

FROM BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN: Four East German Zoos in a Reunited Nation

Ken Kawata

“Germany has been called ‘the land of zoos’ and I would not argue with that sentiment” noted Tim Brown (2003). In the English-speaking sector some may assume that they are the centre of the zoo world, not being aware that Continental Europe is the birthplace of the modern zoo. In terms of quality of zoos, the German-speaking sector, combining Germany, most of Switzerland and Austria, hosts the supreme examples of today’s zoos. Each region of zoos in the world has its own historic background, and casual visitors to German zoos may overlook the historic and political aspects that lie beneath the surface. For such a visitor, even a small amount of information may help to appreciate what unfolds in front of him. Here follows a quick look at various factors that affect German zoos, from the post-World War II era to the present. Information, other than the cited accounts, was gathered through personal communications and the sources remain anonymous.

Of Politics, Colours and Amusement

Concerning the period following World War II, we easily fall into assumptions: After the devastation of the war, thanks to dedicated professionals and citizens, zoos rose from the ashes and - supported by the roaring capitalist economy - they achieved remarkable prosperity. Zoos in Frankfurt, Hamburg (Tierpark Hagenbeck), and (former West) Berlin follow this pattern. Overshadowed by such a success story is the *other* Germany. After the war, Germany was partitioned by Great Britain, France, the USA and the Soviet Union, leading to the creation of two Germanys. Yet most of us in the so-called Free World had a limited amount of information about the other side, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) or East Germany, which used to occupy 30% of the land area of the reunified Germany. As of 1987 there were nine large zoos in the GDR (Strehlow, 2001).

East Is East, West Is West?

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the dissolution of the GDR resulted in the consolidation of all the German states into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The move had significant administrative and economic effects on German zoos. After nearly three decades, it is still worthwhile to take a glance at the GDR’s impact on zoos. The topic of communism in Eastern Europe brings images of secret police snooping on citizens’ lives, empty shelves in grocery stores and bleak vistas of uniformly-designed grey concrete buildings. The name GDR is indeed a marker for assumptions, and it is not much of a leap for us to imagine how zoos were treated.

We are partial to stereotyping of others. More than half a decade after the collapse of the communist regimes, well-known zoo enthusiast John Tuson planned to visit some zoos in the former Soviet bloc. *“I was greeted with incredulity and sympathy, the general consensus appearing to be that I would have to prepare myself to see some pretty unpleasant sights - badly kept animals in woeful enclosures.”* (He was in for a surprise: *“...there are a large number of zoos east of the old Iron Curtain which are nothing short of excellent, and from which the zoos of the West could learn a great deal.”*) (1996)

Dr. Roger Conant, retired Philadelphia Zoo director, commented with regard to Dr. Heinrich Dathe, that the latter *“was an able zoologist and zoo expert who, in the eyes of those of us who live in the West, was on the wrong side of the line”* – because, at the end of the war, Dr. Dathe found himself in the Russian Zone which eventually became known as the GDR. *“It was a lucky break for him, however, because his excellent reputation, as the assistant director of*

the Leipzig Zoo, made him the logical choice to head a brand-new zoo” to be created in East Berlin. “Dathe got along with the Communists and accepted their dictates” (Conant, 1997). The term ‘wrong side’ clearly indicates the aforementioned Western bias. Biased or not, here follows a sliver of information concerning what Dr. Dathe dealt with:

“For the first time in the history of all state legislatures in the world, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) has laid down the social function of zoos in three significant documents” including the “Law Concerning the Uniform Socialist Educational System” and the two ordinances issued by the Ministry of Cultures. *“Thus the GDR became the first nation in which the tasks of the zoos, i.e. the use of their potential for popular education, research and recreation, and the relevant responsibilities of the state, are anchored in law.”* In reality, the senior staff might have had to continually deal with restrictive jargons. An example: in 1982 noted herpetologist Hans-Günter Petzold of Tierpark Berlin published a monograph. This volume *“contains references on the Marxist theory of class struggle mostly in the introductory chapter. Without these remarks, common in the East German scientific community, it was almost impossible to publish a book”* (Petzold, 2008).

