

LOST MENAGERIES - WHY AND HOW ZOOS DISAPPEAR (Part 1)

BY HERMAN REICHENBACH

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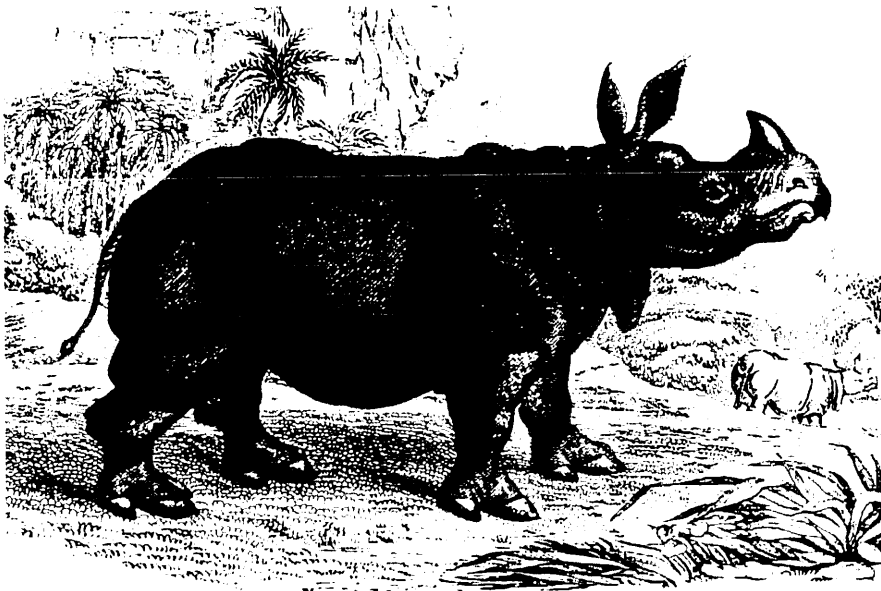
I.Z.N. Index

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On 12 March 1991, the council of the Zoological Society of London voted to shut London Zoo down at the end of the summer. For ever. The zoo was running at a loss of £2m annually, £30m would be needed to fix things up, especially eight listed buildings, and at least another £30m to bring the gardens up to the standards of Europe's other capital zoos. 'Animals face slaughter as London Zoo decides to close,' *The Sunday Times* cried out on page 1 of its 7 April issue to a surprised breakfast-eating public. 'Closure rumours lure public to see threatened animals,' *The Guardian* reported the next day; 'Up to 10,000 visitors streamed through the gates [that Sunday], braving the wind, the rain and the media.' Appeals were made, fund-raising started, and on 9 July the council of the ZSL postponed closure for another year at least. Eleven months, a new director and a million visitors later, with neither a government hand-out nor a white knight in sight, all but one of the council's 22 members again decided to close down the zoo after 30 September 1992, putting enthusiasts of Britain's oldest zoo on the rack. In response, however, a surge of visitors generated £500,000 revenue more than originally envisioned for the summer, a 'Save Our Zoo' campaign collected £300,000, and a grateful Emir of Kuwait, recently liberated from the Iraqis, donated an additional £1m. Not the £30m that the society had wanted for a start, but enough to convince its council on 7 September to cancel closure after all.

Zoos, if defined, as in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, as 'place[s] where wild animals and, in some instances, domesticated animals are exhibited in captivity', have been a permanent fixture of urban society for at least four thousand years. It is thus neither surprising nor remarkable that zoos have disappeared over time – after all, whole cities, states and indeed peoples have disappeared as well. If, however, one defines a zoo as the *Oxford English Dictionary* does, as 'The Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park, London; also extended to similar collections of animals elsewhere', then the loss of zoological gardens, that is, of urban menageries devoted to the promotion of science, public education and conservation as well as merely offering a diversion, is a more unusual and noteworthy phenomenon.

The Zoological Gardens of London are not the oldest of existing zoos. Vienna's Tiergarten Schönbrunn, inaugurated in 1752, unquestionably holds that honour; the Paris Ménagerie du Jardin des Plantes, established in 1793, is the second-oldest zoo. The Tiergarten ('animal garden'), known officially by the French loan-word *Menagerie* until 1924, was one of the last to be established in the mediaeval through baroque tradition of private wild-animal collections of princes and kings. The Paris Ménagerie was the first genuinely scientifically-oriented garden, the first one to be directed by a naturalist, and it can thus lay a legitimate claim to be the first modern zoo. London Zoo, launched in 1828, is the third-oldest extant 'place where wild animals are exhibited in captivity', the first, however, to be called a 'zoological garden' and, after 1829, when land on



The rhinoceros of the Liverpool Zoological Gardens, acquired by Thomas Atkins in Calcutta in 1834, set in an idealized environment. The species identification of the specimen, showing features of both the great Indian and of the Javan rhinoceros, has remained controversial to date. (Reproduced from Jardine, 1836.)

proprietor since 1817 of a menagerie near what is now Trafalgar Square, opened his new Surrey Zoological and Botanical Gardens. These were actually closer to the City of London than Regent's Park, but survived London Zoo's competition only until 1856, twelve years after Cross's retirement. The Liverpool Zoological Gardens lasted only seven years longer.

