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ZOO report BRNO

the magazine for friends of the Brno Zoo

Extraordinary issue on the

60th Brno Zoo anniversary

The Content

Zooreport
the magazine for friends of the Brno Zoo
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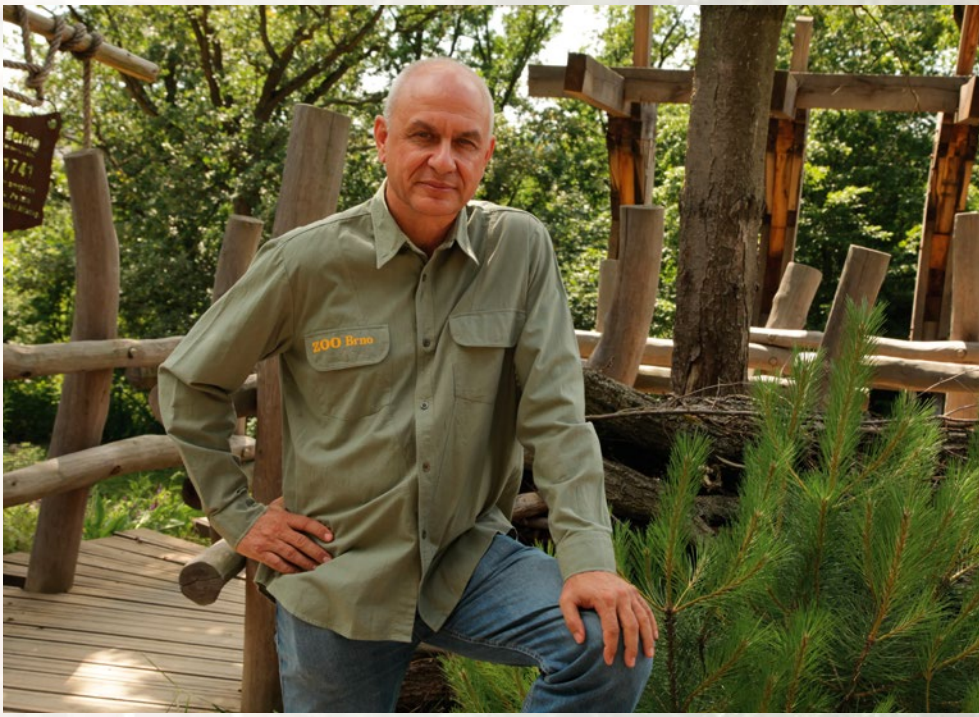
Reticulated giraffes

UNSALEABLE

This special issue of Zooreport was prepared by Eduard Stuchlík to mark the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the opening of Brno Zoo. He used printed materials published from the 1950s by the zoological gardens mainly for their own internal use and also records from the Young Natural Scientist's Station. The book by Jaroslav Eliáš and Karel Tilč Za oponou zoo (Behind the curtain at the zoo, Bratislava, Príroda, 1981) was also a valuable source of information. Special thanks to Lenka Tilčová for oral information and photographs regarding the breeding of Kukulín the polar bear, and also to Theoder Ochmanský for oral information and photographs related to the breeding of Bipo the chimpanzee.

We are Introducing a New Zookeeping Concept

Brno Zoological Gardens have been open to the public for sixty years already, with visitors entering for the first time on 30th August 1953. Since that time, the zoo has changed beyond recognition. Hardly anything has remained from the original facility. However, there actually is still something that has remained the same – the clear vision which our predecessors, the founders of the zoo, had about the purpose of this institution. They intended it to be a place suitable for resting and relaxation, which is (as it used to be called) a form of "sophisticated entertainment" dedicated to the promotion of environmental protection, the breeding of rare animals, and scientific research.



MVDr. Martin Hovorka, Ph.D., Director of Brno Zoo

When we celebrated half a century of our existence ten years ago, a new ambitious journey had begun with the purpose of transforming the zoo into a top institution of its kind. In the year 2000, on the occasion of the acceptance of Brno Zoological Gardens as a regular member of the exclusive World Association of Zoos and Aquaria (WAZA) in Pretoria, South Africa, we presented our new zookeeping concept: According to this, a larger part of the zoo would be divided into four main exhibition groupings – Beringia, the Caribbean, the Kalahari, and Wallacea. We wanted to introduce visitors to areas where specific living conditions had led to a particularly rich development in terms of the various forms of life present there, and which had provided certain evolutionary turning points or focal points for biodiversity. Such a concept for our exhibits makes our zoological gardens special, and different from others. Also, the importance of the city of which the zoo is part, a city in which the founder of genetics, Johann Gregor Mendel, lived and created his work, could help with this effort. After all, evolutionary theory goes hand in hand with genetics.

We have included the new zookeeping concept in the Strategic Development Plan for Brno Zoo, a document of essential importance which the city council approved in 2004. Based on this document, an architectural design office completed an urban zoning study for the development of Brno Zoo, allowing for the construction of other buildings within the zoo area in harmony with its current structures. Also taken into consideration were such things as the traffic situation in the city district. It was, as well, necessary to respect the biocorridors which pass through the surroundings of the gardens. This zoning study also guarantees the preservation of the forested character of the hill known as Mniší Hora, on whose slopes the zoological gardens are situated.

The first exhibit included in the Beringia complex for northern animals was the run for Canadian beavers, which was ceremoniously opened in 2003. In the following year, a run for Arctic wolves was added, along with a Canada lynx exhibit in 2008. Other work in Beringia focused on the area between Tiger Rocks and the wolf and beaver runs, where we completed a set of exhibits featuring the landscape of Kamchatka and eastern Siberia in October 2010. Here, the main attraction is the extensive Kamchatka bear run, with wolverines living in a smaller enclosure. This set of exhibits also contains an aviary for snowy owls, a run for Arctic foxes, and an aviary for northern coastal birds.

The construction of the individual parts of Beringia over the last ten years has been accompanied by the building of many smaller new structures and a significant adaptation of older zookeeping facilities. For example, we reconstructed the monkey pavilion in 2010. Animal breeding has also been developing successfully: We are most proud of the polar bear young which were born in 2007 and 2012.

In the very near future, it is expected that three new exhibits will be built at the zoo, as the city of Brno has obtained a grant from the European Union for this purpose. These exhibits will feature an African village, which will be located in the area of the viewing terrace by the Safari run, a kangaroo exhibit at the top part of the main route, and a bald eagle aviary near the run for wolves and beavers. The city has also received European funding for a new car park and zoo entrance, which has been designed to be built in the direction of the Kníničky city district.