It would be interesting, incidentally, to turn the table around to see how GDR officials perceived zoos in the West. To wit: the Dresden Zoo director was bewildered and puzzled as he looked at the ‘other side’ after the collapse of the Iron Curtain. In particular, cooperative breeding programs, namely EEP and SSP, and their collective decision-making by committees, must have been disturbing. For him it bordered on dictatorship, since the decisions were no longer in the hands of *his* zoo (Lücker, 1994). That prompted the late Marvin Jones to comment, since he thought that Americans may have been a bit puzzled by his remarks, *“This is understandable, since live animal collections in the United States of America have undergone tremendous change in the last twenty years”* (Jones, 1995). The Dresden director must have felt like Gulliver on his voyages, observing the strange customs of Laputa and Glubbudbrib.

Green Is More Than a Colour

The general public may look at a zoo as a utopia of sorts, far removed from the mundane worries and sorrows of life. Obviously, however, a zoo is a microcosm of our human world and by no means immune to the influence of wider society, including politics. Zoos may be a common language that connects peoples of the world, yet often-restrictive politics can affect zoos in all manner of ways. In Germany in the 1980s the growth of the Green Party signalled new priorities within sections of the Left, and a new angle for political critiques of zoos. The Green Party was established around the principles of environmentalism, and the Party maintains a keen interest in animal issues. Inevitably it will find its way into zoo operations. Take, for instance, a look at the ‘Animal Welfare’ segment from The Green Position document. *“The protection of animals is a constitutional objective and is enshrined in the Basic Law. However, there are weaknesses and abuses both at legal level and in practice. Our aim is to identify the shortcomings that must be addressed and strengthen animals’ rights to a life in humane and species-appropriate conditions, free from unnecessary suffering.”* It goes on to talk of an urgent need for a ban on animal testing, protection of pets, and ‘animal-free circuses’ - under which it says, in part: *“We want to ensure that the only species of animal permitted in circuses are those which can be kept in a species-appropriate manner.”* The document emphasizes *“Giving animals a powerful voice”*: *“Animal welfare must be strengthened at the federal level. We want to address the flaws in the implementation of current legislation which occur at the expense of animal welfare.”* (Anon., 2017)

Concealed under the general tone is the groundwork leading to such a statement, a force to drive activists into action. In certain urban intellectual circles, it is chic to spout the political viewpoint that zoos are morally and emotionally unacceptable. In general, those Green politicians with small or school-age children may tend to be pro-zoo while those without children of their own frequently discover their animal-rights sentiment. It is said that several years ago, the Green Party published election campaign documents implying an intent to ban popular mega-vertebrates from zoos, and abolish private ownership of ‘exotic’ animals.

Targeted are iconic species such as cetaceans; Greens are among those critical of dolphinariums. It is no exaggeration that German zoos face a political situation quite different from what their American counterparts have to deal with. But so much for politics.

The Mirror Crack'd

Often ignored by public debates is zoos' below-the-surface bedfellow: amusement, or entertainment. Across the world, there has been a development of large-scale animal exhibits as a part of amusement complexes known as theme parks. Not that entertaining visitors is bad, yet caution is in order for a modest approach. In 2010 in Germany I heard that there were three zoos which had adopted the theme park scheme. My conclusion after a review: the theme park concept is a cracked mirror of nature (Kawata, 2011a). It takes the animal collection away from the public and may even spread inaccurate information. Yet theme parks bring in revenue, and that speaks volumes. (That does not seem to affect all mainstream zoos. At Tierpark Hagenbeck recently, the impression that I detected was that Hagenbeck will adhere to its tradition: perhaps unsurprising, but still a relief.)

Footprints of History

In the autumn of 2017 my wife Jean and I visited Germany and Poland, the main purpose of the trip being attendance at the 'Zoohistorica' event in Wrocław. During the trip we visited zoos which frequently enjoy international publicity, including those in Wrocław, Leipzig, Hamburg and Berlin. We also reviewed those that are less prominent in name recognition. This account focuses on four German zoos in the former GDR, visited between 4th and 24th September. I was curious as to how those zoos had developed after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and if the remnants of the GDR era were still noticeable.

