

SOME SMALLER ZOOS OF ILLINOIS

BY KEN KAWATA

Introduction

Characterized by the expansive vista of grasslands, lakes and streams, Illinois – with a land area about half that of Italy and a population of 12,419,293 (all population figures by AAA, 2010) – is nestled in the American Midwest. The mighty Mississippi River forms the western border, while at the north-eastern corner Chicago faces Lake Michigan. The 1930 AAZPA statistics listed two institutions for Illinois, Lincoln Park Zoo and Brookfield Zoo, but not the John Shedd Aquarium, another Chicago institution (Doolittle, 1932). Soon, the U.S.A. saw two periods of zoo construction, firstly during the Great Depression, with funds and labor provided by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs. The post-WWII economic prosperity also enabled the birth of zoos and aquariums. The 1970 statistics by AAZPA provided 11 institutions for Illinois (Truett, 1970) while the current AZA document lists nine (AZA, 2010). A travel guidebook by the Automobile Association of America (AAA) lists nine zoos and related institutions for this state (AAA, 2010).

The Midwest is where my active years in zoos began, and in the 1970s I used to visit zoos in Illinois. During July 2010 I traveled to Bloomington in central Illinois to attend the annual convention of the Circus Historical Society, and the trip afforded an opportunity to revisit five zoos in smaller cities. While driving between these cities a vast vista of flat farmlands unfolds, predominantly for corn, as far as the eye can see, with occasional groves of deciduous trees breaking up the monotony. Even major highways often appear sparsely traveled. Public transportation systems are poorly developed in this country, particularly outside of large cities, which means that without having a car, visiting zoos is often difficult. Zoos are not marked on major highways (Niabi Zoo being an exception), and at times, even on local roads, signs may be confusing or not clearly visible. Locals know where it is but out-of-towners, especially those with a poor sense of direction (such as this writer), must pay close attention to small signs on the sides of the road.

The Midwest is prone to severe weather, in particular dangerous storms with tornadoes, strong winds and floods. As luck had it, though, I did not encounter the wicked storm which pounded on Chicago, north-east of Bloomington.

Henson Robinson Zoo, Springfield (the state capital, pop. 111,454)

Five years after retirement I have not kept close contact with current zoo staff, so on 18 July I decided to visit the first two zoos incognito. At Henson Robinson the admission fee for an adult is US\$4.50, and I paid \$3.00 for senior rate. The layout of this six-hectare zoo has not changed over the years. In common with other zoos that I visited, the tour begins with a building that houses the ticket booth, restrooms (toilets in Europe) and a gift shop, followed by indoor exhibits for delicate (or not winter-hardy) and relatively small vertebrate species (excluding fish). They are nearly always kept behind a glass barrier. The Midwest is known for harsh winters and such a building is a must to protect animals and humans. Visitors then move on to follow the route toward outdoor exhibits.

It was a cool day with intermittent, gentle light rain. Partly because of that, nearly all the animals were visible instead of hiding themselves. There are other reasons for visibility. Vegetation is trimmed neatly, while in some other zoos plant overgrowth in and out of enclosures often conceals animals. Also, visitors can see indoor night (or winter) quarters through glass barriers, and animals are visible during exhibit cleaning and on cold days. The only species I could not spot were bobcat and puma (the latter due to exhibit renovation). The zoo does not have many ungulates. The collection seems to focus on small-to-medium-sized primates and carnivores with public appeal, supplemented by a variety of birds and a few reptiles. As in most other zoos during my trip, one can make an inventory of species on exhibit in 40 to 45 minutes. I will skip domesticated animals and common species such as the ubiquitous Canada goose and mute swan. I may have missed a few, but the following constituted the main body of the collection: two-toed sloth, red ruffed lemur, ring-tailed lemur, black lemur, Wied's marmoset, Bolivian titi, brown-headed spider monkey, dusky leaf monkey, lar gibbon, wolverine, North American river otter, African hunting dog, red wolf, white-nosed coati, Himalayan black bear, prehensile-tailed porcupine, Indian muntjac, woodchuck; African penguin, cinereous vulture, turkey vulture, Harris hawk, red-tailed hawk, bald eagle, white cockatoo, magpie goose, great horned owl; Galapagos tortoise, American alligator, and an assortment of representative reptiles such as Madagascar ground boa and boa constrictor.

