

Penscynor NEWS



SUMMER 1987

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Over two years have passed since the last issue of a Penscynor Newsletter — a reflection of the hectic life of an ever developing zoo rather than an indication of lassitude! So, with apologies for the delay, here is a brief update on the many happenings here.

The last 12 months have seen the development, by Neath Borough Council, of the Craig Gladys woodlands immediately behind the park. Vehicle access is now possible to a picnic-site amongst the trees and several pathways now give easy passage through both the larch plantation and the native woodlands. Development continues and soon further car spaces will be available; these spaces are available to Park visitors under an agreement which allowed the access road to be built on Penscynor ground.



Within the park, recent building work includes new coffee shop — the "Copper Kettle" — which serves a variety of delicious foods and drinks, the complete rebuilding of several monkey houses, the construction of a prairie-dog enclosure and new aviaries in the Pets Corner area. Work on the chimpanzee enclosure continues — when finished only the Capuchin monkey cage remains to be redeveloped to complete the 3 year rebuilding of all primate housing.

A PRICKLY TREEFUL

One of the most interesting of recent arrivals to Penscynor is the North American Tree Porcupine. Unlike its more familiar Old World cousins, this animal lives high in the treetops, feeding largely on leaves, buds and berries but coming to the ground to forage for other foods. Look carefully and high above the new prairie-dog enclosure for a sight of this agile rodent.

RECENT ARRIVALS

- 1 pair North American Tree Pocupines
- 1 pair Snowy Owls
- 1 pair East African Crowned Cranes
- 2 female Patagonian Sea lions
- 1 female Goeldi's monkey
- 2 pairs Round Island skinks
- 2 pairs Cuban boa
- family Sooty mangabey

BIRTHS — JAN-JUN 1987

- Humboldt's penguin
- Scarlet macaw
- Goeldi lory
- Black-winged lory
- Red lory
- Perfect lory
- Green-naped lory
- Roseate cockatoo
- Moluccan cockatoo
- Splendid parakeet
- Alexandrine parakeet
- Eider duck
- Lesser whitefront goose
- Tufted duck
- Silvery marmoset
- Cotton top tamarin
- Goeldi's monkey
- Brown capuchin
- Jungle cat
- Muntjac deer
- Green monkey
- Ring-tailed lemur
- Round Island skinks



North American Tree Porcupine



PARROTS IN PERIL

Following its successful support of the "Rhino Minder" campaign in 1986, the National Federation of Zoological Gardens is attempting to raise £24,000 during 1987 to support the International Council for Bird Protection "Parrots in Peril" appeal.

A long term ICBP programme seeks to develop agriculture on the Caribbean island of Dominica whilst at the same time preserving as much as possible of the native tropical forest.

Particularly at risk are the Imperial and Red-necked Amazon parrots — perhaps only 50 and 250, respectively, of each remain. Money is urgently required to carry out census work and to establish a study/education centre on the island. Fund raising activities can be found at all Federation zoos, particularly during "Zoo Month" (July).



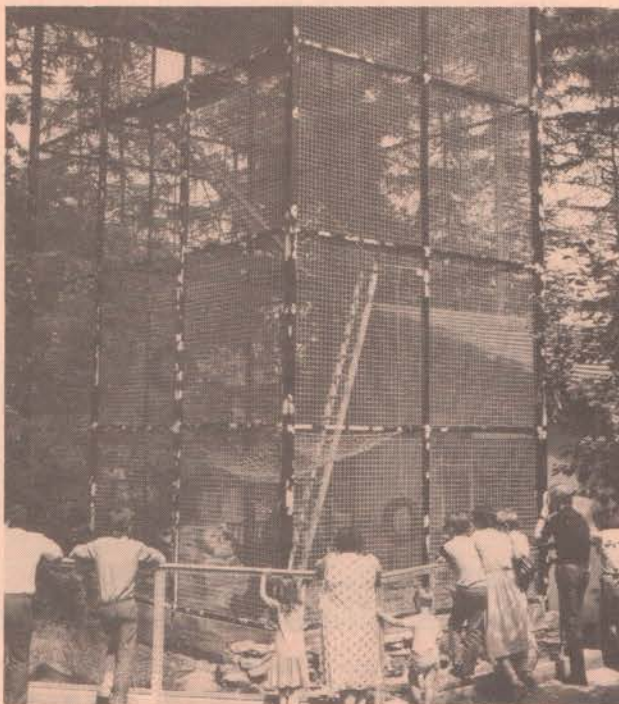
The Round Island Skink is one of the world's most endangered animals. Pencynor became only the second world zoo to breed this animal when 11 hatched in May, 1987.