Zoologischer Garten Halle

Of the four zoos, this is the only one that predates the Cold War era, having opened on 23 May 1901. A notable event took place in 1933, when a visitor observed a kangaroo birth as "*the mother calmly licked a smooth path in the fur for the infant on its way up*" into her pouch (Grzimek, 1966). During the early stage of the Cold War the zoo experienced twists and turns of history, such as going through "*three administrations, at first by the U.S. army, then by the Soviet army and thereafter as part of the GDR*" according to the voluminous work by Ludwig Baumgarten (Strehlow, 2010). Several years after the end of the GDR era, John Tuson visited this zoo and had the following impression (his observations leave a noteworthy, vivid snapshot of zoos from this period in history):

The zoo "*is lumbered with ancient buildings which are less than ideal for their inhabitants.*" Considering that the zoo had not been destroyed by bombing during the war, it is no surprise that buildings from the 1920s and 1930s, for antelopes, carnivores and great apes, were still in use. "*The carnivore house, for example, has no outside enclosures for half of its inhabitants, and those*



Above: Entrance to Zoologischer Garten Halle, located in a residential area outside enclosures which it does have are woefully small. Tuson also added, "*one must*

applaud the efforts which have been made with the house: where appropriate, cages have been well planted, and whilst it remains less than ideal this house is certainly not the disgrace which one might have expected after reading J.G. Pickard's rather spiteful discussions of European zoos in I.Z.N. 41/8." (Tuson, 1996)

Halle and Magdeburg (to be reviewed later) both have a population of close to a quarter of a million. Halle's zoo, surrounded closely by residential areas, was designed around a steep hill. This requires visitors to be in good physical condition, in proportion to a relatively small area of nine hectares. Because of this topography it is known as 'Bergzoo' (Mountain Zoo). The layout represents a combination of geographic - such as Africa, Himalaya, Patagonia - and generic clusters of various animal groups. The collection is listed as roughly 250 species and 1,700 specimens. It is a generalized assembly of species with the emphasis on ungulates from mountainous habitats (e.g. Aoudad, Bharal and West Caucasian Tur), and Neotropical stock, including Chacoan Mara, White-faced Saki and South American Fur Seal.

Back to the carnivore house, this building was renovated in the early 2000s, expanded and furnished for indoor as well as outdoor accommodations, leaving little trace of being less than ideal for animals. The treasures of the zoo, such as the Angolan Lion and the Malayan Tiger, can be viewed almost nose-to-nose through the glass partitions. Getting to a finer point, the animal labels are covered with a plastic sheet with Braille. In general the distances between the public and animals, not only felines but also others, are narrower compared with those in much larger, 'naturalistic' enclosures, or behind wide moats, in larger zoos. The limited space and steep hills, unfit for the creation of moats, have benefited the public; they can see the animals.



Left: Inside Halle's renovated carnivore house

Below: Visitors can take an up-close look at an Angolan lion.



Following the carnivore house, the Chimpanzee house is another example of the construction projects of the early 2000s. A spacious indoor area allows a multiple-level viewing and on one ground level, visitors may not even realize that they have stepped into a great ape exhibit; in a lushly planted tropical environment are Cotton-top Tamarin, Bali Mynah, turacos and other birds. Another nearby building is for reptiles and fish. With all these new exhibits, what attracts the public more is the elephant house built in 2006. It is immediately noticeable that the limited space of the zoo is well utilized to comfortably accommodate a breeding group of African

Elephants. For the barrier, glass is used rather than a moat. Here Tamika and Ayo, two calves born in June and August 2016 (the sire is 16 years old now), have become crowd pleasers.



Above left: One of the two newly-arrived aardwolves. Right: Young Black-necked cranes' a zoo rarity.

Other breeding accomplishments include squirrel monkeys (200 born since 1993), Giant Anteaters (exhibited with Crested Screamers), South American Fur Seals and Humboldt's Penguins in a salt-water pool; 13 chicks were raised this season. To the surprise of a visitor from North America, the zoo breeds the Brown Pelican - a common bird on the warm seacoasts of the Americas, but a European zoo-rarity. In Florida, rescued and un-releasable pelicans are readily available by the dozen. A Halle staff member visited Florida and acquired founders. They began to breed and offspring are sent to other zoos. As for unusual species in the collection, unexpected surprises include Eastern Aardwolf (1.1), Southern Pudu and two juvenile Black-necked Cranes. It is a joy to take a moment to watch them. Perhaps due to its long history and unusual topography, the zoo commands a 'personality' of its own to this visitor.