MVDr. Martin Hovorka, Ph.D.,
Director of Brno Zoo

MVDr. Martin Hovorka, Ph.D.,
comes from Mladá Boleslav, where he was born in 1954. In 1973, he completed his studies at a secondary veterinary school and then, after two years of army service, started work as a veterinary technician. From 1978 to 1984, he studied at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Brno, where he was an Assistant Professor in the Department of Veterinary Epidemiology and Microbiology. Between 1991 and 1996, he held several positions in the sphere of primary agricultural production. He became the director of Brno Zoological Gardens in January 1997. His wife is a veterinary surgeon, and he has one daughter and one son.

At its opening, the only building in the zoo was the former gamekeeper's lodge

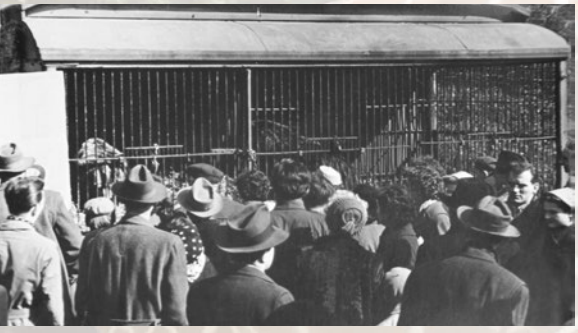


Photo Brno Zoo archive

A trailer from the former Circus Kludský with two brown bears, surrounded by a crowd of visitors

The First Attraction was a Circus Trailer with Bears

Brno Zoological Gardens were founded by order of the Regional National Committee in Brno on 6th May 1950. Mniší Hora, a wooded hill in Bystrc, near Brno, was chosen as a suitable spot to build the zoo. At that time, the woods had been given to Masaryk University for the construction of their botanical gardens. An agreement was drawn up under which the zoo was provided with the valley of the Hlubočka Stream and the adjacent southwestern side of the hill, with a total area of ten hectares; while the botanical gardens would take up the southern and eastern slopes. The top of the hill itself and the northern slopes remained a reserve. After three years of effort and the skilled help of volunteer enthusiasts, the zoo was opened to the public. The first animal collection contained 171 individuals belonging to 51 species.

Sunday 30th August 1953 was a sunny day on which around 4,000 people came to see the opening of the zoo. Seven hundred metres of paths were lined with 20 cages and aviaries, with wooden fenced enclosures for ungulates. Alongside the sheep and goats in the enclosures, other less-common domestic animals could be found – Bactrian camels, llamas, and domesticated yaks. Aviaries housed various species of songbirds, and also common, silver, and Lady Amherst's pheasants. In other aviaries for birds of prey and owls, there were Eastern imperial eagles, tawny owls, long-eared owls, barn owls, and Eurasian eagle-owls. Northern raccoons, European pine martens, wildcats, red foxes and Eurasian lynx lived in cages. The most valuable animal in the zoo was a wolverine, brought from what was then the Soviet Union. He answered to the name of Ivan and learned how to do somersaults when visitors threw treats into his cage. At that time, he was the only wolverine in the whole of Czechoslovakia. Also included in the initial collection was a pair of jungle cats. In the following years, the female raised two kittens, which then moved on to Ostrava and Liberec zoos.

Two trailers from Circus Kludský, which had closed down, were also put into use as exhibits: One of them became a big zoo attraction, as in it were two Eurasian brown bears. The second was divided into four sleeping quarters for a European badger, a European wolverine and a red fox. (It is unknown what inhabited the fourth section.) The first lions also appeared in 1953 on Mniší Hora. A hut was built to house them, with a small cage as a run. A few red-necked wallabies were added, imported directly from Australia. By the end of 1953, the new zoo had been visited by 34,594 people.

Photo Miloš Budík

One of the two circus trailers, used as exhibits, contained four species of animals

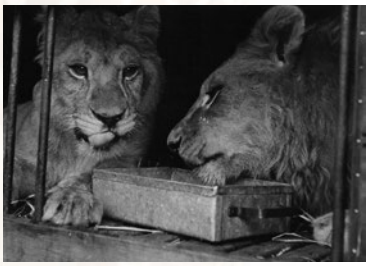


Photo Miloš Budík

It was still only 1953 when a pair of young lions arrived at the zoo

Photo Miloš Budík

Visitor feeding a llama

Photo Brno Zoo archive

Zoo vet MVDr. Jaroslav Jedlička with young brown bears

Photo Miloš Budík

The brown bears raised their young in a circus trailer

The Bear Became the Symbol of the Zoo

Brno Zoo didn't build its first pavilion until 1956. A wooden hostel for construction workers was converted into a provisional vivarium. For its time, the pavilion was quite impressive: Visitors passed through a dark, twenty-five-metre-long corridor lit by a glow which emanated from one side from thirteen terrariums housing primarily native amphibians and reptiles, and from the other side by a number of tropical fish aquariums. The vivarium was later extended by a tract with a roomy tank for crocodiles and, for example, false gharials; and terrariums for large lizards (such as water monitors and gold tegus) and also snakes (including reticulated pythons, green anacondas, and boa constrictors). There was also an exhibit with the very rare Aldabra giant tortoise and the rarest amphibian ever kept at Brno Zoo – the Chinese giant salamander.

The zoological gardens started to develop quite quickly, with several other important buildings appearing in 1959. A poultry house was adapted to create the first (rather humble) bird pavilion. The old bird pavilion housed a range of exotic birds including toucans, hornbills, and large macaws. Between 1961 and 1978, the zoo managed to breed 29 blue-and-yellow macaws within the crowded conditions of the pavilion.

In 1959, a new entrance area was built and the visitors' route was extended in length to 1,700 metres. It ended at a new bear enclosure which was at that time the largest in Czechoslovakia.

Ten thousand people came to the ceremonial opening of the new brown bear enclosure on 28th June 1959. This record number of visitors was unbeaten for many long years. The bears Váňa and Duňa, previously exhibited in a circus trailer, could now run around in a large enclosure without bars on a rocky slope with a water tank and sleeping quarters. After the move, Brno's first pair of bears had their first children, and the playful cubs attracted large crowds. The bear became the symbol of the zoo. Later, another two females were added to the large enclosure and, at one time, there were four brown bear cubs in residence. The interest of the visitors was unfortunately accompanied by their feeding the animals – a bad habit. A survey carried out by zoo employees at that time discovered that the bears were eating approximately eight kilos of sugar daily, even though there were signs over both sides of the viewing terrace stating that feeding the animals was forbidden.