The founder and first proprietor of Liverpool's new zoo was Thomas Atkins, the owner of a travelling menagerie. Settling down, he purchased four hectares [ten acres] of disused and flooded clay-pits half an hour's walk from the Liverpool exchange for £2,000 in 1832. One water-logged pit was fenced in for waterfowl, others were filled in, lawns were laid out and trees and shrubs planted. What little is known of Atkins's enterprise is due largely to his advertisements and to his informative guide-books. Upon paying entrance (a shilling; £1.1.0 for an annual pass), the waterfowl and wading-birds pond was the first exhibit to come to view – a device still widely seen in zoos, especially in central Europe. The next exhibits were the bear pits, with a collection unthinkable in a British zoo today: polar, sloth, spectacled, European brown and North American black bears. From here one had a panoramic view of the gardens on a sloping landscape. On his four hectares Atkins also found space for an elephant house with three Indian elephants by his second year, a 'menagerie'³

³ A 'menagerie' in mid-19th-century Britain could be a lion or other carnivore house as well as a wild-animal collection in general.

for big cats and a second for hyenas, jackals and the like, a monkey house, an 'eyry' for birds-of-prey, vultures and owls, a pheasantry and other aviaries. Before the exit, one came across the ungulate house with antelopes, deer, camelids, tapirs, zebras and – if the animal was correctly identified – a specimen of the now extinct quagga. Atkins, however, continued to exhibit animals on the road as well, so not everything in the guide-book would necessarily be in the zoo on one's visit.

One remarkable animal frequently on show elsewhere in Britain was a bull rhinoceros that Atkins had purchased in 1834 for £1,000 – that is, half as much as he had paid for the whole of the zoo's grounds. Shipped in from Calcutta, it was exhibited – in Dublin, Glasgow and Edinburgh as well as in Liverpool itself – as an Indian rhinoceros, although it appears in fact to have been a specimen of the exceedingly rare Javan rhinoceros, one of at most half a dozen specimens ever seen alive in Europe. A one-month stay in 1835 at Dublin Zoo alone brought in £140 and a llama.⁴

Hybrids between a tigress and a lion were a speciality of Atkins. Modern zoo directors would only frown at the idea of breeding such bastards, but the public were not averse to viewing zoological freaks a century and a half ago (and can occasionally be attracted even now to such animals, as witness a certain popularity of white tigers and white alligators). The first such animals ever bred in a zoological garden were apparently two 'lion-tigers' born in Liverpool on 19 July 1833, but Atkins first bred specimens as early as 1824 in his travelling menagerie whilst in Windsor.

The zoo historian Clinton H. Keeling has remarked (1984, p. 15) that 'people, rather than site or housing or conditions and circumstances, make, or mar, a zoological garden.' The dictum certainly applies to the Liverpool gardens. Atkins left the stage in the 1850s – whether by death or retirement, let alone exactly when, has yet to be recorded – and decay soon set in. The zoo became a share-holding company with an initial capital of £10,000 in December, 1859, with the incorporation of the Liverpool Zoological Gardens Co. Ltd. To boost public interest, drinking booths were installed in the zoo, but they attracted a clientele presumably anathema to Liverpool's more fashionable society, a vicious circle soon set in, and in 1863 the company was bankrupt. The collection was absorbed into Liverpool's wild-animal trade.

Manchester at mid-century was England's third-largest city, having grown from 70,000 in 1801 to 303,000 population by 1851; 40 years later, having bypassed Liverpool and Glasgow with 704,000 inhabitants, it had become Britain's second city. The first passenger rail service between two cities linked Liverpool with Manchester in 1830. The 'Manchester Zoological Gardens' were inaugurated on 31 May 1838, the year Manchester was incorporated as a borough, on six hectares [15 acres] in Higher Broughton, a 30 to 40 minutes' walk north-west of the Manchester exchange. Unlike the Liverpool Zoological

⁴ Sclater (1876) and Reynolds (1961), among others, both consider(ed) the specimen to be Javan. Rookmaaker (1993) disputes the classification for various reasons; the 'Javan school' based its judgement largely on two illustrations of the animal published by Jardine (1836), plates 8 and 9, where it was also identified as an Indian rhinoceros (p. 171). Javan rhinoceroses at the time, however, were not yet known to inhabit eastern Bengal and Burma, so all rhinoceroses coming out of Calcutta, such as the Liverpool specimen, were considered to be Indian – which in a way they were.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

I found A.C. van Bruggen's review of okapi captive history (*I.Z.N.* 313, 504–510) extremely impressive. In a footnote (p. 507), Dr van Bruggen mentions the possible presence of okapi in Japan, and readers might be interested in an update on this.

A pair of okapi arrived in Japan on 20 October 1997 and were delivered to Yokohama Zoological Garden on 5 November. The female, Layla, was born on 22 July 1996 at Dallas Zoo and the male, Kiangaa, was born on 7 May 1996 at San Diego Wild Animal Park. These were the first of the species to land on Japanese soil.

A note in *Animals and Zoos*, Tokyo Zoological Park Society's monthly magazine (No. 613, April 2001, p. 22),

reveals that a female was born to this Yokohama pair on 21 November 2000. The calf, raised by the mother, was doing well at the age of three months; the report gave some data on body weight.

Animals and Zoos No. 618, September 2001, has a detailed account (pp. 12–16), with photos, about the transfer of a four-year-old female from San Diego to Tokyo. She arrived at Narita airport on 21 May 2001, and entered Ueno Zoo, Tokyo, on 6 June. Thus, to the best of my knowledge, as of the end of 2001 there were four okapi in Japan.

Sincerely,

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