Tierpark Cottbus

What greets the visitors, as they approach this zoo, is the towering and handsome climax forest that has grown along the River Spree. These splendid pines and deciduous trees continue into the 25 hectares of totally level ground that comprises the zoo. As the zoo is located near the Polish border, the signs are posted in both German and Polish. There are no major population centres within the vicinity, and the zoo attracts about 150,000 visitors annually: more than the population of the city of Cottbus, which is 100,000. Opened on 1 June 1954, the zoo was included in the eight zoos initially approved by the GDR. The total number of animals is about 1,300.

Amid the lush vegetation exhibits begin to appear, the first of the 'usual suspects' being large mammals such as Bactrian Camels, Baird's and Lowland Tapirs and two female Asian Elephants, now in their 50s (there is no immediate plan to expand the elephant facility). The carnivore house, built in the 1960s, has been expanded with large yards, housing North China Leopard and both Malayan and Sumatran Tiger. Ungulates come into view next, such as Przewalski's Horse, Javan Banteng and Wisent. Smaller mammalian stock includes Emperor Tamarin, Lar Gibbon and Yellow-spotted Rock Hyrax.

Interesting as they are, it is not mammals but birds that have put the zoo on the map. Continuing on the visitor trail, gradually the wetlands begin to catch the visitor's attention, first the pond, then marshes and narrow creeks. Because of this environment, the aforementioned Dr. Heinrich Dathe of Tierpark Berlin came up with the idea for Cottbus to focus on wetland birds, such as Anatidae and waders. In the 1970s, during the GDR days, Chilean Flamingo and West African Crowned Crane arrived. Also a female Manchurian Crane was received from



TIERPARK COTTBUS

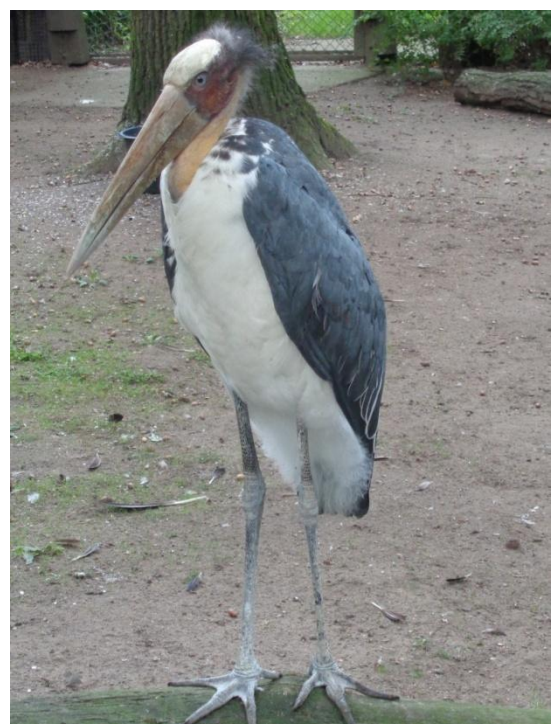
Top: Entrance to Tierpark Cottbus where, as it is located near the Polish Border, the signs are posted bilingually.

Above left: Saddlebill stork parents with eight-week old chicks.

Above right: Bactrian camels near the entrance.

Left: Lesser adjutant stork.

All photos in this article by Ken Kawata



North Korea. The number of Anatidae once reached 80 species; currently the collection stays a little over 60 species.

More recently, however, maintaining a large number of waterfowl has faced a host of challenges. The immediate problem, the one shared by zoos across Germany, is serious predatory damage from native and introduced carnivores. These include Red Fox, North American Raccoon and Raccoon Dog; whilst *Accipiter* hawks may also cause problems. Another critical threat is the bird flu pandemic. These difficulties require protection measures by 'hard' barriers, such as wire-mesh to cover enclosures, and those measures are costly. In addition, birds are not to be pinioned according to a German rule; another reason to discourage keeping birds in open enclosures which make the inhabitants so vulnerable. Moreover in today's zoos, it is no longer in vogue to pursue rarity and to collect a large number of species from a particular animal group. Hence fewer zoos seem interested in rare species, and it is no easy task to find homes for rare birds and their offspring. German zoo directors used to assemble a wide variety of species, often focusing on rarity. But the inclination toward larger animal inventories has shifted eastward in the last decade or so. Now Czech and Polish zoos are enthusiastically exhibiting larger numbers of species, many of them quite rare.

