

# zoo

report

september 2003

the magazine for friends of the Brno Zoo

**BRNO**



special supplement  
**ZOO REPORT PROFÍ**

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*Dr. Bernhard Blaszkewitz*

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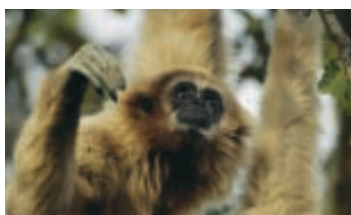
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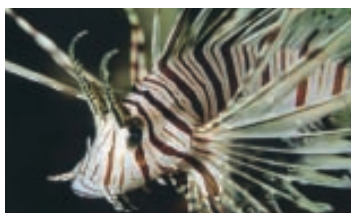
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### Zooreport

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UNSALEABLE

## Why do people visit zoos?

**Everyone expects good food and drink when visiting a restaurant.**

**When I go skiing, I look forward to powder snow and when I wish to see an opera, I justly expect that I will be offered music. Of course, the answer to the question in the title is simple.**

**People visit zoological gardens because of the animals. Nonetheless, it seems that this simple fact is already insufficient for many current directors of zoological gardens.**

Although it had once been important that animal pavilions and facilities be built for animals, corresponding to the needs of the animals to the same degree as the animals corresponded to the needs of visitors, it would appear that already this fact is no longer accepted. A park must be for experiences, jungle adventures, safari entertainment, or modern, as everything is called by that empty word. A visit to a zoological garden should be an event. It is a matter of course that each visit to a zoological garden is an entirely special event, based on the opportunity to meet animals. Without even travelling abroad, right in his/her hometown, a visitor to a zoological

garden may meet not just animals from all countries, but he/she may also discover wonderful parks and gardens. And if he/she is enchanted from meeting the animals, he/she will also be willing to read something about those animals. He/she may read the panels about animals; purchase a guide through the zoological garden; subscribe to a magazine about the zoological garden; and by attending lectures and special tours offered at the zoological gardens, he/she might broaden his/her knowledge about animals and nature. If the visitor experiences this joy from meeting animals, he/she is also prepared to come to terms with the problem of environmental protection and will have an understanding of the fact that environmental protection of our animal life must be exerted with financial means. The visitor to the zoological garden may learn all of this while wandering through the zoological garden, which serves for his/her rest and enjoyment. In order to enable this joy for visitors from meeting animals, it is necessary to realize the state in which animals will be representative and rich in species mix. We have come across such a status, for example, in the zoological garden in Brno.

### **Dr. Bernhard Blaszkiewicz (born in 1954)**

*Biology studies at the Free University in Berlin; he completed studies in 1978 as a graduate biologist. Throughout his entire study period and prior to beginning studies, he worked as a volunteer (intern) at the veterinary treatment centre in the zoological garden in Berlin. In 1979, he worked as a volunteer assistant in the zoological garden in Frankfurt, and for the next 4 years he worked as the curator and deputy director of the zoological garden in Gelsenkirchen. In the years 1984 - 1991, he worked as the mammal curator in the zoological garden in Berlin. In 1987, he took a degree at the University of Kassel with work on the topic "Breeding Mammals in Zoological Gardens" as a Doctor of Natural Sciences. Since 1 May 1991, Bernhard Blaszkiewicz has been director of Tierpark Berlin-Friedrichsfeld (Berlin Zoo). He represents the Berlin Zoo in the former International Union of Directors of Zoological Gardens (IUDZG) (currently the World Association of Zoos and Aquaria - WAZA), the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), and the German Federation of Zoo Directors (VDZ), of which he is the vice-president.*



