

## **Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Heinz-Georg Klös 1926-2014**

On 28 July 2014 Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Heinz-Georg Klös left us after a long illness. Born in the city of Elberfeld, from 1929 on he lived in the city of Wuppertal near the zoo where from his early youth he learned the charm and attraction of a zoo with its living animals. Consequently he studied veterinary medicine and zoology at the university of Giessen and worked during the term breaks as an animal keeper in different zoos and circuses. After he finished his studies in 1953 he worked at Wuppertal Zoo as a curator for a short time. By early 1954 he became director of Osnabrück Zoo, where he worked until the end of 1956. On 1 January 1957 he became the new director of Berlin Zoo, remaining in this post until he retired on 31 August 1991. After his retirement he did not leave Berlin Zoo, but continued to support it as a member of the board and also as chairman of the board of Tierpark Berlin. He had to resign these posts after a stroke and despite his further involvement with both zoos, his ill health had such devastating consequences he was eventually unable even to visit the zoo. His wife, Ursula Klös, looked after him until his death.



Photo: Archiv Zoo Berlin

When he arrived in Berlin, the zoo had not totally recovered from the damage it had suffered in World War II. Where possible the existing ruins had been renovated: the 1872 antelope house had been restored as a modern building in its original style, and two new buildings had been finished, the hippopotamus house and the elephant house, both the most advanced of their time. The most important change had taken place in 1956, when the zoo gave away parts of its grounds in the south and east for the development of the city of West Berlin, receiving in exchange larger grounds in the north and across the railway in the west. Together with this increased area the zoo received a large sum of money so that Heinz-Georg Klös could continue the restoration and also modernize it.

At the same time the authorities in East Berlin created a new zoo, the 'Tierpark Berlin', which opened in 1955. It was five times as large as the old zoo in the centre of the city and was strongly supported by the city of East Berlin and also by the government of the German Democratic Republic. So by 1957 there was keen competition between the two zoos for visitors which did not end until 1961 when the GDR erected the Wall and made it impossible for West Berliners to visit the other part of their city. From then on the competition was more abstract and political, a fact that both directors knew how to use for the beneficial development of their individual zoos.

Heinz-Georg Klös was a conservative director. His aims followed those of his predecessors: he wanted to rebuild the collection, rich in interesting animal species, that Berlin Zoo had been known for in the past. The design of the buildings was also conservative, with rows of similar enclosures for the different species. The fifties and sixties of the last century were a time for modern buildings without the exotic elements so characteristic of zoos before WWI and especially of Berlin Zoo. As some of the old buildings, such as the houses for European and American bison and for zebras and asses, still existed in their exotic style, some people recommended demolishing them and replacing them with modern stables. But Klös rejected these suggestions, as he understood that the old buildings were part of the zoo's history and among its distinctive characteristics. The new buildings, though, were built in modern style. For example the ape house, the first part of which was built in 1958 and 1959, had four outdoor and four indoor enclosures, each measuring 27 by 18 by 14 feet, which to my knowledge were the largest enclosures for apes for a long time. It is not necessary to mention all the buildings put up during Klös's directorship: there were more than a hundred construction projects during his time, with a total cost of more than DM140,000,000 or approximately €70,000,000.

But he was not only conservative: he understood the spirit of the time very well. So beginning in the seventies he again changed the design of the zoo. The many small enclosures, for example the deer parks, the goat mountain and the antelope house, were combined to form larger and better homes for only one or two species. The number of species at the zoo decreased somewhat, but often there was a space somewhere in the grounds to build new enclosures.