It was early Sunday afternoon, I had been there for an hour and noticed that the zoo was practically empty: besides this writer there was a family of three. As I was leaving the rain stopped, the bright sun revived the summer heat and the suffocating humidity began to wrap the body surface. I crawled into my rented car and drove 60 km straight east to the next destination.

Scovill Zoo, Decatur (pop. 81,860)

To my surprise the zoo parking lot (capacity: cars 162, buses 20) was nearly full. A children's playground with colorfully-painted swings and slides in the same area came into view. Inside the zoo by the entrance are revenue makers, a carousel and a train, and all this generates a festive atmosphere. The admission fee with senior rate is US\$4.00, and a train ride costs \$2.00. So I took the narrated, seven-minute train ride. Backtracking a bit and stepping into the entrance building, I looked for zoo postcards at the gift shop. Nowadays, many zoos sell commercially mass-produced generic postcards with absolutely no local character. At Henson Robinson Zoo I was pleased to purchase their own, and again in Decatur I found home-made postcards.

The zoo grounds became crowded. In several locations there were tables for free ice cream, handed out by friendly, fully-uniformed officers from the local sheriff's department. Munching ice cream, I recalled my first visit some three-dozen years ago. It was a small animal farm, and the recent growth is striking. Zoo purists may not appreciate the carousel or the children's playground mixed in with animal exhibits; the enclosed contact area with farm animals is called 'the petting zoo' here, a term purists hate with a passion (more on this issue later). The zoo world, however, has been changing rapidly. Zoos were a man's world in those days, but now the keepers are mostly college-educated young women. (What remains essentially unchanged over the decades is that blacks are rarely seen. Zoos are still a white world, both employees and visitors, an issue few choose to discuss.) But so much for nostalgia.

A zoo which is designed under one cohesive master plan will build facilities and assemble the entire animal collection within the planned phases, based on a specific theme. Conversely, the approach is different when the new staff intends to re-start a zoo with an inherited heterogeneous mixture of animal cages. Scovill, like the next three zoos, belongs to the latter category. In this six-hectare site new animals and exhibits have been added, and the zoo will probably continue to do so. In the process, it will take time for the zoo to develop its own focus and character. As for the collection, in most zoos mammals and birds form the two support columns with amphibians and reptiles taking a supplemental role, and Scovill follows the pattern. The first two groups are spread throughout; some of the reptiles – such as American alligator and Galapagos tortoise – are in outdoor (and apparently seasonal) enclosures. Others are housed in the Herpetarium, a free-standing building with approximately two dozen small exhibit units, several medium-sized units and one large unit. These exhibit basic zoo stock, e.g. giant snakes, monitor lizards and poison dart frogs. No venomous species are noted, which makes sense: with skyrocketing costs of antivenom sera, a necessity for a snake-bite protocol due to increasing concern for workplace safety, why take a chance, unless the staff makes a commitment to specifically focus on venomous reptiles.



Scovill Zoo's assistant director Ken Frye giving a talk to the public. (Photo: Ken Kawata)

A quick glance at the collection on exhibit focused on species of interest: ring-tailed lemur, golden lion tamarin, cotton-top tamarin, cheetah, meerkat, red panda, grey wolf, Grant's zebra, tufted deer, Bactrian camel, black-tailed prairie dog, capybara; emu, American white pelican, Chilean flamingo, turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk, eastern crowned crane, green-winged macaw, blue-and-gold macaw, sun conure, barn owl, laughing kookaburra, plus an assortment of

smaller birds; Galapagos tortoise, American alligator, aforementioned groups of reptiles and amphibians.

