by the transformation of forests and savannah into plantations.

Reintroduction efforts by the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums began in 1981. For the Brno Zoo, the Bali Mynah is the 18th species to be included in European Endangered Species Programmes (EEP).

Mgr. Jana Kantorová,  
Eduard Stuchlik



Photo: Markéta Hodková

Runs in the Miami Metro Zoo give the impression of an open landscape (foreground: Arabian Oryx)

### Visiting the Miami Metro Zoo

For visitors from the post-communist regions of Europe, a tour of a North American zoo is still an excursion into the future. As soon as they arrive, there is a huge parking lot stretching as far as the eye can see. Even though here in the Czech Republic almost everyone has a car, so many parking spaces, for example at the Brno Zoo, is only a dream.

The way to the Miami Metro Zoo, covering 290 acres of land in southern Florida, consists of a twisting road gradually opening up onto views of the animal runs. One can see everything without any visual obstructions, only the Imperial Eagles behind their netting. The other species – antelope, lions, bears, Komodo dragons, Indian and African rhinoceros, as well as elephants, tapirs, hippopotami, okapi, koalas, and more – inhabit

runs separated from people by narrow and deep but almost invisible moats. The viewer senses a broad landscape full of animals, in which, for example, an elephant is perfectly at peace next to a white Indian Tiger. The feeling of expansive views is even reinforced in relatively small runs. Where animals cannot completely hide, they can be seen as if in open, natural scenery though they are separated by an inconspicuous moat.

Although there are countless species of birds on branches in the giant walk-through aviary, down below they are also in the water. In the bat pavilion, we searched in vain for anything flying. We gazed at figurines relating to legends about vampires as in a mini house of horrors and at the nearly 1.5 m high mock-up of a Fruit Bat, which, upon touching a button, displays various types of larger than life bats in a small refuge under its wings and head. Something is always screeching and buzzing, but no real animals can be seen. In the end, I saw a clump of furry bodies in an artificial cave and, after patiently observing whether or not they were breathing, I guessed that these were the only live bats.

Every 50 metres or so, there is a covered, wooden bench and drinking water. Children could spend the whole day here. They

can dig for dinosaur bones, sit in a weaver-bird nest, learn something by playing with a wide variety of educational gadgets, or climb on the back of a camel or rhinoceros partially buried in the sand, where they can also enjoy just playing in the sand.

The Miami Metro Zoo has been open since 1980 and maintains more than 800 mammals, birds, and reptiles of 260 species. It also offers four climate controlled pavilions with educational rooms, two gift shops, refreshments with hamburgers, a children's zoo with regular programmes, a children's playground with a merry-go-round, a natural amphitheatre with performances three times a day, an education program for schools, guided tours and facilities, daily feedings with commentary in many areas of the zoo, arrangements for birthdays or other parties, etc.



Photo: Markéta Hodková

Green Iguana on the garden wall of its adoptive parents

When walking through the Miami Metro Zoo, we frequently felt that this zoo was here just for us and that the staff did everything so that we were comfortable while we were there. The effort to prepare such luxury for zoo visitors seemed to be carried to an excess, almost to the extreme. However, I think that in the Czech Republic, we could also get used to such a well-developed system.

*Mgr. Markéta Hodková*



Photo: Markéta Hodková

Young tapir in the swamp





Photo: Eduard Stuchlík

Group of Barbary Sheep

### **Barbary Sheep have five young animals**

Five Barbary Sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*), a male and four females, were brought to Mniší Hora from Sweden's Borås by employees of the Brno Zoo in May last year, and they joined the resident pair. The import means a significant strengthening of the gene pool of the Barbary sheep population bred in the Czech Republic. During March and April of this year, five young were born and the Brno herd of sheep now stands at eleven members. A significant morphological component of sheep is a long mane growing on the neck and limbs, which can reach to the ground in the females. In the wild, the sheep are rare. Its habitat is in North Africa, where it lives in barren mountain areas with sparse ground cover. They have been artificially transplanted to the USA.

### **First steps toward the return of ground squirrels**

The Rescue Station of the Zoo took in two European Ground Squirrels (*Spermophilus citellus*) found in southern Moravia after a predator had seized their parents. Now, the already fully grown, orphaned young could form the basis of a reintroduction breeding program after we obtain another individual in cooperation with the Plzeň Zoo, something which the Brno Zoo has aspired to for quite some time now. The ground squirrels are currently located in the experimental breeding facility.

### **Prairie Dogs again begin to reproduce**

Another increase this spring is six young that appeared in the exhibition of Plains Prairie Dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*),



Photo: Eduard Stuchlík

Female Barbary Sheep with its young

formerly inhabited by a male and two females. The first two Prairie Dogs were born sometime at the end of April, but because these rodents from the squirrel family spend their initial weeks of life underground, people didn't see them until the middle of May. At the end of May, four more young made their appearance. These are younger and come from the other female. Three years ago, we genetically strengthened the group of Prairie Dogs with individuals from a foreign breed, and there was conflict among the animals - Prairie Dogs are used to living in family clans. Therefore, last year we did not have any offspring, but this year the gift has confirmed that relations in the group have been restored. The Prairie Dogs exhibition is located on Mniší Hora at the covered pool, which is an advantage - they were unable to dig out, as has happened in at least one Czech zoo, where they escaped into an adjacent garden colony. Prairie Dogs live on the prairies of the central regions of the USA from Canadian to Mexican borders. They subsist on various grass species and other plants and dig systems of warrens and burrows where they live in giant colonies with millions of individuals.