CONGO GORILLAS

Many readers will have followed the story of the recent import into the UK of three orphaned gorillas from the Congo — to quite the best gorilla zoo in the world, Howletts in Kent.

Many who saw film of the three unfortunate animals will regard this as a proper and humane course of action but in fact the whole issue is surrounded by controversy. Fearing that moving these animals from the Congo would only encourage further trade, British zoos (via the National Federation), the Primate Society of Great Britain, the Nature Conservancy Council (the government's scientific advisors) and other bodies recommended that import papers **not** be issued in this case. Indeed, the Dept. of the Environment did refuse licences, but their decision was subsequently overruled by the Minister involved. Perhaps someone should ask William Waldegrave why this was done and on what qualification he felt able to ignore all advice?

In this case there was a clear and unfortunate conflict between the interests of the three orphans and the species, a conflict with no easy solution. Let's hope that what appears to be one politician's whimsical decision does not result in the "orphaning" of more African apes, to the ultimate detriment of the species. Many of us think it may well do just that.



An outdoor play area for infant chimps is the first phase of 1987's rebuilding of the chimpanzee housing.

BUTTERFLIES: ONE FAILURE, ONE SUCCESS

The prolonged wet and cold spell of early spring was almost certainly the reason for the non-appearance of any members of the Holly blue butterfly colony living wild at Pencynor, and also the reduced numbers of other species seen. On a happier note, children at Cilfrew School enjoyed a term long butterfly project which included the hatching of March fritillaries, Poplar and Eyed hawk moths and Emperor moths supplied by Pencynor. Having been fascinated and enthused by this colourful branch of the insect world, Wales now has many additions to its ranks of wildlife supporters.

COLOMBIA, COLONS and COCAINE

The Latin American country of Colombia occupies the north-western corner of the South American sub-continent, where the Andes mountains meet the Caribbean Sea. Its rapidly growing population is, by western standards, poor and the government is committed to the growth of agriculture at the expense of natural forest cover. The most densely populated area is the north-west corner, where only 5% of the original forest remains; this area is the home of one of the world's most endangered primates, the Cotton-headed tamarin.

This tiny monkey — smaller than our familiar grey squirrel — is strikingly patterned, being predominantly brown and white, and sports a prominent crest of long, silky hair. It lives in small family groups of perhaps a dozen animals — mum, several sets of twin youngsters and dad, (or possibly two dads, the wild habits of the animal are little known).

Food consists of fruit, vines, insects, newly sprouting leaves or buds and, occasionally, small animals; a family group holds a territory which offers a year round food supply.

Unfortunately for the Cotton-top, medical researchers have long known this animal as the only primate which, seemingly spontaneously, develops cancer of the colon and demand from western lab. workers has been a significant factor in the decline of wild numbers. It is estimated that between 1960-75 as many as 40,000 Cotton tops were exported from Colombia for various biomedical programmes. This export trade was declared illegal by the Colombian government in 1974. This pressure, on an animal with a naturally small range, together with massive habitat loss has inevitably resulted in near extinction.

Conservationists working to help the wild population face an unusual difficulty in their attempts to establish the most basic data on the animal's numbers and ecology. Because of its proximity to the Caribbean islands, with their easy links to Florida, and its inaccessible, mountainous interior, Colombia has developed a huge, illegal trade in drugs, particularly cocaine. Foreign researchers are unwelcome in remote areas, and have been known to disappear; consequently, western funding agencies have been less than eager to become involved in the field work necessary for the establishing of viable protected areas.