On a positive note, the zoo has been known for successful stork breeding projects. The list includes the Lesser Adjutant Stork, an uncommon feat. In the last two decades the zoo's Marabous have produced some 150 offspring. Nesting takes place in winter, not in spacious outdoor enclosures but in an off-exhibit cage. The unattractive and sterile-looking indoor cage appears no larger than 6 x 10 meters in size - which proves the point that breeding of some (probably many) zoo animals does not always require a big, expensive, professionally-designed enclosure. Separation of the sexes is important for Marabous, I am told, and to let the male first build the nest. (For certain birds or mammals, the timing of separation and introduction of the sexes could be tricky and lead to serious/fatal injuries.) Australian Pelicans also breed during Germany's winter in an off-exhibit, indoor cage similar in size to the Marabou cage.

Not every bird breeds in winter, however. In one corner of the zoo stands a cage, 450 square meters in size. On an elevated nest platform, Saddlebill Stork parents are busy tending eight-week old chicks. It is a gratifying sight. As opposed to Cottbus' ordinary cage, larger zoos across the world often keep waders in a different setting. They are in a mixed group with ungulates in a spacious African savanna enclosure, which creates an illusion of an African ecosystem created for the public. But take a moment to *closely* watch those birds in the immersive and 'naturalistic' enclosure. The birds' attention appears all consumed by the ungulates in the same space; the wide-open area gives no sense of privacy or security to settle down. If you were to put Cottbus' Saddlebill pair in a large mixed-species exhibit, almost certainly they couldn't build a nest and raise young.

As mentioned before, open enclosures (for most birds) have become problematic in Germany due to the threats of bird flu and predation, and the rule against pinioning. Even without these restrictions, the major problems in 'naturalistic' open exhibits remain. Catherine King points up the high rate of injuries, including fatal, on birds by ungulates (and ostriches); these exhibits simply "just do not do justice to the birds" (cited by Kawata, 2012). Simply put, the birds are being used as disposable materials to dress up popular large mammal exhibits. Conversely, the traditional cage is viewed as a hated symbol of imprisonment; but this viewpoint ignores welfare of individual birds and their breeding potential. For discussion on the subject, refer to Heini Hediger: In his thinking, a cage is the occupant's personal property, thus providing *ownership*, a home to defend. And "*The cage can also prevent encounters between animals of different species.*" (Hediger, 1964)

Many would believe that Cottbus does not provide enough space for birds, especially the aforementioned off-exhibit cages. Yet "*it is well known to aviculturists that birds usually do far*

better in small cages than in large aviaries” according to Edward Hindle (Foreword to Hediger, 1964). Another viewpoint: *“Basically, successful and repeated breeding is recognized as the main criteria of good zoo husbandry and, to many people, it is considered a vital justification for the existence of zoos.”* (Sadleir, 1975) Based on the words of these authorities, Cottbus is to be congratulated for its success story.

Zoo Schwerin

A segment of a deep deciduous forest, first covering rolling hills and then transforming to a more level piece of land, is home to this 25 hectare zoo, opened 24 April 1956. Stepping into the zoo I am a bit surprised by a large dog accompanying a family. Later I learn that former GDR zoos tend to allow dogs in. Evidently the dog does not scare the Rothschild’s Giraffes, in one of the first exhibits to draw my attention. Behind the giraffes are ostriches with chicks, and Lions. A slight turn to the right takes the visitor to a renovated Tiger exhibit, a testimony to the zoo’s attempt to shed the image of the GDR era: *“Because the old Siberian tiger enclosure, built in 1972, was not compatible with today’s style of animal management, planning to replace it began in 1994. The new enclosure, opened in May 2000, includes a tiger house with six night quarters...two main outdoor enclosures and a visitor area.”* (Anon., 2002) And the efforts for renewal apparently continue.

A more recent addition is a White Rhino enclosure consisting of a long walk (which appears to run almost 200 meters) to the yard, which is elongated and irregularly shaped and with multi-level viewing. Mixed in with the rhinos are Grevy’s Zebra. The entire exhibit is said to be 8,000



square-meters in size, but it seems even larger. Adjacent to the rhinos stands a curious mixed species exhibit of Brown Bears and Grey Wolves, effectively designed in an elevated terrain with trees and shrubs. If a wolf chooses to separate itself from the bears, it can do so through a somewhat concealed, small door.