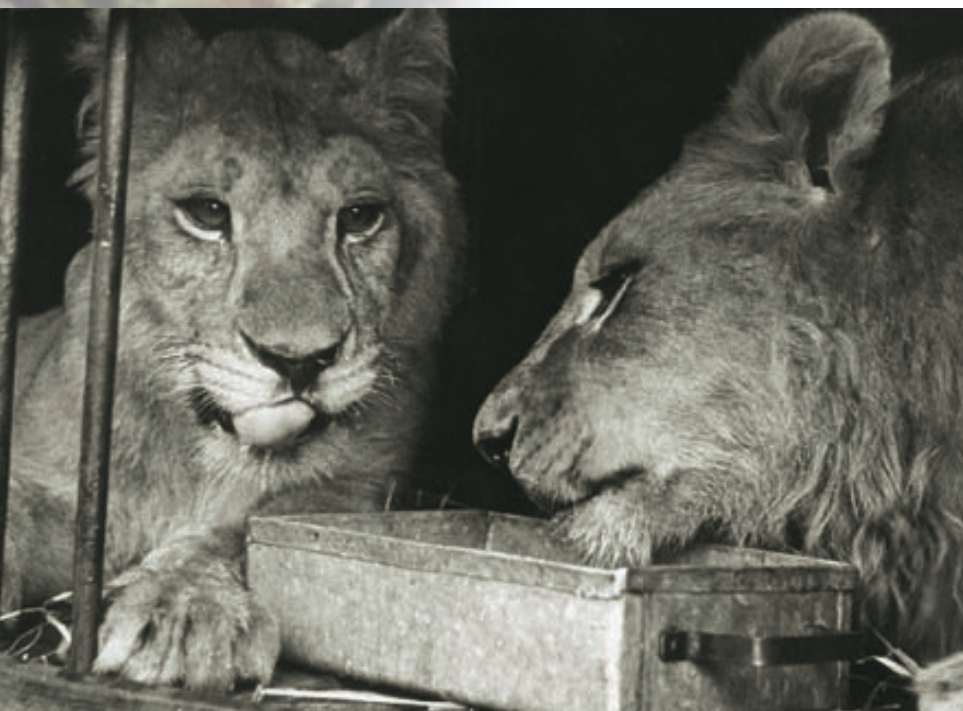
Dr. Bernhard Blaszkiewicz with young Snow Leopards

As we read in the last issue of the magazine Zooreport, more than 80 species of mammals are exhibited in the zoological garden in Brno, which is a good guarantee for visitors that some experience with animals will be arranged for them.

So that we may once again clearly formulate the answer: People do not go to zoological gardens because they expect an alpine slide or a laser show; they do not go to zoological gardens even to admire an artificial landscape in which there are no animals - they go because of the animals and that is as it should be!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Bernhard Blaszkiewicz".

Dr. Bernhard Blaszkiewicz,  
Director of Tierpark  
Berlin-Friedrichsfelde



The first pair of lions in the Zoo (photo from August 1954)

Photo: Miloš Budík



Photo: Archiv Zoo Brno

Professor Valoušek was most often surrounded by a group of young people

### **Adult education has kept step with the development of zoos**

After opening in 1953, the Zoological Garden of the City of Brno developed relatively rapidly. The ten-hectare area grew over the next decade to more than double, as enthusiastic animal-loving volunteers helped build trails and pavilions. Right from the beginning of its existence, it was characteristic that the garden has devoted extraordinary attention to working with young people.

In 1959, among the new runs emerged the completed, at that time the largest bear house in Czechoslovakia, still serving today. In

its time, the largest Czechoslovak vivarium pavilion, 25m long, with 26 tanks, came into being in 1956 as the very first pavilion in Zoo Brno. During later years it was expanded until 1970 when all the reptiles found a new home in a building that gave its foundations on the southern summit to today's Tropical Kingdom Pavilion. Of the first aviaries, also organized in 1956, today only the torso remains, forming the rear wall of the aviary for domestic owls and birds of prey. Exotic birds received a new pavilion in 1988 on the ridge of Mniší hora. Ungulates originally resided on the locations of the current runs for seals and polar bears in the lower parts of the zoo; over time they were moved to the upper areas. The highest situated, the extensive Safari run, just below the main summit of Mniší hora, has been inhabited since 1980 by ungulates of Sub-Saharan Africa. The first quarters with a run for carnivorous animals from 1953 still stands today, of course in an expanded form, but it will soon be demolished. Now there are Syrian Brown Bears, which are preparing for transport to Russia. Originally, lions lived here, later alternating with polar bears. Monkeys kept in the 1950s in the type cottage have had two interlinked pavilions available since 1956.

With the expansion of exhibition areas, the species composition has also changed from common domestic origin to uncommon exotic animals. In the vivarium pavilion, there were only fish in 1956, to which soon were added reptiles and amphibians. At the beginning of the 1960s, an attempt was finally made to keep sea creatures - seahorses, spine fish and some types of anemones - imported by employees of the zoo from holidays in Bulgaria. Experience in this field and access to information, however, were negligible and the attempt ended in failure.