There is hope, however, that the species will survive. British, American and European zoos, realising the parlous situation in the wild, are joining forces to ensure the continuance of, at least, a captive population.

Penscynor, with some ten years experience of keeping Cotton tops, is particularly active in this effort. With the help of the ubiquitous computer, a studbook of all animals in the British Isles was compiled in 1985 and is published annually. In conjunction with Oak Ridge University, USA, this is being expanded to an international studbook which will be published during 1987. These studbooks list essential information such as parentage, age, reproductive status and gender. Using these data, geneticists and population biologists are able to plan for a continuing healthy zoo population and a "surplus" of animals which can be used for re-introducing to suitably protected areas of Colombia. Penscynor is currently exploring the feasibility of such a return — the University of Wisconsin has already begun preliminary studies. In the meantime, six family groups, 35 animals in all, of one of the world's rarest mammals continue to thrive in West Glamorgan.



COTTON TOP TAMARIN

BOLIVIA

Penscynor has furthered its links with Prodena Bolivia, the only organisation working for wildlife conservation in Bolivia, by granting £1,000 towards the development of research facilities in Amboro National Park.



Many youngsters enjoyed the opportunity to help feed the Penguins, one of our Zoo Month activities.

KEEPER TRAINING

On average, we receive three requests a week from young people who want to know how to become a zoo keeper. An important part of the answer is the City and Guilds certificate in "Animal Management", achieved via a correspondence course run by the National Extension College.

This course is rapidly becoming an "industry standard" and following the course is now a prerequisite for all new junior keeper appointments at Penscynor. Taking two years to complete, the course offers an excellent grounding in zoo work and theory.

Mrs. Denise Gallimore and Miss Selina Rees became the first students to sit this exam at Penscynor in May; results are awaited!

NEW GUIDE BOOK

Easter 1987 saw the production of a completely new Penscynor guide-book. With 50 full colour illustrations and a fact-packed text, we think this represents excellent value at only 50p.

GLOBE TROTTING MONKEYS

One of the questions most frequently asked of Penscynor staff is "where do the animals come from?". Ignoring the obvious biological reply, the answer is slightly different for each Class of animals.

Almost invariably, mammals are born either at Penscynor or another zoo and it is extremely rare for wild caught animals to enter the zoo world (but see the item about Congo gorillas).

The situation is not so good for birds and reptiles. Husbandry techniques are not as developed for these animals and the pet trade maintains a steady importation; the zoo situation is improving rapidly, with ever more successful breeding and consumption of wild animals should soon be a thing of the past.

Marine fish and invertebrates are the greatest cause for concern, with virtually all specimens being collected from tropical seas. The vast majority of animals are destined for the pet-trade but no zoos have yet made any useful contributions to halting reef destruction.

As an indication of the cooperation among zoos to ensure healthy breeding stocks of animals, the following monkeys have arrived or left here in 1987 (or are scheduled to move as soon as necessary permits and licences are finalised!):

silvery marmosets — female in from Washington, USA; female in from Poznan, Poland; male out to Washington; female out to Banham, Norfolk; male out to Poznan; pair out to private keeper, Swindon;

golden lion tamarin out to Krefeld, Germany;

emperor tamarin out to Marwell, Hampshire;

spot-nosed monkey in from Switzerland;

two female spot-nosed monkeys in from Vancouver, Canada;

female goeldi's monkey in from Kilverstone, Norfolk;

family of Sooty Mangabeys in from London;

all of these transfers are made on a loan agreement and no money is involved — each move is made to maximise the breeding potential of the world's captive animals.



Suzie, Fergus and Twm enjoy an afternoon break.

Penscynor Wildlife Park is open every day except Christmas Day, from 10.00 a.m.

The Park is 2 miles North of Neath, off the A465

Further details Tel.: NEATH (0639) 2189