The forested, rolling hills continue, with a generously large area for wild boar and a huge walk-through yard for Fallow Deer (does only). The topography slowly changes, becoming easier for

visitors' feet. Rolling hills are then replaced with a wetland area made up of a series of ponds; inhabitants include White Stork. Thus far the design theme seems to be non-geographic but animal-popularity driven. Before arriving at a farm section with domestic animals, a Striped Hyena catches the public's interest. The hyena is followed by a breeding group of Humboldt's Penguins and an island for a Pileated Gibbon. These and other exhibits remind me of something lacking in the scene.

Inseparable from the American zoo design is the heavy reliance on mock (or artificial) rocks by a spray cement construction process called gunite. Regardless of their geographic or habitat origin, animals from apes to elephants are uniformly turned into cave dwellers. A lack of imagination, yes, but also an easy way out for zoo designers and architects. The rampant use of gunite was common from the 1960s through to the 1980s. A typical example of that era is Columbus Zoo in Ohio, which might be called 'gunite overkill' or 'gunite-lovers' heaven'. What I learned after extensive study tour in Europe in the 1980s was that rocks, logs and vegetation make better exhibit materials. Why cover not only exhibits but also the building walls with fake rocks?

Back to Schwerin, and speaking of buildings the zoo basically remains an outdoor exhibit facility. Four buildings are featured for exhibits but the first one, the giraffe house, is closed.



Another one in the farm area is a small barn which visitors can step inside, and not an exhibit per se. The Frog House, another one, perhaps 12 x 12 meters in size is very inactive, to put it politely: more than half the terrariums are empty, and the rest of them hold a Fire Salamander and a few species of *Rana*, *Bufo* and *Bombina*.

On the other hand the fourth building, the Humboldt House, is a highlight of the zoo's indoor exhibits. Along with an outdoor area leading to the house, it represents the only zoo-geographical emphasis, the Neotropical. Capuchins, coatis and about 16

Collared Peccaries share an open enclosure, roughly 50 x 30 meters in size. Plenty of climbing apparatus keeps arboreal activities going, and in turn it seems to stimulate the peccaries. Around the corner another large enclosure features Giant Anteater and four Lowland Tapirs. Inside the building there is a series of terrariums and aquariums, some medium-sized and some small, exhibiting a variety of taxa from Red-legged Tarantula to freshwater stingrays. But the core of this house is in the mixed species presentation in a lush tropical greenhouse atmosphere. Multi-level viewing platforms allow a close look at Linné's Two-toed Sloth, Goeldi's Marmoset and Bolivian Squirrel Monkey, among others. On the forest floor, active agoutis appear unafraid of visitors.

Based on statistics from several years ago, the zoo's animal inventory included 154 species and about 2400 specimens. Even with the Humboldt House addition, the zoo remains largely an ABC collection focusing on large ungulates and carnivores, supplemented by Capybara, Bennett's Wallaby and limited varieties of birds, amphibians and reptiles. Future plans include a terrarium, and hopefully this will help to diversify the zoo's species-structure.

Above: Pileated gibbon.

Zoologischer Garten Magdeburg

Under a cloudy sky with a threat of showers, I entered one of the gates. This zoo was opened on 1 July 1950. *“It sketches the modest beginnings of the zoo during the communist regime in East Germany (D.D.R.), chronicling an amazing period of growth followed by a new lease of life after the reunification of Germany in 1990”*, noted the late Adolph van Bruggen as he reviewed the zoo history book by Schröpel, published in 2000. *“Started as a Heimattiergarten, a park for local animals only, it grew within a few decades into a medium-sized zoological garden (14.5 hectares) with a comprehensive collection and remarkable breeding results”*. As an example, *“they have an enviable record in breeding the black rhinoceros since 1979, now in the second generation with a calf born in 1995.”*

That aside, some events from the early days may disturb those in the West: *“The first director/founder was forced to resign in 1952 for political reasons (not being a true communist), the second director had to flee to West Germany in 1957 (his personal data and even a photograph are not yet available, because his files were sequestered by the secret police) – both events being symptoms of an authoritarian regime without any regard for the individual”* (van Bruggen, 2001). Nonetheless, the zoo seems to have had a forward-looking stance from its infancy; expansion plans began in 1957, and from Assam the arrival of the first elephant, always a blessed event, took place in 1960. Renovation began to replace ‘classical’ exhibits with more modern enclosures while still under the GDR regime in 1981.