Photo Brno Zoo archive

The entrance to the zoo, 1959

Photo Brno Zoo archive

A winter view of the provisional vivarium; a sign above the entrance read "Terrarium"

Photo Brno Zoo archive

Zookeeper with a reticulated python, from the 1st half of the 1960s

A grivet in the first monkey pavilion

The Time of Busy Construction Work

The first monkey pavilion appeared in 1960. It was constructed from a holiday cottage with outside runs attached to it. The building stood near a gamekeeper's lodge where a cage with monkeys, often surrounded by many visitors, had been placed soon after the opening of the zoo. In 1961, the zoo obtained its first pair of chimpanzees, which were accommodated in a structure attached to the temporary vivarium. This building is still preserved today as the sleeping quarters for leopards. As of 1st January 1963, the gardens held the following nine primate species: Sunda slow loris, long-tailed macaque, rhesus macaque, bear macaque, grivet, collared mangabey, hamadryas baboon, yellow baboon, and common chimpanzee.

Photo Brno Zoo archive

Monkey pavilion No. 1 from 1966

Photo Brno Zoo archive

Monkey pavilion No. 2 from 1966; the right-hand side was designed for the keeping of apes

Photo Brno Zoo archive

The first monkey pavilion

At the end of the first decade of the existence of the zoo, the wooden fences then in use started to be replaced with fencing made from metal tubes, and the gardens expanded from the sides of Mniší Hora to its upper parts. In 1962, a bison run was created on the top of the hill, and stables and runs for llamas, wild Bactrian camels, wild yaks, and other ungulates were moved to this area from the lower part of the zoo.

Between 1964 and 1965, the zoo built two joined monkey pavilions according to a design by architect Otto Eisler. They were very modern for that time. The zoo's chimpanzees were moved from the unsuitable structure attached to the temporary vivarium to part of pavilion No. 2, which was specially designed for the keeping of apes. Bipo, the first chimpanzee bred domestically in the Czech Republic, was born to them in 1967. His mother, Bibina, gave birth to two other chimps in the following years (a male in 1969 and a female in 1971) and she looked after them herself.

Breeding successes of the second decade of the existence of the zoo include, for example, three griffon vultures bred between 1963 and 1965; and twenty-two karakal born between 1966 and 1972 in one of the small cages on what was known as the "Alley of Small Predators", which no longer exists today.

The first zoning study, prepared by architect Eisler, guided the construction work after 1960. A great deal of such work took place at the zoological gardens, mainly because it had been taken over by the city administration in 1957 and the whole of Mniší Hora had been allocated to it. (The botanical gardens were then created at a different location.) From the original ten hectares, Brno Zoo grew to a 24-hectare exhibition area.

Photo Brno Zoo archive

Karakal kittens

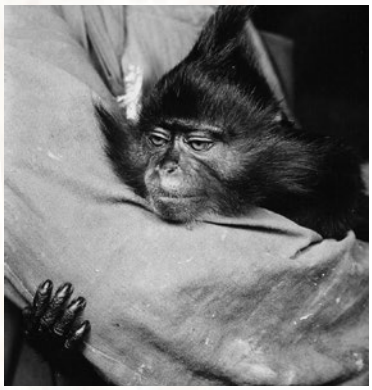


Foto Miloš Budík

Collared mangabey

Photo Brno Zoo archive

Griffon vulture chicks

Photo Josef Mráz

Bipo at the age of 3 months

Photo Josef Mráz

Bipo's christening

The First Chimpanzee Born in Czech Zoos

Brno Zoo's first pair of chimpanzees, the male Batul and the female Bibina, came to the zoo as one year olds in 1961. They came from the Congo, having been caught in the wild. After their arrival in Brno, the chimpanzees grew up together in the back yard of the temporary vivarium, and they moved to the new ape pavilion in August 1965. They lived in close contact with their keepers, and were so tame that they could even go for walks with a keeper outside their enclosure. In May 1966, the zoo bought a strong eleven-year-old male called Pongo from Czechoslovak circuses and placed him with Batul and Bibina.

Pongo soon took the leading position within the group. Eight-year-old Bibina already had a regular estrous cycle, with all its signs. Because males grow up later, Butul wasn't interested in her, and his passivity was perhaps also due to the fact that he had known Bibina since he was very young. Pongo mated with Bibina immediately after his arrival at the zoo and continued this activity regularly until November, when she became pregnant. She then started to separate herself from the group, and avoided further mating. Bibina's pregnancy lasted for eight months. She gave birth on 15th July 1967.

The new mother didn't accept her baby. The newborn ape weighed 1.75 kg and was well developed, so its raising was taken over by two keepers. They took turns in looking after the young animal because it was necessary to provide it with Feminar artificial milk for babies every two hours. After a month, they added vitamins B and C to the Feminar and, one month later, they introduced mixed fruit with Infadin. At first, Bipo drank about 100 ml of Feminar a day. On the 10th day, his weight had dropped a bit (to 1.63 kg). Then he started gaining weight and, at the age of 20 days, when he drank 530 ml of Feminar, he exceeded his birth weight by 8 g. When he was 80 days old, he weighed 3.16 kg, drank 740 ml of Feminar, and got his first tooth. The baby ape, though he had been vaccinated against tuberculosis immediately, lived in isolation from his surroundings due to a concern regarding infections. Visitors had to wait until three months after the birth before they could see him, and then only through a glass barrier. At that time, the male was christened – he was named Bipo, after both of his parents. He already had all twelve teeth at the age of five months.

Photo Brno Zoo archive

Keeper Theodor Ochmanský with Dadyna and Bipo

Bipo was doing well and, in 1968, he was provided with a female friend, Dadyna, who was approximately the same age and who came from Cameroon. She lived at the zoo until 2010. Unfortunately, Bipo's life was short: He died of a malignant disease at the age of five. He was the first chimpanzee born in Czech zoological gardens.