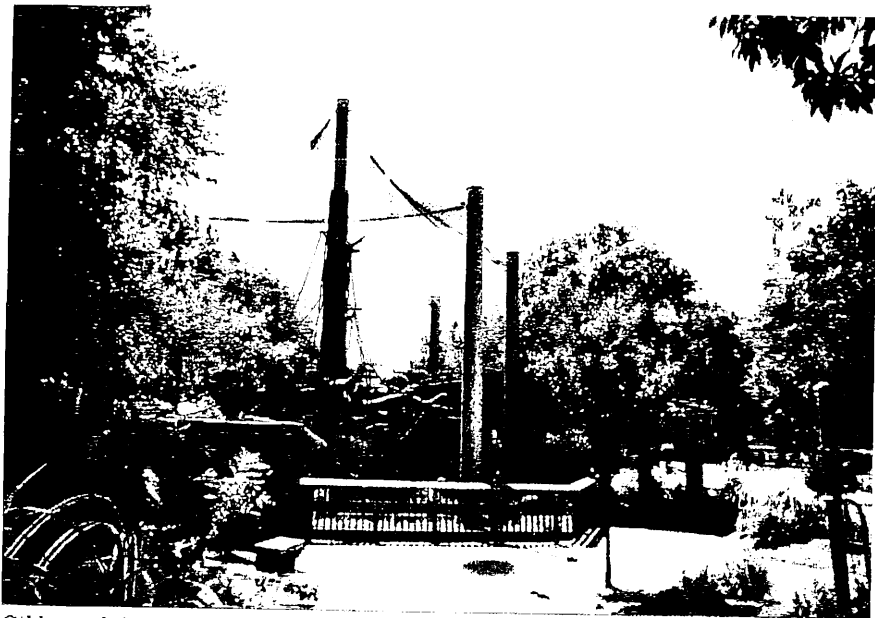
Peoria Zoo, Peoria (pop. 112,936)

Since the late 1800s exotic animals were on display in several parks throughout Peoria. These animals were brought together and Glen Oak Zoo was born in 1955; later the name was changed to Peoria Zoo. The AZA directory no longer lists the Species-Specimen (or S-S) Counts of the member institutions, but to take a reasonable guess, this zoo probably has the top S-S Count out of the five zoos on my visit. It is also the most progressive, evidenced by 'Africa!', a 27-million-dollar project that opened in 2009 (with site preparation and related expense it adds up to \$32 million). Africa!, which occupies 2.8 hectares, was a part of the 2000 master plan. Funding will continue to construct the entry area, and when it is completed the zoo will have tripled its original size of 2.8 hectares. I am, however, jumping ahead of the story.

On 19 July I began the tour at the historic entry building, which appeared familiar from my first visit. This is where a variety of species is housed in a relatively compact space. What caught my eye first was the giant elephant shrews (*Rhynchocyon petersi*), which have bred here. Other species of interest in the building include: three-banded armadillo (breeding), ring-tailed lemur, mongoose lemur, ruffed lemur, Central American spider monkey (*Ateles geoffroyi* – light-colored), meerkat, tree shrew (*Tupaia belangeri*), African porcupine (*Hystrix africaeaustralis*); Papuan hornbill, laughing kookaburra; Burmese python, boa constrictor, gila monster and Mexican beaded lizard, and California sea lion in an adjacent exhibit. Other reptiles and amphibians are exhibited in various locations, including outdoor enclosures (e.g. Chinese alligator) and Africa!. Amphibians, such as Colorado River toad, axolotl and poison dart frog, are in a small building called Conservation Center near the entry building. When I stepped inside I was surprised that it was unattended. It is unthinkable in a large city (be it Chicago or New York) to leave a building unsupervised, for fear of vandalism and theft.

A farm animal section called Animal Adventure is located nearby. Regardless of the name, a farm animal exhibit is a required facility in American zoos, always with the characteristic red barn. A winding walkway leads to more conventional exhibits – wire-meshed cages and ungulate yards for such animals as Siberian tiger, binturong, takin and Arabian camel, and an Australian area with black swan and emu. According to the master plan these areas will be renovated. At the northern end of the zoo comes the newest addition, Africa!.

At the entrance is a large snack bar building. Exhibits begin nearby with a tall, circular building called Tree House, with rock python, weaver (*Ploceus* sp.) and other animals that are not winter-hardy; a surprise find is the Zambian giant mole-rat (*Cryptomys mechowi*), that has bred. Outside of the building stand wire-meshed exhibits for mandrill and for black-and-white colobus mixed with red river hog. The main feature, however, is the group of large open enclosures that can be viewed both from ground level and from elevated walkways and observation deck. Reticulated giraffes take up the far corner, Thomson's gazelle and gerenuk share the adjacent yard, while Grevy's zebra and southern white rhinoceros occupy the other end, partially separated from the public by a pond. At the other end, with a backdrop of a thick forest, lions overlook the spread of ungulates. (The curator said they belong to the subspecies *krugeri* – it is good to



Gibbon exhibit, Niabi Zoo. (Photo: Ken Kawata)