Adult education activity was already practiced by the Brno garden in the first days of its existence. Secondary school professor Emeritus of biology Bruno Valoušek, the enthusiastic zoologist and conservationist, lectured at a high level. This Jičín native appeared on Mniší hora in 1955. For many visitors, his lectures, broadcast over the local public address system throughout the area of the garden, became a regular extraordinary event, still remembered by many today. The same was true of his excellent guide activity and a number of people came to the zoo just "for Valoušek". Already then, he founded a circle of young biologists, in which he educated a number of future professionals. Several million interested parties visited thousands of his events for the lay and expert public. Mr. Professor - as everyone called him - has become a living legend. In the administrative building, he used the broadcasting equipment, but he never had his own office. He worked outdoors, under the broad sky and in the pavilions of the zoological garden to the end of his life, surrounded by grateful listeners, primarily children and youth. He died in 1971 in his eighty-third year. Rightfully, one of the streets of the Bystřec Housing Estate bears his name.

The circle of young biologists in 1978 was renamed the Station for Young Natural Scientists. This now operates in fourteen professional sections and in comparison with similar facilities in other zoos of our republic, the breadth of its activities is probably unique.

*Emil Štiss*

## Plzeň Zoo merged with botanical garden

The collection of animals in Zoo Plzeň, the second oldest in the Czech lands, currently has risen to about 6,000 specimens of nearly 1,100 species, twenty-three of which are kept by the Plzeň staff in the context of European conservation programs. Admirable is that 70 percent of animal species in Zoo Plzeň are not present in any Czech or Slovak zoological gardens.

The Plzeň Zoo was founded in 1926 in the urban neighbourhood of Doudlevec. Since 1963, it has operated in the area in Lochotín, where in 1981 it merged with the adjacent botanical garden. Workers of the Zoological and Botanical Gardens of the City of Plzeň

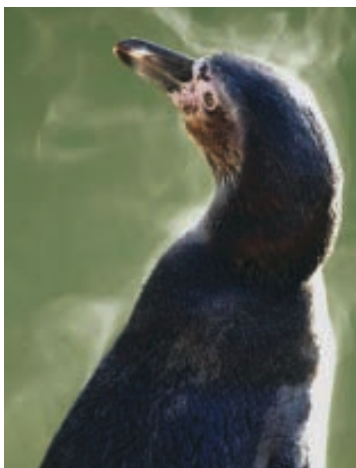


Photo: Jaroslav Vogelhanz

Humboldt Penguin

transformed the articulated terrain, covering an area of 21 hectares, intensively after 1996 into a zoogeographic bio-park, in which the botanical and zoological sections have ceased

to be distinguished. A series of older runs and exhibitions are beginning to disappear, as animals and plants are distributed throughout the entire area; an instructive trail called "Development of Nature in the Quaternary Period" has been developed with a hectare forest run for a larger group of brown bears. Rare species have increased, the most significant acquisition was in October 1997 with the arrival of a young pair of Komodo Dragons, the most powerful lizards on the Earth, which even undertook the incubation of fertilized eggs in 2001, but unfortunately without offspring.

The new direction for zoo development is apparent, for example, in the exhibition for monkeys, from the original five species in one pavilion, the garden now keeps more than 20 species distributed throughout seven locations. The monkeys themselves don't even know what bars are. Since the summer of 2000, the chimpanzees have had a natural run with grass, bushes and trees and unlike the original pair, the current group has six members; the island or natural runs are used also by the Lars Gibbon, Angolan Guenon, Lion Macaque or Black and White Ruffed Lemur and Ring-Tailed Lemur.

Already, large carnivorous animals no longer live in a common pavilion. Puma and leopard inhabit their own "aviary", and a free run for Ussurian Tigers and Berber Lions is being completed with 800 m<sup>2</sup> in the exhibition, which replaces a series of smaller cages and runs. The remainder of the original pavilion for carnivorous animals, under the name