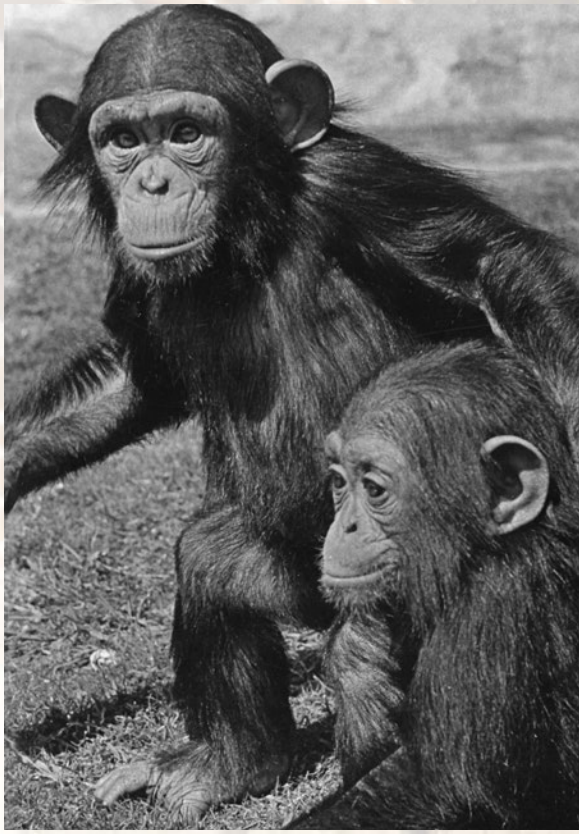


Photo Josef Mráz

Bipo and Dadyna

Photo Brno Zoo archive

The vivarium completed in 1972 was constructed from a glazed hall with a gable roof and a ground floor corridor

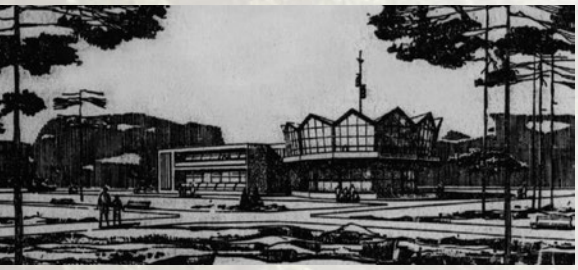


Photo Brno Zoo archive

Design for new vivarium at the southern peak of Mniší Hora, presented by architect Otto Eisler, was not implemented

Terrarium and Hospital

Animals from the temporary vivarium were able to move to more spacious enclosures in 1972. On the southern, lower 'peak' of Mniší Hora, a new vivarium building was constructed consisting of two operational units with a shared entrance – a large hall with a high glass gable roof intended for large lizards and snakes, and a ground floor area, which was also well glazed. The service corridor in the middle of the ground floor of the building was surrounded by individual terrariums for amphibians and smaller lizards, snakes, and tortoises/turtles. The visitor route led around the peripheral walls. Daylight helped with the lighting of the terrariums. However, the efforts made to maintain the necessary temperature in the large, badly insulated hall weren't successful. Therefore, the roof of the hall was thermally insulated, and large compartments, which proved to be particularly suitable for the keeping of Nile crocodiles, were set up inside the building. They reproduced repeatedly.

Towards the end of the 1960s, construction began on two enclosures with pools for water birds in the area where Tiger Rocks are today. In 1971, a third enclosure was built next to the existing ones for greater, American, and Chilean flamingos. During the construction of Tiger Rocks, two pools were retained as a basis for the water tanks in the tiger and leopard enclosures.

The state veterinary administration set up a veterinary hospital with a quarantine facility and sleeping quarters and enclosures for lions and seals at Brno Zoo in 1971. The lions, which had been living in an old predator enclosure from 1953, were successfully moved to a new predator enclosure near the former gamekeeper's lodge in 1966 and, five years later, the king of the animals was able to settle down in an enclosure near the seals. The lions remained there for almost thirty years; but during the period when Tiger Rocks was being constructed (1998–2000), tigers were housed in that enclosure while the lions were found a home in other zoo facilities.

The first pair of polar bears appeared at Brno Zoo in 1964 but, as they didn't have their own enclosure, they lived together with the brown bears and alternated with them in the run. One year later, these polar bears were moved to Bratislava Zoo. The old enclosure for predators, which was empty after the lions had left, was then extended by the addition of a pool. A young pair of polar bears, Turul and Severka, were brought from what was then the Soviet Union and placed in this enclosure in 1966.

Turul and Severka had twins every year. The male stayed in the enclosure, where he had his own sleeping quarters but no access to the part of the run with the swimming pool. The environment in which the polar bears lived for over ten years didn't enable either natural breeding or the safe removal of their young after birth. Out of ten births, the young cubs were removed successfully only twice. The first set of twins, which were raised at the zoo, died when they were eight days old of an overall bacterial infection.

The second removal was successful. A zoo veterinarian, MVDr. Karel Tilč, took care of the baby bears and, together with his wife Lenka, raised one of the cubs in his Brno flat. The young bear was officially called Arktis but everybody started calling him Kukulín. He was only the fourth polar bear in the world to be artificially raised.

Foto Karel Tilč

Kukulín in an incubator

Photo Brno Zoo archive

Flamingos

The veterinary surgery building is from 1971

Photo Jaroslav Eliáš

Karel Tilč in the bear enclosure with Kukulín

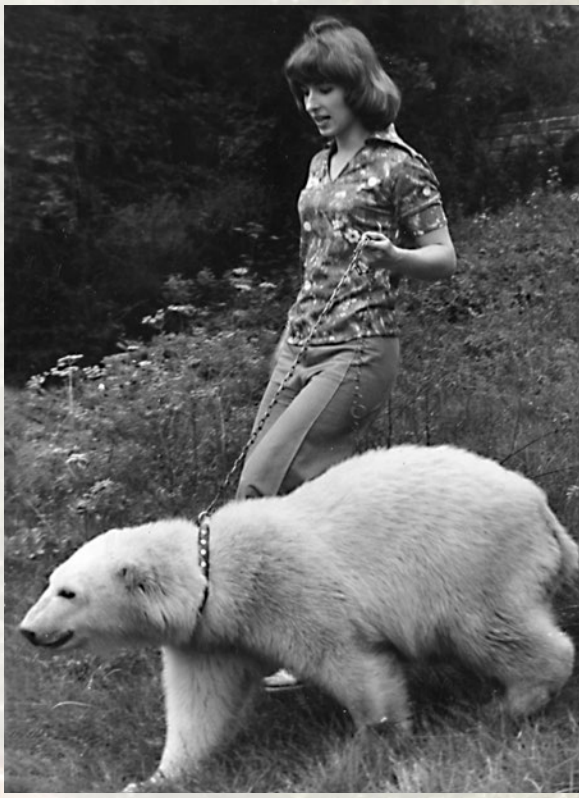


Photo Karel Tilč

Lenka Tilčová on a walk around the zoo with Kukulín

Polar Bear Kukulín Can't Be Left Out of the History of Brno Zoo

The second polar bear twins that were taken away from their mother, Severka, were born on 3rd December 1976. They were moved to the Tilčs' flat and put into an incubator. Dr. and Mrs. Tilč fed the young with Sunar brand artificial baby food, to which they added fish oil and honey. On the sixth day, one of the cubs got a fever, stopped taking food, whined, and hardly slept. It died that night in its sleep.

