

1988

Help Newsletter No 10



Friends of Howletts
and
Port Lympne

PORT LYMPNE HOOFSTOCK SECTION

by Jimmy Shave and Gordon Scott

The completion of our new Sumatran rhino house and adjoining yards in April of this year enabled us to move our male, Torgamba, into the zoo from his temporary quarters at Combe Farm. The new house consists of five bedrooms, two large inside yards, each containing a heated pool, and a fruit store cum keepers' room. The bedroom annexed to the keepers' room, which is considerably larger than the other four, has a large window in the adjoining wall, enabling us to see the rhino without actually disturbing them. This 'double' room was to be reserved for Torgamba's long awaited mate. The moving of Torgamba went extremely well. He was crated at Combe Farm and transported by horse box to his new home. Throughout the entire ordeal he was very calm, indeed he did not seem unduly bothered by the whole affair.

On the evening of 30th April our female Sumatran rhino, Meranti, arrived at Port Lympne from our base camp in Indonesia. The crate was unloaded and manoeuvred into position. At 9 p.m., with few people about to alarm her, Meranti backed out of the opened crate, but almost immediately went back in again. This happened a number of times, but eventually we managed to coax her into the allotted bedroom. From the first day she adjusted to her new diet remarkably well. By feeding her small amounts at first, and then increasing the quantities of leaves, lucerne, fruit and vegetables, she now eats as much as her mate Torgamba. Encouraged by her calm behaviour and their constant calling to each other, we let them out together in the inside yards. They instantly took to each other, playfully pushing and rubbing against one another. At no time have there been any signs of aggression between them. The outside yards incorporate a mud wallow which they love and frequently use. Now that their spacious woodland paddock is finished they are let out most days. They thoroughly enjoy the combination of woodland running into grassland. One of the most amazing things to watch is them climbing and uprooting the young saplings. To this day they continue to get on famously.

Following our last report on the black rhino, though the sixteen month gestation period was long past since the mating of Rukwa and possibly Naivasha, no signs of pregnancy had been

observed. This prompted us to have both females scanned to see if they were in fact pregnant. Unfortunately neither Rukwa nor Naivasha turned out to be in calf. It was thought that the problem lay with Baringo, as he had shown very little interest in either of the females since the matings. So we tried to find another male. This was done very quickly and on 8th June Bwana Mkubwa arrived from Whipsnade Zoo. He was taken to the new black rhino shed where we had previously swapped Basha, Kingo and Arusha for Rukwa and Naivasha. Two weeks later Bwana was introduced to the females in the Cape buffalo field, and within a few days he had mated with both of them. We now hope that they are at last pregnant again. The remaining members of our herd of black rhino are in good health, all sharing the original shed and paddocks.

Another acquisition to the section was a young pair of babirusa or Celebes pigs. These are named Poso (male) and Bettina (female). They are currently using Torgamba's old house and yard at Combe Farm. With the completion of the perimeter fence at Combe, we have moved a herd of twelve female Przewalski horses, a group of axis deer and some surplus male barasingha and sambar. Torgamba's old field is now home to three male water buffalo.

Notable births for the last year are 7 barasingha, bringing their numbers up to 35; 2.4 bison; 2.1 Cape buffalo; 2.1 water buffalo; and so far 1.4 Przewalski horses with another two expected. During the last year we have sold 1.1 Przewalski horses to West Midlands Safari Park; 1.0 bison to Kilverstone Zoo; 1.1 water buffalo and 12 axis deer. Having had no success in recent years our last two sable antelope were transferred to Paignton Zoo.

The death of our male Malayan tapir and the loan of the female at Howletts to Twycross Zoo led to the Howletts male being paired with our female at Port Lympne. This proved to be a successful move as mating has been observed. The empty Malayan tapir paddock at Howletts now houses a pair of Brazilian tapirs from Port Lympne.

The next few years should prove to be very fruitful for the rhino section, with the possibility of two more black rhino being born and, who knows, perhaps a Sumatran!