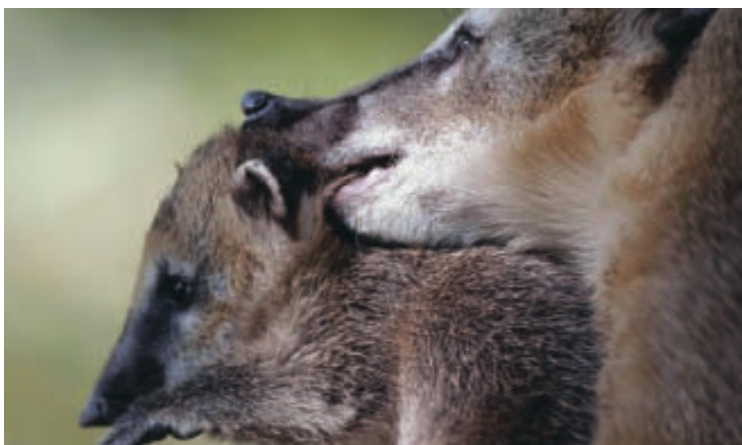


Photo: Jaroslav Vogelhanz

Coatimundis



Photo: Jaroslav Vogelhanz

Lars Gibbons

The Secret World of the African Night, was transformed in 2001 into a nocturnal house with Fennec Foxes, small flying foxes, mongoose, Rock Hyraxes, Spring Mouses, unique Garnette Bushbaby and Cape Fox. In the non-tropical parts, visitors are happy to watch the play of Coatimundis in the trees or coypus in the water. Among the most popular inhabitants of the garden are the numerous Humboldt Penguins, which are fed fish by hand by keepers before the eyes of visitors.

The Zoological and Botanical Garden of the City of Plzeň has covered about half of its journey to determined form, but subsequently still more tasks await it: construction of trails, pavilions, animal shelters, exhibitions, reconstruction of existing objects, replacement of remaining iron fences with moats and palisades, etc. The ascending direction of development is still liked not just by the animals, which feel satisfied and feel comfortable multiplying, but also visitors, whose numbers continue to grow and currently fluctuate around 250,000 per year.

Martin Vobruba



Indian longhouse of the Haida tribe

**An anniversary gift:  
The beaver run and Indian  
longhouse**

The fiftieth anniversary celebrations for Zoo Brno peaked on Saturday 30 August 2003 with the opening of a run for Canadian Beavers and a replica of a Canadian Indian longhouse of the Haida Gwaii tribe. The ribbon was cut by the deputy mayor of Brno, Petr Zbytek, and the chargé d'affaires of the Canadian embassy in Prague, Olivier Nicoloff. The festive event was accompanied by the roll of Indian drums by the Brno musical group, the Pow-wow Singers.



Part of the Canadian Beaver run

Another group – a five-member band, composed of Canadian Beavers from the Chomutov Zoo – have permanently settled in Brno. They have a small, twelve-metre long lake, whose raised banks have been fitted with glass viewing windows, which enable visitors to observe the lives of the beavers both above and below the water surface. The lake has been supplemented with a beaver dam from tree trunks converging into an artificial den. There is a space linked to it, from where visitors may observe the behaviour of the animals through glass partitions under dimmed artificial light.

Canadian Beavers (*Castor canadensis*), unlike European Beavers (*Castor fiber*), display daily activity, otherwise there is not much to distinguish them. The Brno Zoo has decided to keep Canadian Beavers, because their run represents the first investment in the planned collection of exhibitions for the Northern Fauna of Beringia.

The beaver tank is supplied by a waterfall originating from the neighbouring run for Canadian Wolves, which is still under construction. Now, however, it is possible to have a look into the run through the glass rear wall of an Indian longhouse, the construction of which is supplemented by two totem poles. Before the

entrance stands a sixteen-metre tall pole, the second totem pole inside the longhouse is four metres tall. The longhouse was built by the carpentry firm Juráň from Valašské Meziříčí and the totem poles were carved by the woodcarver Jan Brlica of Francova Lhota at Vsetín. The work is a faithful replica of an object standing in the open-air museum in Vancouver, Canada. The longhouse also serves as an information centre, where people can learn interesting facts about Beringia, and arctic and sub-arctic nature and about the Haida tribe.

During the opening of the longhouse, Canadian diplomat Olivier Nicoloff noted that the Brno Zoo has also approximated the life of the original human inhabitants of his country for visitors. The Haida tribe belongs among the group of North-western Indians living on the shores of the North American subcontinent, who – unlike other North American Indians – built stately longhouses and giant totem poles and, after the Mayans and Incans, created the third most advanced civilization of pre-Columbian America. The Haida lived in thirteen settlements on the Queen Charlotte Islands. They were called the water people. Their houses and totem poles faced the sea, which pro-