For the first month, the cub Kukulín lived in an incubator, the temperature of which was lowered gradually. He spent the next month in a baby cot before starting to move around the flat. During this period, he hated it when the temperature rose above 18°C, and his keepers had to start getting him used to higher temperatures. On the first day of artificial feeding, the bear drank 140 ml of milk; on the tenth 310 ml; on the thirtieth 600 ml; and as a three-month-old, he managed three litres per day in three servings. At that time, he started to be given boiled mackerel and pieces of fat-free meat. He also enjoyed yoghurt and cheese.

Raising the bear at home was particularly demanding for Lenka Tilčová, who spent almost all her time with the bear. For example, she wrote in her breeding diary about Kukulín: "He tipped over buckets of water; he put the rubbish bin on his head and crawled around the flat with it. When I took it away from him, he mixed the mackerel leftovers with excrement and spread it across the floor, and then rolled around in it. He urinated in the created mixture. I wanted to tidy this up but he tore the rag out of my hands and pushed it under the cupboard. Then he returned to get the brush and bit it into pieces. He got a slap and I threw him into the bath tub. Now he's sulking and he growls at me when I come near."

The three-month-old bear had to go back to the zoo. He was able to walk well and could play on his own, but hated being separated from the people whom he considered to be his parents. He now saw his favourite keeper less often but, when she visited, he enjoyed going with her for walks around the gardens. However, Dr. Tilč worked at the zoo, and the bear now became attached to him. (At the Tilčs' he had preferred Lenka.) The veterinarian came to see him as often as possible, as Kukulín would wait for him by the door to the cage enclosure and hit it with his paws and head if Dr. Tilč didn't come. Unfortunately, Dr. and Mrs. Tilč couldn't be with him as often as when he was in their flat; but luckily, a brown bear was at that time raising her own cub of approximately of the same age. The keepers took it away from her and moved it to the polar bear enclosure. The two cubs became close companions, though the polar bear still preferred his adoptive parents. However, his brown friend helped him to become more independent. When Kukulín later found himself alone, this time in the big bear run, he no longer protested so much.

Dr. Tilč used to come to this run to play with Kukulín until the bear reached the age of three. The powerful predator allowed his favourite person to ride on him and roll with him in the grass, handling the vet so gently that Dr. Tilč never suffered even the slightest scratch. Kukulín got a huge present for his third birthday – an older polar bear female who came from Dvůr Králové Zoo. Kukulín became livelier and the female bear behaved as if she were younger, with both of them jumping around in the pool for hours and chasing each other on the rocks. Kukulín stopped looking for human company.

Kukulín didn't have any offspring and didn't live to an old age. He died of a malignant disease when he was seven. Many were saddened by this, especially Dr. and Mrs. Tilč who, however, could take comfort in the thought that their work – the demanding raising of a baby polar bear – had been successful.

The Safari enclosure

The feeding area for giraffes is close to the viewpoint overlooking the Safari enclosure

Blue wildebeest

archiv ZOO Brno

Safari and Bird Pavilion

Brno safari, an extensive area with pond, stream, viewing terrace, and stables was completed by zoo workers and part-timers in 1980. Not far from the main 'summit' of Mniší Hora, on an area of approximately one hectare, representative fauna of the sub-Saharan savannah were given their new home. Various species have been kept there over the years: Rothschild's giraffe, scimitar-horned oryx, addax, Boehm's and Chapman's zebra, blue wildebeest, lechwe, and ostrich. The present composition of species housed there consists of reticulated giraffe, Chapman's zebra, blue wildebeest, and ostrich. All these animals currently reproduce. Most of all, we appreciate the giraffes that have been bred there: a female, Julie, was born in 2006 and, in 2010, the female Ta-Bita and the male Verst were born.

At one point, our zoo also kept orangutans. We received seven of them on loan from Dvůr Králové Zoo in 1981. They were put in the ape pavilion. Three years later, five of them returned to their home zoo. The couple which stayed in Brno produced a stillborn baby. In 1986, both orangutans died: It was speculated that they may have been poisoned by a visitor.

An important construction of the 1980s was a pavilion for exotic birds. It was completed in 1987, while the outdoor aviaries were completed three years later. The pavilion was built on the ridge of Mniší Hora, approximately in the middle between the lower and the higher 'peaks' of the hill. Apart from large macaws, rare species of parrots such as hyacinth macaws, Cuban amazons, palm cockatoos, and salmon-crested cockatoos were also kept there. In the current collection we can see, for example, greater vasa parrots, eclectus parrots, keas, Timneh African grey parrots, and white cockatoos. The birds are complemented by an exhibit with common squirrel monkeys and woylies.

The enclosures built up to the 1980s were created with the help of volunteers. Later, the zoo had to search for other ways of financing new buildings.

Chapman's zebra

Datuk the orangutan

Red-and-green macaw

Kea

Cuvier's dwarf caiman

Green anaconda

Beaded lizard

Terraria in the Tropical Kingdom pavilion

There was originally a meerkat run next to the entrance to the pavilion; it was later modified to host Azara's agoutis

The Tropical Kingdom

The perennial showpiece of the zoo to be built was the Tropical Kingdom pavilion, opened in 1998. It was created by the reconstruction of the ground-floor section of the 1972 vivarium. The interior of the pavilion is reminiscent of a labyrinth, taking visitors via a winding path between various large terraria with glass walls stretching from the floor to the ceiling. In them, we house mainly tropical reptiles, but also fish.

Azara's agouti

Pygmy marmoset

The largest aqua-terrarium, representing a tropical river environment, hosts not only black piranhas, but also Malaysian giant turtles and Cuvier's dwarf caiman. Other exhibited animals include, for example, green anacondas and venomous beaded lizards. The reptile collection also includes a rare lizard species from the island of Hispaniola, the giant Hispaniolan galliwasp, which ranks among the most endangered species in the world. The area on which the lizard is now found, on the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, is only around 10 km2. In addition, the pavilion contains three mammal exhibits equipped with outside runs. In one of them, we look after a species of South American rodent, the Azara's agouti; while in the others, two small jungle monkey species can be found: the red-handed tamarin and the pygmy marmoset.

