

Foreword

When I started my professional career as a junior research worker of the Zoological Society of London, I was told that zoos made news 'second only to murder'. Even if they do not still enjoy that exalted position in the hierarchy of public interest, they certainly continue to receive their fair share of attention. Births of rare creatures attract almost as much notice as royal births, and the death of a zoo favourite is treated as a national – sometimes even as an international – event. The escape of a dangerous animal from a safari park, and the mauling of a visitor or keeper, make front-page news. And when a book that attacks zoos appears, it receives almost as much attention as a major work of literature or science.

The present volume is neither a defence of zoos nor a guide to them. What it does is illustrate how zoos have evolved, by reference to the history of a few. Those that have been selected are among the best in the world. Needless to say, there are others that might have been chosen.

The names of the present and former professional staff of the Zoological Society of London who are responsible for the different chapters are listed on page 2. Most of us have seen the majority of the zoos that are described; and all have seen more than a few. I make no apology for the fact that the Zoological Society of London is treated as a standard by which to judge other institutions of a like kind. That is what it happens to be. It is the oldest and the most scientific of them all, and I like to think that it will continue to be the most vigorous.

The avoidance of repetition and the coordination of the stories which the various chapters tell has called for a liberal measure of general editing, which in turn has demanded an unusual degree of tolerance from my fellow contributors. I owe a special word of thanks to Mr Peter Olney, the Society's Curator of Birds and the present Editor of the *International Zoo Yearbook*, for his help in organizing the work.

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September 1979