

Editorial

by John Aspinall



1985-86 has been an interesting year for Howletts and Port Lympne. The main event has been the successful capture of 3.1 Sumatran rhino in the Torgamba forest and their installation in Port Lympne and Djakarta zoo (see page 20). The last bull to be caught, Napangga, is to be swapped with Julia at Malacca zoo. This will leave for the time being, 1.1 at Port Lympne, 1.1 at Djakarta, 1.2 at Malacca and 1.0 at Bangkok. Four more rhino are to be rescued from Torgamba and split between Djakarta and Port Lympne, so there is plenty more work to be done which will take at least one more year to complete.

A successful year with the gorilla colony has ended with the birth of 1.3, all of which have been mother-reared (see page 12). The expression 'mother-reared' should not obscure the important role of the father in the birth and raising of these remarkable apes. These recent additions bring the colony to 28 - 9.19. We can expect between three and five more births next year with any sort of luck.

One day we intend to put a whole family of 8 to 11 gorillas back in the wild or semi-wild state, provided the animals will have a chance of the enforcement of protection. At least one or two keepers will have to accompany the apes for a year or two on site to give the venture any hope

of success. We are about ten years away from being in a position to be able to afford the 'loss' of such a large group of pioneers.

Everyone here is excited by the breakthroughs made in the breeding of some quite difficult species this last year. Fishing cat, guereza, Javan langur and maned wolf have all been bred and raised successfully en famille during the last twelve months, by us for the first time.

We are also pleased to report that many of our colonies are now operating in multiple. Two litters from different breeding pairs, all mother-reared, for caracal, Siberian lynx, serval and desert cat. Some zoos are content to have one breeding pair of a species and then find great difficulty to keep things going when one of the pair dies from an accident or old age. Next year we hope to add hunting dog, bush dog, rusty-spotted cat, black-footed cat and marbled cat to the list of breeding successes.

I hate to end an editorial on an optimistic note as I know such a sentiment jars with the hopelessness most informed people feel at this time — the most terrible time in all evolution when so many of her creations are being swept away before the rising swell of human numbers. We do what we do with misgiving, acting more out of instinct than reason; the former being of course the better guide to wisdom.

Obituary

by John Aspinall

DIAN FOSSEY

The death of Dian Fossey at Parc des Volcans in Rwanda two days after Christmas, hacked to death by natives wielding machetes, was a terrible shock to those who knew her and admired her work. I was in California at that time and could scarcely believe what I had heard on the television news. Only a month earlier I had received a letter from her in Karisoke thanking me for a gift I had made to her of a specially bound copy of her recent book 'Gorillas in the Mist'. Dian was 53 and had worked in the Virungas for 18 years protecting her beloved mountain gorillas. She was a natural autodidact and her work and her legend will live on after her. Louis Leakey believed that her lack of formal qualifications was an asset and I would certainly endorse this. I used to tease her about why she bothered to get her doctorate so late in life, after in fact her most valuable work was already done, and she answered saying, 'It's all very well for you to laugh, I need to earn some money on the lecture circuit and the doctorate is useful there.' A tall commanding woman, I got on well with her from the start and though I think she hated zoos in general she liked Howletts, writing to me after a visit that she was privileged to see its 'wonders'. Most of all, of course, she appreciated the colony of 28 lowland gorillas separated as they are into three bands, and remarked that the behaviour she witnessed at Howletts was uncannily similar to that of her mountain gorillas in Karisoke.

Dian Fossey was outspoken and not given to suffering fools. Her lasting and breathtaking achievement was not only to be accepted by the gorilla bands but to mingle with them in rest and play. She was a true successor to George Schaller whose pioneering work had inspired her own and to which she added this amazing dimension. The only other person working in this manner on mountain gorillas during her early years was Adrian Deschryver in Zaire. Dian believed that a woman was advantaged over a man in any attempt to enter a gorilla band. She told me that an adult, human female presents little threat to a silverback and a submissive, invitation posture usually disarms

him completely. Deschryver had difficulty here and never gained quite the same quality of acceptance. Dian Fossey's only rival among female primate ethologists is Jane Goodall, whose work amongst the chimps of Gombe can be compared in dedication and perseverance to her own achievements. The American girl, however, was unfortunate to have to work in a country that had the densest population per square mile of any state in Africa. If she was severe on poachers she had to be severe, if she was hard on her staff what choice had she? The encroachment of farmers on the volcanic slopes was ominous and increasing. That her great battle will probably be a losing battle will not reduce her posthumous fame. Dian was and is and should remain a legend . . . an example which we hope some will follow — right into the breach. Whatever slender chance there is of saving the last two hundred odd mountain

*Baby Doll with her daughter Tambabi
(Photograph by Rod Williams)*