The neighbouring building, Hall A, has remained in its original form from 1972. We now keep Cuban rock iguanas, Desmarest's hutias, moustached tamarins and Komodo dragons there. In the future, this building should be reconstructed into a tropical hall with insectaria and tanks for manatees as part of the Caribbean grouping of exhibits.

The breathing of new life into the zoo actually began a year before completion of the Tropical Kingdom, when we reconstructed the llama enclosure. It was not such a large investment, but it was carried out at an important location by the main visitor route. The old barrier was replaced by a wooden palisade and a wall was made from quarried stone. Since 2008, a pedestrian bridge has stood by the palisades to convey pedestrians away from the main route, where a train runs. Also since that date, we have been keeping alpacas instead of llamas in that enclosure.

Red-handed tamarin

Photo Michal Pšikula

The llama enclosure after reconstruction in 1998

Sumatran tigers

View from the U Tygra restaurant into the tiger enclosure

Sri Lankan leopard

The Tiger Rocks

In the year 2000, two years after the construction of the Tropical Kingdom pavilion, another grand enclosure – Tiger Rocks – was already standing at the zoo. It was divided into two parts: In one of them, which was intended for Sumatran tigers, there was a run and sleeping quarters with a glass wall facing the visitor route. The second part, structured in the same way, belonged to our Sri Lankan leopards. The spacious runs are complemented by water reservoirs and artificial streams with waterfalls. The breeding facilities at Tiger Rocks are also equipped with a birthing room.

However, Tiger Rocks has been used mainly by tigers since 2011, when the leopards were moved to an independent enclosure near the administrative building. The new leopard enclosure, which has an area of approximately 300 m2, also contains sleeping quarters created by the adaptation of one of our oldest breeding facilities from 1962. It is a former extension to the temporary vivarium which was originally used by chimpanzees. After the latest reconstruction, it fully meets the current requirements for the keeping of medium-sized cats.

The 2002 building in which the U Tygra ('By the Tiger') Restaurant is found forms a single architectural whole with Tiger Rocks. It was built on the location of the former gamekeeper's lodge, and some of the load-bearing walls of the lodge became part of the new building. The architect incorporated a glass wall in the restaurant, through which people can watch what's happening in the enclosure. There is also an aviary in the restaurant which stretches vertically along the staircase to the top floor, where there is a souvenir shop. We keep Bali mynas in the top part of the aviary, while the bottom part originally contained tropical squirrels. We are now looking for a new suitable species for this part of the aviary. The loft was also brought into use during the radical reconstruction of the gamekeeper's lodge, being made into three guest rooms for colleagues visiting from other zoos.

View of the U Tygra restaurant through the tiger enclosure

A winter walk around the zoo can be sweetened up by a visit to the cosy U Tygra restaurant

A wolf with her young

The Arctic wolf enclosure

Beringia Started with Beavers and Wolves

In 2000, the zoo management produced a new zookeeping concept according to which the greater part of the zoo will be divided into four themed exhibit groupings: Beringia, the Caribbean, Wallaceia, and the Kalahari.

Beringia presents northern fauna from both sides of the Bering Strait. The first component to be completed was the enclosure for Canadian beavers, opened in 2003. A large part of the beaver run consists of a water tank, and the enclosure is also fitted with a dam and a lodge which visitors can enter to watch the beaver family through a glass partition. At the same time, we completed and ceremoniously opened a replica of a family hut used by Indians from the Haida Gwaii tribe of the Queen Charlotte Islands, which was copied from a structure found in an open-air village museum in Vancouver, Canada. The hut is decorated with two totem poles, one outside and one inside. On entering, visitors can view an ethnographic exhibit and read about Beringia and the advanced culture of the original inhabitants of the northwestern coast of Canada. The hut stands right next to the beaver enclosure, its glass wall offering a breathtaking view of the wolf run.

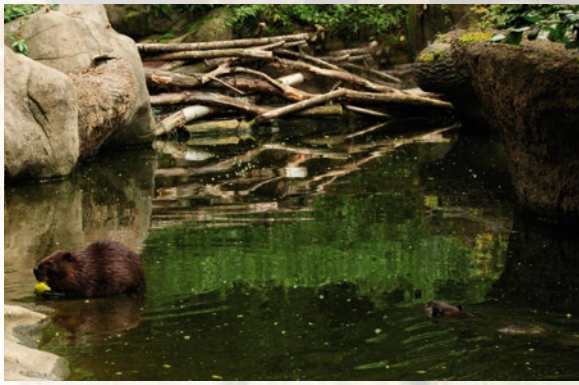
Arctic wolves

The enclosure for Arctic wolves was completed in 2004. The extensive wolf run, with its lush vegetation, was modeled in such a way that the animals have plenty of privacy. A set of pools connected by a stream with a waterfall in the wolf run flows into a lake in the beaver enclosure. The enclosure for wolves and the enclosure for beavers form a single unit that represents one part of the Canadian landscape. The wolves and beavers have adapted to the environment on Mniší Hora well, reproducing every year.

Totem inside the Indian hut

Canadian beavers

Hut of the type used by the Haida Gwaii tribe of North American Indians



Canadian beaver enclosure

Cora the polar bear with her twins, born on 23rd November 2007

Polar Bear Cora Raises Her First Twins

In 2006, polar bears Umca and Cora were able to move from rather cramped quarters in the former lion enclosure to a large natural run which used to be inhabited by brown bears. (We had stopped keeping European brown bears, and we were preparing an enclosure for a different brown bear subspecies.) Umca and Cora liked their new home, which was designed by architect Otto Eisler for polar bears in 1959, and they started to procreate. Cora gave birth to the first successfully raised twins on 23rd November 2007. These young males, after more than a year with their mother, left to strengthen the breeding programmes at Prague Zoo and at Gelsenkirchen Zoo in Germany.

New enclosures with new technical improvements were created at the zoo over time. Wild Przewalski's horses returned to Brno Zoo in 2005 after quite a long period without them in our collection. We adapted a run for them that used to house Bactrian camels, and gave their stable the shape of a Mongolian yurt.