Those elephants are a part of the Asian area which also includes a pair of buff-cheeked gibbons (*Hylobates gabriellae*) and a koi pond. A farm animal area (called children's zoo), inserted between the gibbons and Australian Walk-About, appears somewhat out of place. The Australian exhibit is a walk-through area with red-necked wallaby, emu and the popular Lorikeet Landing, where the public can feed some 50 of them, predominantly rainbow lorikeets. Another new exhibit is African Outpost, featuring a large enclosure for a breeding herd of reticulated giraffes. Tucked behind them is an old but well-maintained structure, a bird house with a large assortment of psittacines, raptors and gallinaceous species. (At this point I realized that I could not jot down an animal inventory of this zoo in 45 minutes, since the exhibits are spread out in this 20-hectare park.) Skipping past the bird house, the African exhibit continues with ostriches and plains zebras, the latter clearly showing the characteristics of the Damara zebra (*Equus burchelli antiquorum*).

From that point I swung back to the giraffes, walked past the black-and-white colobus exhibit but did not see any (the sun was hot and bright – they must have been in their shaded night quarters), and looked at lions in a large, grassy yard. The old male had a large dark mane with long fur continuing underneath all the way to the belly, the type we used to see often in zoos and circuses. A series of large enclosures followed, housing Arabian camel, bobcat, red wolf, bald eagle, collared peccary and American black bear. Standing in the center of the zoo, a large structure for felids comes into view for jaguars (spotted and black), leopards (spotted and black), tiger and puma. Exhibits are grass-covered and large; indoor quarters are also large and clean, but what unavoidably stands out is the thick metal bars. Herein lies a contrast between the old and the new exhibit styles. I was relieved to hear that the public does not complain about animals kept 'behind

bars'. Next to the cat building stands another old structure, a rock mound for the Barbary sheep, which still appears to be an adequate exhibit.

As we have seen, Niabi Zoo basically features outdoor exhibits. In addition to the bird house there is another indoor facility, which appears new: the reptile building. It has nine large and ten small exhibit units for basic, representative zoo stock such as American alligator and giant snakes. No venomous species is present, à la Scovill Zoo.

Managing an animal collection, especially in a growing zoo, requires flexibility in housing animals, involving an off-show facility for such purposes as quarantine and temporary holding. I was given a tour of an off-premises service area where I saw a large hay barn, an animal hospital, an animal holding building with many 'catch-all' cages of varying sizes, and a program animal (for demonstrations) building. Such a facility, away from the public's eye, necessitates investment and it is money well spent, to build a foundation for husbandry programs.

Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington (pop. 64,808)

My last stop, visited on 21 July, happened to be the oldest of the five zoos, with a history dating back to 1891 (but not listed in the aforementioned 1930 AAZPA statistics). All the others opened after WWII: Peoria (1955), Niabi (1963), Scovill (1967) and Henson Robinson (1970). Aside from the imposing 1914 building that made a strong impression, I do not recall much from the first visit: a sea lion pool and a few other exhibits come to mind. Miller Park Zoo represents another example of a zoo that has gone through a rebirth into a pleasant and compact 3.2-hectare park, thanks to the effort by John Tobias, the former director. What makes a positive impression is the horticultural aspect. A wide variety of flowers, ornate shrubs, tall grasses and neatly-trimmed trees is not only a treat to the eye, but also provides a screening effect to partially conceal exhibit structures and visitors from each other, to ease the sense of crowdedness.

The collection is diverse with a variety of taxa, yet this remains a small zoo with eight full-time staff – director (the official title is Superintendent), educator, gift shop manager and five keepers to care for c. 320 individual animals excluding invertebrates. Seasonal employees supplement labor. For Jay Tetzloff, the new director who began his zoo career in 1987, this is the fifth zoo, all his previous employment being located out of state. As a fellow 'zoo hopper' I enjoyed a brief moment of 'shop talk', covering the subjects of animals and zoo people. Topics included: What grass species can keep clover from taking over an exhibit yard? (My guess is that short fescue is one of them.) If you cannot maintain grass in an ungulate yard, what is the best material to keep it compacted and from getting muddy, easy for cleaning and keeping the hooves worn? (My suggestion is fine-grained limestone crush, which is called 'screening' in the mid-section of the country.)