John Tuson, in his review of the zoo just a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, had high praise. *“Unusually for the zoos of the former East Germany, Magdeburg Zoo does not have to contend with large numbers of archaic buildings. ...the zoo has been able to retain a fairly modern look, even if one or two buildings are very much in need of either replacement or radical renovation.”* One of his points is about its distinctive looks: *“It is from its low-key appearance that Magdeburg derives much of its charm: the monolithic houses so prevalent in German zoos (in both west and east) are largely absent, and as a result the atmosphere of the zoo is almost akin to that of a park – albeit a park packed with some very interesting animals.”* Also: *“Magdeburg is an excellent small-town zoo, very different in flavour from the majority of its neighbours”* (Tuson, 1996). Interestingly, a quarter of a century ago Marvin Jones sent a postcard to a friend from Dresden, stating *“Dresden: nice town, terrible zoo. Magdeburg: terrible town, nice zoo.”* (Reichenbach, email, 2017)

Back to Tuson, he mentions the European Wild Cat breeding program which made the zoo *“able to supply a steady stream of animals to be released into the wild in southern Germany”* (Tuson, 1996). Other animal husbandry programs, from the 1994 annual report: *“The animal department looks back to a very successful year. We bred Colobus monkeys (C. g. caudatus) for the first time; other firsts were kookaburras and Ural Owls. Seven species of marmosets and tamarins reproduced”*, and so the list went on. Moreover *“Three addax were flown to Morocco to be reintroduced in the Souss Massa National Park.”* (Wünnemann, 1995)

Such accounts can easily sway a visitor in favour of the zoo even before he passes the gate. At any rate, the tour begins with a wide-open, grassy stretch behind the new gate, a part of the waves of expansion starting in 2009 that practically doubled the size of the zoo from the GDR era.

One of the new exhibits is the Siberian Tiger enclosure, and Snow Leopards and Dholes are nearby. Lions are in a separate location near the other gate, not far from those other animals near the top of the popularity charts - the great apes. Their house, opened in 2000, is spacious and as in many other exhibits the public has different elevations and angles, each having its own perspective. Large enclosures for Forest Buffalo and kangaroos follow into the children’s section (they do have a children’s playground). Architecturally interesting is the giraffe house that looks like a hill from a distance. The aforementioned van Bruggen commented it *“is partly environmentally friendly, with a roof covered with grass.”* An anecdote here: the house was

“built in 1991 in 110 hours as a challenge in a TV programme called *Jetzt oder nie* (‘Now or never’).” (van Bruggen, 2001).

The clusters of exhibits are distributed throughout the well-planted grounds, and make the 21 hectares appear larger. Noticeably, the zoo blends plants – trees, shrubs and grasses – and animal exhibits intimately; the visiting public walks through meandering tree-covered trails, some wide and some narrower. Barriers, hard or soft, between visitors and animals are often tactfully concealed. One of the contributing factors for effective exhibits is the mixed species approach. Examples abound, such as Dwarf Mongoose and African Ground Squirrel in a relatively small space. Another is the Chinese Goral and Red Panda enclosure. The idea behind this is simple: when the pandas are in trees and concealed by foliage or staying in the nest box, visitors may not take time to look for it. But they notice the goral, stop and take a look around, and enough time may pass for them to find the Red Panda.

More interesting, however, is the formula to mix elephants, the proven crowd pleasers, with other animals.



The old pachyderm house was built in 1967, a large structure designed to house both species of elephants, hippopotamus and Black Rhino. Half a century passed, and the latest of the new constructions is the elephant house, for both African and Asian taxa, recently opened in 2017. Refreshingly, the indoor exhibit section has a feature different from a typical zoo elephant house. When visitors step into the building they find

themselves in a flight aviary - almost. The elephants are not the exclusive inhabitants but instead, members of a cast. Hadada Ibis, Abdim's Stork, Hammerkop and Cattle Egret share the building with the world's largest land animal. The birds have their own space to perch and rest, and access to elephants if they so choose. The public looks at the pachyderm in awe, yet there is something intimidating about the huge, grey body (those with hands-on elephant experience know it all too well!). In this exhibit ibises and storks serve almost to soften the impact: elephants and birds complement each other. There is a strange sense of comfort, even with the cold touch of the towering concrete wall nearby. The facility is still new, and the outdoor exhibit plan also includes a mixed-species approach with Impala, Warthog, Bat-eared Fox and Vervet Monkey – with each species given its own space to stay away from elephants.