The meerkat enclosure is located near the main visitor route

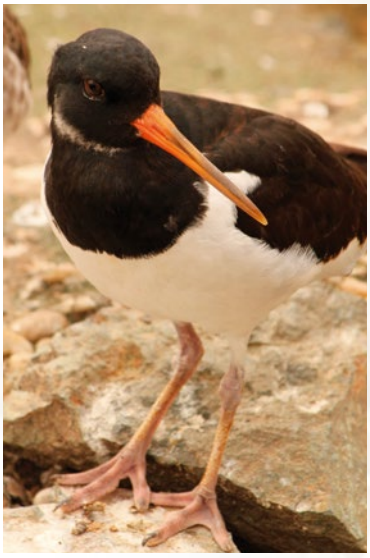
Stable for Przewalski's horses

The bison enclosure

A major event of 2006 at the zoo was the reconstruction of the Children's Zoo. During the following two years, a stylish stable building with an indoor riding hall was created. The bison run was also improved significantly that year with the replacement of the old metal railings by a stylish wooden fence, the reconstruction of the hayloft, and the building of a ditch along the visitor route so that nothing blocked a view of the animals. An Indian village with five teepees was built by the enclosure. We also adapted the run for Barbary sheep so that they could live together with gelada baboons.

In 2008, we widened and paved the main road where a tourist train gives rides to visitors between the U Tygra Restaurant and the ridge of Mniší Hora, and we created a parallel path for pedestrians. Along it, new enclosures for Patagonian maras, white-lipped peccaries, and meerkats were created in 2008 and 2009.

Children's zoo



Eurasian oystercatcher

Snowy owl

Kamchatka brown bears

Beringia is Dominated by Kamchatka Brown Bears

In the years after the runs for wolves and beavers were built, the construction of Beringia continued in the area between those runs and the Tiger Rocks enclosure. In October 2010, we completed a set of enclosures featuring the landscape of Kamchatka and eastern Siberia, supplemented with an entry area for Beringia showing a symbolic depiction of the Bering Strait.

In the middle of this group of exhibits, there are three replica native buildings from Kamchatka which represent the dwellings of bear hunters. A two-room residential house contains a kitchen with an ethnographic exhibition, and a living room with photographs of bears which were taken in the wilderness of Kamchatka. The replica sauna building contains toilet facilities for visitors, while the high hayloft serves as a viewing terrace. These edifices surround a courtyard which has a well built from logs. The courtyard offers an immediate, close-up view of our massive Kamchatka bears, who had twins in January 2012. Their run with its lake is enlivened by artificial geysers and mud volcanoes reminiscent of the protected and famous Geyser Valley on Kamchatka.

Wolverines live in a smaller enclosure near the Kamchatka houses. The exhibit grouping also includes a large aviary with snowy owls in one half and northern coastal birds - ruffs and Eurasian oystercatchers – in the other. The atmosphere is completed by a run for Arctic foxes.

In the future, Beringia will house approximately 75 animal species between Tiger Rocks and the old bear enclosure from 1959, which will be rebuilt. Visitors who come through the current entrance into the zoo arrive first at Tiger Rocks. Behind this enclosure, the inscription "Beringie" can be seen, where artificial geysers and enclosures for wolverines and Kamchatka brown bears welcome our visitors, as they have done since 2010. If people come into the zoo through the new entrance which we would like to build in the direction of Kníničky, it will be the polar bears which welcome them to Beringia and the whole zoo.

Wolverine

Geysers in the Kamchatka brown bear enclosure

The way to the Kamchatka huts

Viewpoint overlooking the Kamchatka brown bear enclosure

The indoor run for chimpanzees

Ring-tailed lemurs

Steller's sea eagles

Giant Hispaniolan galliwasp

From the Monkey Pavilion to a Dragon from Komodo

In October 2010, the zoo completed the first stage of the reconstruction of Monkey Pavilion Number Two, which was built in 1966.

One part of this building, in which there were originally three enclosures, is now used only by chimpanzees. They have the use of all three of the original cage runs, which have been interconnected. Bedrooms have been created for them by adapting the pavilion's unused cellar area. The chimps can move freely from their bedrooms to the floor above, where they have an indoor run which has been extended into space formerly occupied by the visitor passageway. Visitors can watch the action in the run through a glass wall in the remaining part of the passage. Ring-tailed lemurs have moved into the newly adapted sleeping quarters on the other side of the pavilion, and they have also received a new outside run on that side of the building. The outdoor cage for this pavilion, originally intended for apes, was knocked down. In the future, second stage of the reconstruction, the cages now used by chimpanzees will also be removed and a new spacious outside run will be attached for them.

In 2010, another smaller enclosure was created at the zoo in the vicinity of the alpacas, this time for wild vicuñas. During the following year, three new zookeeping facilities appeared: The first was an enclosure for Sri Lankan leopards, which had shared a space with tigers at Tiger Rocks until then. Their new home was built near the administrative building. A new enclosure for polar foxes in Beringia was the second item constructed, suitably complementing the aviary for snowy owls and arctic coastal birds. The third improvement was the attachment of a separate run to the polar bear den for the male bear. Now he won't have to move to a different location when the female is pregnant.

An important breeding success of 2011 was the first raising of a Steller's sea eagle chick. In the following year, the eagles raised two more young and, in 2013, the pair nested again and are now looking after a single chick. The zoo had similar success with their giant Hispaniolan galliwasps, lizards ranking among the most endangered animals in the world. Just like the sea eagles, the galliwasps reproduced for the first time at Brno Zoo in 2011, and also had babies in the following years.

A precious addition to our collection of reptiles is a Komodo dragon male, which we obtained from Prague Zoo in December 2012. We have adapted a large enclosure with an area of 50 m^2 in an older terrarium building to house our new "dragon".

Komodo dragon

Cora with her cubs in July 2013

Second Twins of Polar Bears

In the 2013 season, the polar bear exhibit attracted the most attention in Brno Zoo thanks to the birth of two cubs on 24th November 2012.

At the beginning of June the little bears each weighed approximately 35 kg. They were doing well, growing nicely, and maintaining their appetite. They always threw themselves first at bowls of fish fat, preferring it over the fatty beef and fish that they were given as well. Their diet is actually quite varied, though, including fruit and vegetables.

From the middle of April, the bear cubs started going into water. While the male learned to swim the whole length of the pool quite soon and in fine style, the cautious female had only plucked up enough courage to go splashing in the shallow part by the beginning of summer. Their mother, Cora, remained very close to her young, keeping them always in view and supplying them with her milk several times a day. While suckling, the little cubs gave out noticeably loud and satisfied growling noises.

The cubs left their den for the first time on 16th March, going for their first walk under the supervision of their careful mother. The sex of each of the twins was ascertained on 4th April, when we vaccinated the little bears. We have to do this for all animals born at the zoo. During their christening on 27th April, the male cub was given the name Nanuk, and the female was named Kometa.