Photo: Miroslav Páskula



Photo: Michal Priskula



A beaver snacks in the water

vided their sustenance. Fighting occasionally broke out among the tribal clans. For revenge, for thievery or for slaves, who served as a labour force, but this also had a special mission – to genetically strengthen the local population. The Haida were divided into two main clans – the Eagles and the Ravens. The symbols on the totem standing in front of the longhouse at the zoo can be explained as follows: On the top are three guards watching over the three dangers: physical dangers from the surrounding world, spiritual dangers in nature and dangers hidden in the character of people. The eagle's beak below the top represents the Eagle clan; beneath it is the mother of the Eagle people. Next is the raven, symbol of the Raven people, in whose tail is located the mother of the Raven clan. On the lowest part of Haida clan totems were usually monsters guarding against specific danger, in our case it is a wolf, representing the mainland – this animal did not occur on the islands where the Haida lived. The Haida were skilled wood-carvers; they carved monumental totem poles, canoes, masks and containers. The canoes were about twenty metres long and could carry up to two tons of cargo. The ancient tradi-



Photo: Eduard Stuchlík

Charge d'affaires of the Embassy of Canada Olivier Nicoloff and Deputy Mayor of the City of Brno Petr Zbytek (on the left) cut the ribbon at the official opening of the Indian Hut.

tion has passed into memory; today the Haida live only in two villages, but are still recognized jewellery-makers.

On Saturday, ten thousand people came to the zoo for the anniversary celebrations. Among those invited were adoptive parents, sponsors, former employees and directors of Czech and foreign zoos. Among foreigners came representatives from zoological gardens

from Baku, Berlin, Kotzebue, Kaliningrad, Lubljana, Moscow, Nikolaev, Opola, Perm, Samara, Warsaw and Vienna. The Union of Czech and Slovak Zoos were represented by representatives from gardens in Bojnice, Bratislava, Děčín, Hluboká nad Vltavou, Chomutov, Jihlava, Olomouc, Spišská Nová Ves and Vyškov.

Eduard Stuchlík



Photo: Eduard Studlík



At the beginning of July, employees of Zoo Brno released an approximately three-month old White Stork into the wild, which had been in the care of the station for handicapped animals. People brought this bird to the zoo after its discovery in the vicinity of Novomlýnské reservoirs, where the bird had fallen from a nest, but in the end it has again been successfully returned.

### **So the animals will be content ...**

Often I hear comments from visitors to the Zoo about the suffering of the animals, about life in the wild and the hardships in captivity. The opposite reaction has been romantic, enthusiastic admiration for beloved animals. These extremes correspond with how people project their world into the animal world – but they don't detect its actual state.

Many young people wish to work with animals, to study biological fields, to resolve conservationist problems. People have this interest very deeply rooted in them not only because they biologically belong among mammals. We have a common ontological base for many of our instincts. Animals have been linked to humans throughout human historical development either as mere prey,

whose habits and abilities the hunter has had to know very well, or as the object of admiration – the model for characteristics that humans have directly admired in animals, or characteristics and skills that man was forced to cultivate in himself as a worthy partner of animals.

Today, the technical civilization has been capable of destroying – be it rats, some feral domestic animals and many types of insects – the predominant majority of taxons, which have long developed under specific conditions. Relations between people and animals, however, have changed somewhat. On the one hand, we observe barbaric destruction, on the other hand extraordinary interest in systematic and etiological research, for which use has been made of various breeding facilities and zoological gardens, whose task has long been

not merely to show the wonderfully colourful and formidably rapid and powerful or otherwise bombastic interest in animals.

Through various intellectual interests, only a few visitors can imagine animals in the zoo from the standpoint of their needs. The field of education is almost unlimited and what one generation learned, the next already doesn't know. Indeed, for the most part, visitors to the zoo are capable of comprehending that each animal has its own diet and so they maintain the feeding ban. But then they can also be angry when an animal is allowed to hide from people in a shelter and doesn't perform for people. Only a few understand that a wild animal always remains wild, looking out for any self-sacrifice, and that the most important principle when working with animals is caution.

Those who wish freedom for the charges in the zoo are erroneous in their love. Reintroduction programs are complex financial and time-consuming international events, suitable only for some species. Returning to the wild is not simple even for the animals that are brought by people to the zoo, when they are found injured or have fallen from a nest. The possibilities for survival after release into the wild depend, for example, on everything the animal has learned prior to its arrival in the zoo. In the wild, the majority of animal parents teach their young to find food and to protect themselves against predators by specific behaviours. In the wild, young individuals also acquire immunity to various diseases. And an animal that lives in larger communities, due to the lack of social skills acquired in the zoo, may not always find a partner in the wild.

Many species, which have almost ceased to exist in the wild, prosper quite well in breeding facilities. If an animal in the zoo has corresponding conditions for its existence and reproduction, visitors may see them not just alive, but also satisfied.