(red)



Photo: Eduard Stuchlík

Young Plains Prairie Dog with its mother



Feathertail Glider

Photo: Lubomír Štelhík



One of the female Feathertails imported from Poznan had young in its pouch

Photo: Lubomír Štelhík

## Two more consignments of Feathertails arrive from Poznan

At the exhibition of Feathertail Gliders (*Acrobates pygmaeus*) in the London Zoo, a visitor may, or at least until recently could, read a warning that these miniature flying marsupials could only be seen in two European zoos, in London and Poznan. But for more than a year already, it has also been possible to see them in Brno.

In December 2002, the Brno Zoo brought a group of twenty-four individuals

from the Poznan Zoo. Local zoologists imported the first marsupials from the Sydney Zoo to Europe, and they successfully reproduced. The mixed group consists only of females and that is entirely intentional: initially, the Brno staff wanted to verify, in practice, all of the particulars for breeding. At the beginning of this April, fourteen female Feathertails arrived in Brno from Poznan.

The Feathertails live in one of the vivaria of the Tropical Kingdom pavilion, and since they are nocturnal animals, they have a reverse regime: at night we light the building, and they climb into their nests and sleep. During the day, the exhibition is lit sparingly by blue light, simulating moonlight, and the Feathertails are active to the delight of visitors.

Feathertails live in eucalyptus forests on the eastern shores of Australia. They live in trees, feeding on the sap, but they also eat fruit and flowers by extracting nectar. They don't even look askance at insects or small animals. They grow to a length of only 6.5–8 cm and a weight of 10–14 g. Their adaptation to the environment is perfect: their semi-prehensile tail aids them when moving on branches. In particular, the broad

pads on the toes of their feet are somewhat sticky and enable the animals to climb up and down along the smooth trunks of Australian trees effortlessly, while in captivity they easily walk along the vertical glass walls of their housing. Furthermore, Feathertails are equipped with a flying membrane linking the fore and rear limbs. In the sparse Australian forests, when leaping from tree to tree, or to the ground, they cover up to 20 metres. The surface of the tail, which resembles the form of a bird feather, aids them in flight. The method of flight appears effortless – the animal climbs to an elevated point and leaps into open space. It immediately stretches out the length of its body allowing the membrane between the knees and the elbows to tighten and the Feathertail glides like a delta plane.

After its first experience with Feathertail Gliders, the Brno Zoo now offers the opportunity to establish their own breeding program for the smallest, gliding-capable animal in the world. Breeding may be successful only with larger groups, as reproduction does not occur in isolated pairs. Then, as soon as the Zoo successfully adapts the cellar of the Permanent Aquarium Exhibition, the Feathertails could become a welcome species in the local planned nocturarium. Of course, they will also not be missing from the Australian pavilion, which according to the new exhibition concept will appear on Mniši Hora after remodelling the exotic bird pavilion.

*Eduard Stuchlík*



Head of a Feathertail Glider

Photo: Lubomír Štelhík



## New exhibition of Green Anacondas

In the spring of this year, the Brno Zoological Gardens enriched its collection of reptiles with the addition of six Green Anacondas (*Eunectes murinus*), the heaviest snakes in the world. Their maximum weight is between 180 to 200 kg, but the two hundred kilo weight threshold of this giant snake may be exceeded. The circumference of the Green Anaconda's body can be comparable with the chest of an adult human.

Along with Reticulated Pythons, these anacondas are also the longest snakes, growing to more than nine metres in length. Currently, the longest established measured specimen was 9.15 m long (and weighed 227kg!). It should be noted that a snake longer than ten metres has never been found, although in the USA in the nineteen thirties, a significant financial reward was announced for the discovery of such a specimen.



Green Anaconda

The Green Anaconda is grey or olive green to yellow with black or red framed yellow spots. The six Brno anacondas were born last year on May 15 from a single brood. Their parents were born in the Plzen Zoo, which thus far has been the only Czech zoo to keep Green Anacondas. The year-old young



Photo: Otto Ballon-Miemy

### Green Anaconda

measure around two metres and are located in one of the largest vivaria of the Tropical Kingdom pavilion.

Green Anacondas live in the tropical forests of South America near rivers and spend most of their time in the water. They can be found in Brazil, Columbia, Peru, Venezuela, Guyana, and Trinidad. It hunts large fish, turtles, and caiman and ambushes birds and mammals such as peccary and capybara. Before swallowing its victims, the Anaconda suffocates them. It then digests its prey, depending on its size, for a week or a month. They can go for a year without food.

The tank for the Anaconda in Mniší Hora is equipped with a heavy, curved branch and a heated pool, the air temperature is maintained between 26-32 °C with a slight decrease at night. They are fed with fish, chickens, and small mammals. The anaconda is aggressive but not poisonous. It is important to follow every safety precaution while handling them.

The Zoo plans that the anacondas will later be moved to an even larger exhibition. But not all of the reptiles will remain in Brno. The zoo has arranged for two to go to the Vienna Zoo. These snakes will apparently be

transferred during the transport of caribou from Schönbrunn. In the Czech Republic, in addition to Brno, only the Dvůr Králové Zoo currently breeds Green Anacondas.

Green Anaconda falls under CITES II protection, which means that trapping in the wild is only possible for a limited number of specimens. An adult anaconda has no predators – only humans can harm it. For natives, anacondas are a great delicacy. They are also greatly sought after because the demand for snakeskin continues to outpace supply.

*Michal Balcar*



Photo: Eduard Suchlik

Detail of the body of a Green Anaconda





North American Porcupine