It was Brno's Mayor, Roman Onderka, and the director of Brno City Theatre, Stanislav Moša, who christened two white fluffy toy bears on the podium by Beringia that day. The crowd of onlookers and polar bear mascots headed off to the enclosure to watch the live cubs being fed, accompanied by a commentary.

This exhibit also received the most visitors in the following months. People came away from the polar bears full of impressions and feelings. Hopefully, these were not spoiled by the fact that these cubs from the icy plains of the Arctic weren't always as white as we generally imagine them to be: This year's rainy weather had quite an effect on their enclosure.

When the bear cubs left their den halfway through March, there was still snow on the ground outside

Cora with the twins in the pool

The procession of visitors with mascots passing through Beringia to the polar bear enclosure

Christening of two white fluffy toy bears

Visualisation Atelier ADN

After completing construction of the African village, we also want to keep hippos in the Safari enclosure

Drawing Atelier ADN

Ground plan of the kangaroo enclosure

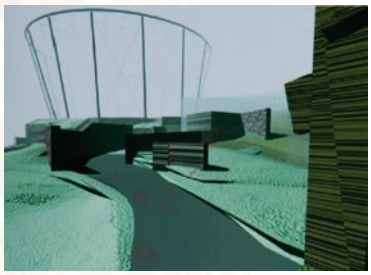
The African Village, Kangaroos, and Bald Eagles

Brno Zoo has three new construction projects which will be implemented in the near future – an African village, an enclosure for kangaroos, and an aviary for bald eagles.

Apart from Beringia, which presents northern animals, complexes devoted to other zoogeographical regions are being built or planned at Brno Zoo. The construction of an African village with eight huts will soon be started near the Safari enclosure where we keep reticulated giraffes, Chapman's zebras, blue wildebeest, and ostriches. The African village, just like the Safari area, will become part of the future Kalahari section, presenting the fauna of the arid part of sub-Saharan Africa. African poultry will reside in the village, and colonies of greater flamingos and African penguins will occupy the lake nearby. In the following years, new lion and cheetah enclosures will be included, and a tank for hippos will also be set up in the Safari run.

Visitors will enter the run with hopping kangaroos near an artificial rock decorated with replicas of rock paintings by the original inhabitants of Australia, the Aborigines. On an educational trail in the kangaroo enclosure, people will come into close proximity with the animals. Walk-through enclosures will thus fill the last empty space along the primary route used by the tourist train which connects the lower and upper parts of the zoo. Ten years ago, there was only a llama run at this location. Now, visitors on the way from the U Tygra Restaurant towards the pavilion for exotic birds can also meet Patagonian maras, meerkats, white-lipped peccaries, alpacas, and vicuñas there – and very shortly these will be supplemented with kangaroos.

The aviary for bald eagles will be made of a steel structure closed on the top by a nylon net. As with the kangaroo run, there will be a path through the aviary. It will be entered through a corridor drilled into imitation rock near the Indian hut. Visitors will find themselves occupying the same space as flying eagles in an area bounded by the runs for Arctic wolves and Canadian lynx. By connecting the aviary with two smaller zookeeping facilities – those for striped skunks and North American porcupines – one unit will be created, which will be another piece in the mosaic of enclosures forming the Beringia complex.



Visualisation Atelier ADN

Model of the bald eagle aviary

Bald eagle

Visualisation Atelier ADN

Interior of the bald eagle aviary

The Clear Idea about the Future Appearance

Brno Zoo has a clear idea about how it is going to develop further. In its work, it is taking a new approach to exhibiting animals based on the general development plan of 2006, which involves building a 'new zoo' on three levels.

First, four themed enclosure groupings are to be created: Beringia, the Caribbean, Kalahari, and Wallacea. We have written about Beringia in a different article, so let's just add that one of the next enclosureswill be for North American river otter. After the North American beavers, Arctic wolves, and bald eagles, the otters will complete the lower, Canadian part of Beringia.

As Beringia shows the influence of the land bridge which used to connect Asia and America on the migration and exchange of fauna from both continents, the Caribbean complex will show theeffect oftheconnection of North and South America via the Isthmus of Panamatwo and a half million years ago. Then, a similarly great exchange took place as evolutionally younger species migrated from the north tothe south, and more archaic species moved from the south to the north. The Caribbean section will take up the southern, lower 'summit' of Mniší Hora withthe Tropical Kingdom pavilion, which already fulfils the requirements of the concept. We are going to reconstruct the neighbouring building with terrariums from 1972 into a tropical hall with an enclosure for manatees.

With the Kalahari complex, we would like to introduce the youngest biome on Earth, hot and barren land (desert). Deserts were created as late as the ice ages, when large amounts of water were bound up within glaciers around the poles, the level of the world ocean dropped, and land masses lost moisture. This exhibit grouping will present large African animals which have managed to adapt to desert life, and will include a reconstruction of today's Safari enclosure, as well asits surroundings.

Wallacea will show a place on the planet where two different zoogeographical areas meet. The imaginary Wallace line divides the Indonesian archipelago into a north-eastern part inhabited by fauna related to those found in Australia and Oceania, and a south-western region with fauna belonging to the adjacent part of South-East Asia. The enclosures making up Wallacea will be built on a forested slope under the lower hilltop of Mniší Hora which hasn't been accessible to the public so far.

With this second level of the new concept for the zoo, we would like to demonstrate the influence of isolation on the development of life forms. We will present animals from islands in the sea as well as – figuratively – in the skies, such as those living in isolation in high mountain regions. At the same time, we will also draw the visitor's attention to the special vulnerability of island populations.

The third level of our concept is the presentation of selected systematic groups. These will include, for instance, equidae, for which there is space in the surroundings of the Przewalski's horse enclosure; and primates, which will belocated in an orchard at the top end of the zoo.

Despite the suggested number of new zookeeping facilities, there will still be enough space for so-called supplementary enclosures. These include the Children's Zoo, which is already in use, with its popular pony rides. Other proposed additions are: Moravian Cottage (an open-air exhibit with domestic animals), Moravian River (a presentation of life in a water environment), and a falconer's meadow. (An overview of planned constructions within the context of current exhibits is listed in the chart on the back page of the cover of this Zooreport issue.)

Visualisation Ateliér ADN

Butterfly exhibit in a tropical greenhouse in the Wallacea exhibit groupin

Visualisation Ateliér ADN

Otter exhibit in Beringia

General Development Plan

Legend:

- Selected current exhibits
- Exhibits planned for the nearest future
- Exhibits for the more distant future