*Lubica Hrdinová*

## Female Common Squirrel Monkey bears its young on its back

In Zoo Brno, the small female Common Squirrel Monkey (*Saimiri sciureus*) has borne its young on its back since 28 July. For now it is caring for the young alone, but its offspring has grown a bit, also occasionally climbing onto the back of its father; it has already stepped out on the road to independence for the first time in half a year. An adult squirrel monkey measures around thirty centimetres and somewhat longer with its tail. Visitors to the zoo enjoy watching these small animals, which are active all day and nimbly leap from branch to branch. Their home is Central and South America, where they live in groups numbering up to five hundred individuals. From rainforest regions, "thieving" squirrel monkeys set out for plantations.

Photo: Igor Zehl



Female Common Squirrel Monkey with offspring

began to feel the presence of a competitor. Even though the mother protected the offspring, to be sure, keepers separated it from its father. After several days, the mature kiang became accustomed to the new situation and now the herd is whole again. The stallion has again given its attention only to its mare, with which it is again breeding. The home of the kiang is northeastern Tibet, where it lives – in numbers near the critical edge of extinction – on alpine steppes at elevations up to 5,000 metres.

## Anniversary exhibition

The exhibition Fifty Years of Zoo Brno 1953-2003, opened on 18 July 2003, occupying the spaces of the Permanent Aquarium Exhibit at Radnická Street no. 6 through the end of the year. In the hall on the ground floor are 23 posters graphically illustrated by 300 photographs. The Gothic cellars are devoted to the new exhibition concept, which represents architectonic models of future pavilions.

## Zoo welcomed the twelve millionth visitor

On Sunday, 10 August, the twelve millionth visitor to Zoo Brno was three-year old Jakub Šardický from Čejkovice u Hodonína. Jakub, who came to Mniší

hora with his parents, was congratulated by the director of the zoo, Martin Hovorka, together with the head of the commercial department of the zoo, Jaroslava Vavřínová, then the family was given gifts: a digital camera, a book with zoological topics, a plush lion, chocolate and 50 free tickets to the garden.

(red)



Photo: Igor Zehl

Young kiang

## Additions to the kiang herd

In Zoo Brno, the herd of kiangs (*Equus hemionus holdereri*), wild asses from Asia, consists of one male and three females. To the joy of keepers, one of the mares gave birth to a colt on 19 June. They say about the five-member Brno herd that it is the fifth largest in Europe – only a total of 102 kiangs live in captivity. Immediately after the birth of the little kiang, the stallion was somewhat upset and



Photo: Lubomír Štehlík

Director of Zoo Brno, Dr. Martin Hovorka, welcomes the twelve millionth visitor to the garden



Photo: Michal Piškula

The third saltwater aquarium in the Permanent Aquarium Exhibition



Photo: Michal Piškula

Lionfish

### **A bit of the sea in the centre of the city**

The exhibition for sea life in the Brno Permanent Aquarium Exhibition on Radnická Street belonging to Zoo Brno, as far as size is concerned, cannot be compared to the large volume tanks in some Czech zoos; but it should be seen as part of a complex aimed, as well as possible, at faithfully including the species variety for tropical fish. In three tanks, with a volume of approximately 2,500 litres, live 12 species of saltwater fish and a series of invertebrates, primarily corals.

The first aquarium is reserved for carnivorous predatory fish. Probably the most conspicuous are young Lion Fish (*Pterois volitans*). These beautiful fish, growing to a length of 35 cm, could be dangerous in their

surroundings. Their long barbs exude poison when stinging, which can even cause distress in humans. Another specimen in this tank is the Orange-Lined Triggerfish (*Balistopus undulatus*), a robust and expressively coloured fish, which in nature feeds chiefly on invertebrates, whose hard shells are ground by powerful teeth. With a little luck, it is also possible to see the Snowflake Eel (*Echidna nebulosa*). This creature, whose body is reminiscent of a snake and can be up to 80 cm long, usually hides among the rocks.

The dominant species in the sea aquarium is the abundant colourful species, which together with several Echinus and Skunk Cleaner Shrimp (*Lysmata amboinensis*), represent coral reef inhabitants. In this aquarium, exhibitors have placed emphasis on fish. In it, for example, we find two species of Tangs (*Zebrasoma*), which are a fish that varies its menu to include sea anemone; also

the False Clown Anemonefish (*Ocellaris Clown*) (*Amphiprion ocellaris*), Spinecheek Anemonefish (Maroon Clown) (*Premnas biaculeatus*), Yellow-Tailed Blue Damsel (*Chrysiptera parasema*), Royal Dottyback (*Pseudochromis paccagnellae*) or Three Striped Damsel (*Dascyllus aruanus*), which many young visitors compare with a zebra.