Back on the zoo grounds, after passing the entrance building, a narrow walkway leads to outdoor exhibits for native North American animals such as burrowing owl, bobcat, bald eagle and red-tailed hawk. After red wolf, now a common zoo resident, the walkway points to ZooLab, a one-storied interpretive building that has a sit-down area with paper and crayons for children. A variety of taxa is presented in glass-fronted exhibit units – arthropods (larantula, walking stick), amphibians (tomato frog), reptiles (star tortoise, prehensile-tailed skink), birds (amazon) and mammals (cotton-top tamarin, meerkat).

ENRICHMENT AT PHOENIX ZOO FOR ANIMALS WITH LIMITED SPACE

BY HILDA TRESZ

Animal keeping has come a long way in terms of providing environmental enrichment for captive animals. Once zoological professionals recognized that enrichment was a crucial part of behavioral management in order to improve well-being in captivity, steps were taken first to encourage implementation and later to actually enforce the use of it. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) set the first U.S. federal regulation in the Animal Welfare Act of 1985, requiring exercise for dogs, and environmental enhancement to promote the psychological well-being of nonhuman primates. Since 1985, these mandates have become associated with the term “environmental enrichment” (Kulpa-Eddy *et al.*, 2005). In addition to the USDA, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), founded in 1924, has promoted animal welfare in its standards and guidelines.

Today, professionally-managed U.S. zoological facilities are expected to develop and implement enrichment plans, institution-wide, if they desire to be AZA-accredited. It is now a requirement that institutions must have a formal written enrichment program that promotes species appropriate behavioral opportunities and have a specific staff member(s) or committee assigned for enrichment program oversight, implementation, training, and interdepartmental coordination of enrichment efforts (AZA, 2010).

Some institutions exceed basic expectations by providing daily enrichment even for animals that are kept in large, naturalistic and/or mixed-species exhibits. In every institution however, there are animals that need special attention due to their health, housing and handling arrangements. Overly aggressive animals, sick animals, show and school out-reach program animals, etc., often need to be housed solitarily and/or in small areas. Accordingly, their need for behavioral enrichment is magnified. Staff members at Phoenix Zoo have been making extra efforts toward improving the well-being of these animals with creative and adaptive enrichment planning.

Same principle – different challenges

The basic goal of enrichment in any setting is to elicit species-appropriate behaviors in all enrichment categories if possible (social, foraging, manipulanda, structure/substrate, sensory and training) while overcoming space restrictions. Social enrichment stimulation can be provided by conspecifics and non-conspecifics (physical contact such as grooming, petting, verbal communication, etc.). Foraging enrichment is the second most important category after social enrichment, especially when animals are considered to be lacking proper social housing. In the wild, ‘working for food’ is one of the most frequently found species-typical and time-consuming behaviors. Objects that can be moved, used or altered (manipulated) in some manner by the animal are referred to as ‘manipulanda’. The most basic component of the physical or inanimate environment is the enclosure structure (its size, shape, and design) and the substrate

birthday, sea lion feeding (that includes talks), keeper chat, animal shows, behind-the-scenes tours, and the list goes on. These are a part of keepers’ daily work beyond merely exhibiting animals, and they may potentially leave a lasting positive impression on the visitors’ minds, adults and children. When carried out properly, these are the tool to connect with the public, and to introduce animals to the visitors’ lives.

Community asset

In any country, the majority of zoos consists of smaller and lesser-known institutions, often overshadowed by larger cousins. Chicago dominates this region with the three giants: across the river to the west lies Saint Louis, Missouri, whose famous zoo further casts a commanding presence. The annual attendance figures from 2008 (AZA, 2010) provide the following comparison. The combined attendance of the five zoos I visited added up to 576,866, or merely 28% of the attendance for Brookfield Zoo. The smaller zoos, away from the heavy tourist traffic, mainly serve the local and nearby communities. Tourism appears thriving across the land, yet there is a segment of the local population that does not travel extensively. In particular, at this time of recession not every family can afford to fly to San Diego, California, or Orlando, Florida, on vacation. Moreover, admission fees for prominent, large institutions have increased – adding food and souvenirs, an outing at a large zoo could be a burden on a family’s already stressed finances. For them, smaller local zoos offer an alternative. They are within an easy driving distance, cost for the outing is lower and visitors do not have to race against the clock to see the entire zoo. In that aspect alone, smaller zoos constitute vital community assets.

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