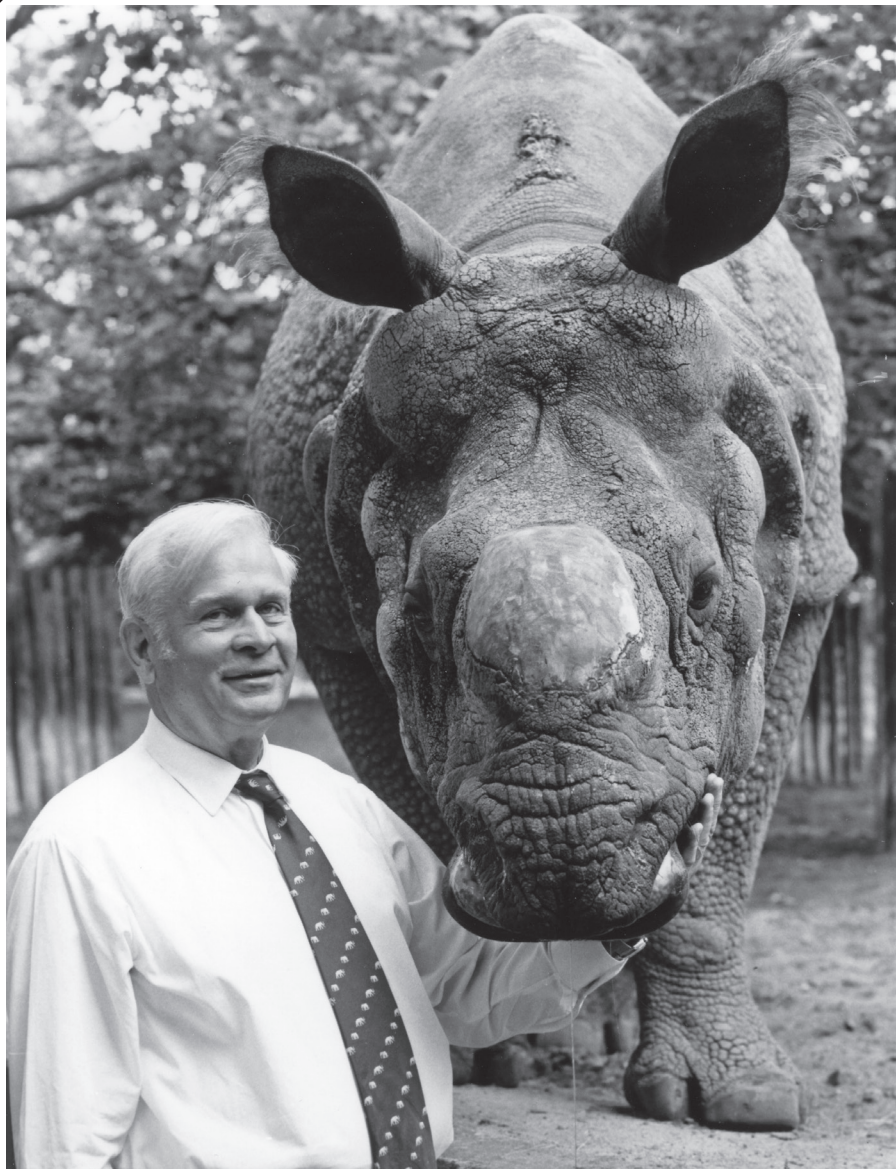


Photo: Archiv Zoo Berlin

The zoo was enlarged twice during his time as director, providing room for new ideas such as the geographical themed areas in the part on the other side of the Landwehrkanal. Here large enclosures were developed for mixed groups of animals from South America, Africa, Asia and Australia.

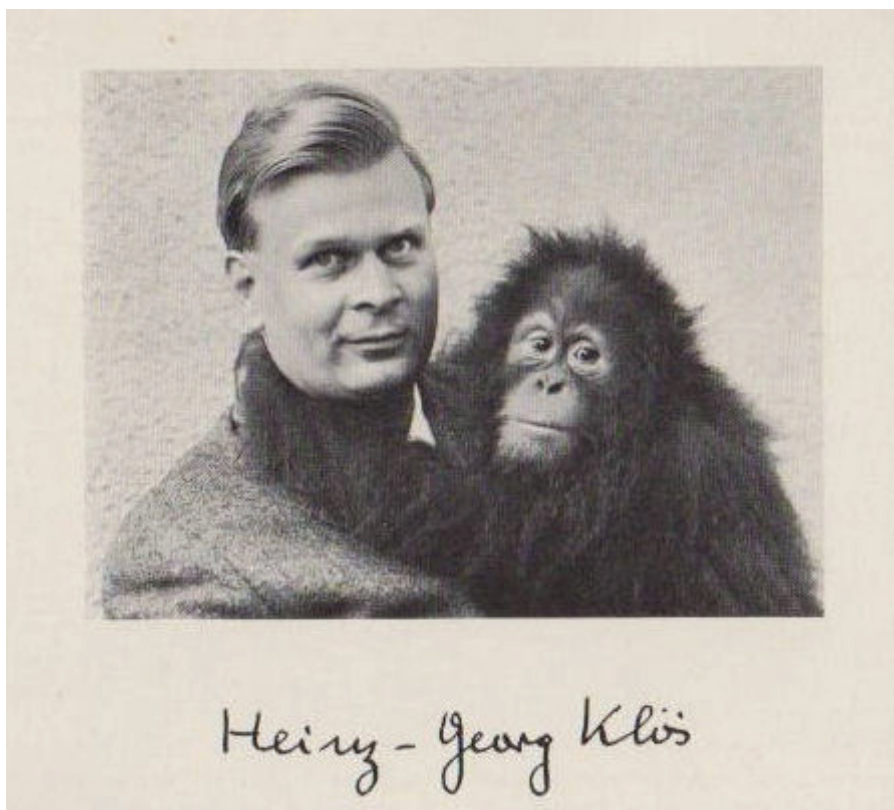


Photo: Wieczorek

Heinz-Georg Klös was always interested in the history of Berlin Zoo. During WWII the archives of the zoo were totally destroyed and very few documents survived from the more than 100 years of the zoo's history. Prof. Klös started to collect old printed records of the zoo, supported by shareholders and other people who possessed in their homes older documents, guide books or other items. Three important books on the history of Berlin Zoo resulted from his interest, including the highly respected "Von der Menagerie zum Tierparadies" published in 1969.

There are many more facets of Heinz-Georg Klös worth mentioning, such as his support of and friendship with artists, his enthusiastic engagement in conservation, his participation in international organizations, such as the Heinz Sielmann Stiftung and his work as a member of the Board of Tierpark Berlin.

In Berlin, and in the zoo community, he will be remembered as the person who made Berlin Zoo into one of the greatest zoos in the world.

*Harro Strehlow*