The third sea aquarium – noticeably the most interesting – faithfully reproduces a coral reef. Upon first sight, practically thirty corals of various sizes are confined here, whose growth is limited by the volume of the tank – the size of some specimens can be dozens of centimetres, but the majority of them are prospering very well and not even their proliferation is unique. We also find here the abovementioned shrimp, several Echini, Three Striped Damsel, Yellow-Tail Blue Damsel, Royal Dottyback, as well as Yellow Tang (*Zebrasoma flavescens*) and a pair of Tomato Anemonefish (Tomato Clowns) (*Amphiprion frenatus*). The last noted species lives in symbiosis with anemones and among the fish inhabitants of this aquarium is fixed the greatest attention. Tomato Anemonefish (Tomato Clown) are accommodating, willing to accept food from the hand.

Since 1989, sea aquaria keeping has been nothing unreal in the Czech Republic and breeders in this field have continued to increase. Mass development, however, is prevented by the significant acquisition cost and relatively large demands on breeding and maintenance. This fact thus markedly increases the considerable significance of public aquaria.

Jan Špaček



Photo: Michal Piškula

Yellow-Tailed Blue Damsel

## A family of Cuban Iguanas grows

This year in August, in the Tropical Kingdom Pavilion, in one of two summits of Mniši hora, hatched four Cuban Iguanas, sometimes noted as Giant Iguanas (*Cyclura nubila*). In the European context, the breeding of Cuban Iguanas is very rare; at the same time, last year in the summer, four individuals of the abovementioned species came into the world in Zoo Brno – in both cases, this involved a third generation birth in captivity, as the parents and grandparents of these children were born in the Prague Zoo. Their breeding was established in 1991 by trapping a male and three females in the wild.

The goal-directed breeding of these iguanas began on Mniši hora in 1998, when Zoo Brno acquired a group from their Prague colleagues composed of one male and five females. In 2002, one of these became the mother of four offspring. During the evacuation of reptiles from the flooded Prague Zoo, it succeeded in acquiring another male, also originating from the wild, which was entirely unrelated to the other specimens. The related male was set aside from breeding, so this year's young are a valuable renewal of the genetic base. The current collection in Zoo Brno consists of two males, five females, this year's four young, and of last year's four offspring, two have survived.

At the end of the 1990s, there were only 54 Cuban Iguanas in captivity, and today's numbers are not much larger. Of European gardens, Cuban Iguanas are proliferating only in



Photo: Michal Piškula

### Cuban Iguana

the zoos in Prague, Jihlava and Brno. Outside Europe, these iguanas are kept only in zoos in Cuba and three others in the USA. In addition to these, there are also various unique private breeding programs in the world.

The Cuban Iguana lives in isolated populations in the predominantly shore areas in Cuba and on adjacent small islets, including Isla de los Piños; the literature indicates the literature indicates a sub-species on the Cayman Islands. The week-old offspring measure around 30 cm, but in adulthood the male can grow up to a length of 185 cm. Cuban Iguanas live for approximately twenty years, while the average age in captivity exceeds the limit of 25 years. They are placid, shy, but clever animals. They live on flowers and plant growth or also entire plants, occasionally eating snails, crabs and fish. The huge males lounge on elevated locations and by swinging their heads, they protect their territory, which often leads to the eruption of violent fights. In appearance is reminiscent of

extinct prehistoric lizards – besides the same as the other seven species from the *Cyclura* family from the Greater and Lesser Antilles.

The number of Cuban Iguanas, estimated at around 40,000 specimens, continues to decline primarily because their habitat is being destroyed by the development of tourism accompanied by the construction of hotels and beaches. The natives also hunt these iguanas for meat – they call them Cuban chickens. Also the eggs placed in burrows have fallen prey to feral domestic animals.

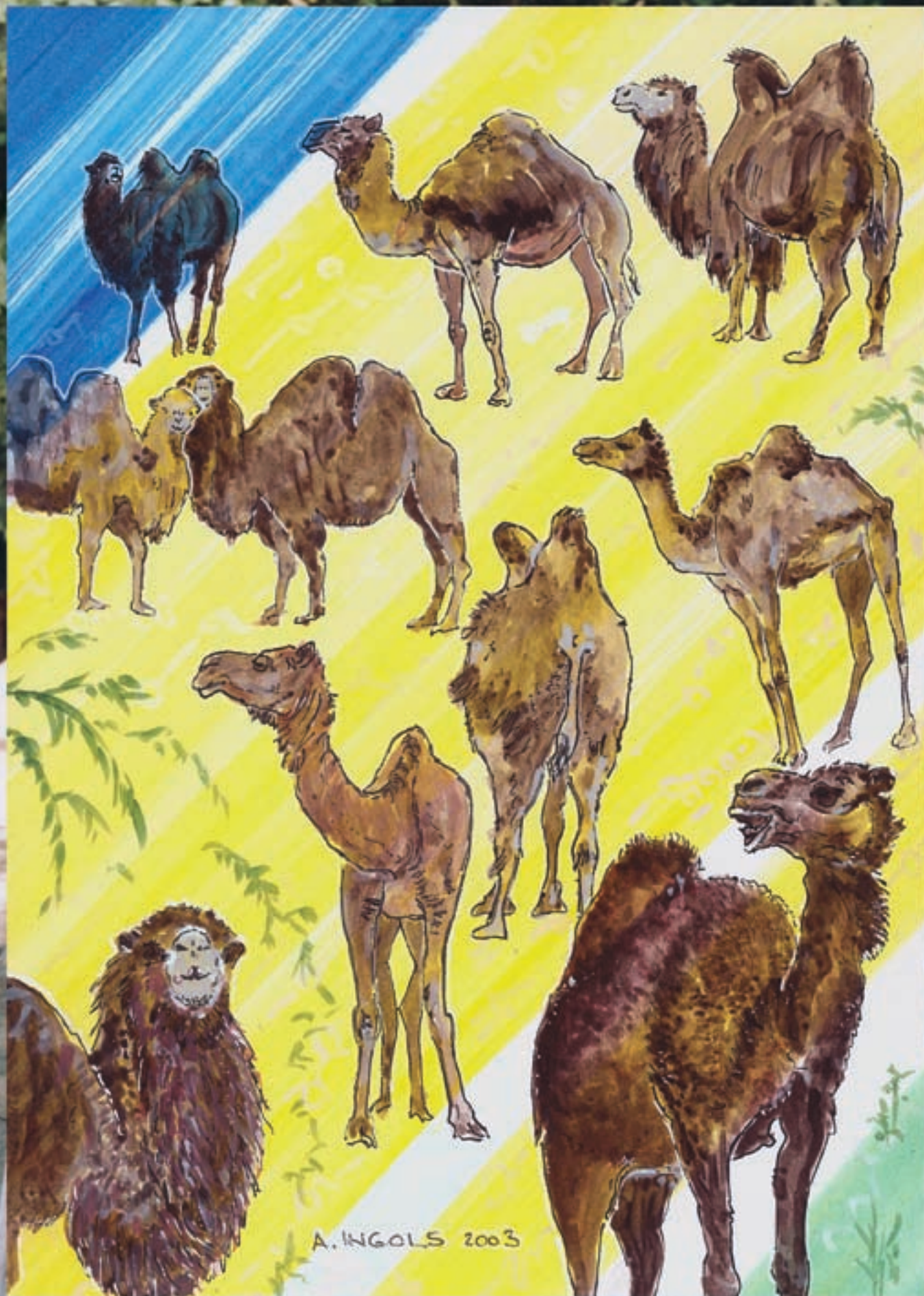
The Tropical Kingdom Pavilion displays the repeated successful breeding not only of Cuban Iguanas, but also an entire array of other reptile species. Besides the unforgettable birth of 39 young egg-bearing Jackson Chameleons at the end of 2002, we can also mention, for example, the greater number of Green Iguanas, which were born this year in the spring. Terrarium keepers from Mniši hora also replenish the hope for laying eggs from the Rhinoceros Iguanas. The Tropical Kingdom ranks among the largest attractions of Mniši hora and its significance should still increase. In the future, the space in the glass hall with a ridge roof belonging to the pavilion, is to be occupied by free-flying birds, residing in the crowns of the palms. Below them and in the adjacent planned tract will reside a series of new species, for example, Manatees, as well as sea life – sharks and coral fish.

Eduard Stuchlík



Photo: Lubomír Štehlík

Young Cuban Iguana



Camels