Top photo: The new elephant House opened in 2017 at Zoologischer Garten Magdeburg and inside the Elephant House showing mixed-species exhibit with Birds.

A similar effect is noticeable in the enclosure of the Black Rhino breeding group. In the outdoor area the rhinos are on exhibit not only with ungulates, but also with three lemur species (strictly speaking, this is not zoogeographic accuracy!). Once inside the viewing area, the ambience gives a soothing feeling. You are separated from the rest of the zoo and, momentarily, you



may even forget that these are captive animals. Like elephants, the rhinoceros has something of the prehistoric about it – horned, and clad in grey armour, it looks like a small tank. What softens that aspect are the mediating agents: soil, shrubs, grass, wooden poles and boulders (no thanks to gunite), in addition to other animals that share the same space. Also, there is another consideration for exhibiting a large, often inactive mammal. When the rhino is sound asleep,

resembling an uninteresting grey mound, visitors may instead notice lemurs active and interacting.

Not to curb enthusiasm, but here I am reminded of some zoo issues. Zoos are in a continuous process of renewing themselves and there is no such thing as 'completion'. Years ago the director of a large, major American zoo said: "*Every zoo has a slum, and I have mine*", adding that he wouldn't hide it. Not to look for one in Magdeburg, but it does not require an eagle's eye to find areas reminiscent of the old era. A row of ungulate enclosures for deer and wild asses is one, each consisting of a yard and a barn (possibly with adjacent shift yards). Some would say these exhibits lack imagination, but take another look. They are well maintained, 'furniture' such as brush piles has been added in the yard and more importantly, the animals appear healthy. (Back to the USA again, the Catskill Game Farm, now closed, used to be one of my favourite collections. It mainly consisted of those *simple* structures. Animals appeared fine and the public had a good view of them.)

Regarding the old days, we cannot apply a broad brush stroke to say that all old things from the GDR era are bad. In the off-show area of Magdeburg I am given a chance to see a lion cage, built in 1958 and enlarged in 1980. The outdoor section measures roughly 6 x 10 meters with two indoor stalls, about 4 x 4 meters in size; they were in use until 2001. The dimensions sound fairly common for those days, not only at GDR zoos but



also across the world, especially in small to medium-sized zoos. In other words, it would not be fair to uniformly blame the GDR administration for the small spaces for animals. These old structures are rapidly disappearing from the rear view mirror, but may be worth a closer look for the sake of history.

The zoo's inventory consists of 190 species and 1,200 specimens. My review of the zoo may sound too biased towards ABC animals, but it is sometimes unavoidable - simply because popular species of mammals and birds are the twin pillars of any generalized collection. As in many other zoos, these two classes dominate Magdeburg's collection and they take up much of our attention. Within the confines of taxonomic groupings, however, the collection is versatile beyond the ABC animals, such as those of the Neotropical region. There are tapirs, Giant Anteaters and some smaller forms represented by marmosets and tamarins (11 species) as well as macaws. Speaking of taxonomy, it certainly appears the zoo needs an enriched herpetological repertoire for a good balance.

Right: A herd of Grevy zebra greets visitors at Zoological Garten Magdeburg.

Previous page top: Black rhinoceros exhibit.

Previous page bottom: "Environmentally friendly" giraffe house



Magdeburg still retains the characteristics described by John Tuson some two decades ago. It is growing and thriving with little trace of struggles; a zoo that has a lot to offer and makes you wish to return some day. It may still be called a medium-sized zoo, but for a closer look, a whole day is recommended for future visitors.

Envoy

Which extant zoo was the first modern zoo of the world? Personally I subscribe to the theory that the honour goes to the menagerie opened at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris in 1794 (Kawata, 2011b). Thus, compared with other cultural establishments of the world, the modern zoo is a relatively young institution. During a short life span, zoos have gone through turbulent periods, such as experiencing two world wars. For zoos in the former GDR, nearly half a century from the end of World War II to the crumbling of the Soviet Union represents more than a speck on the page of the world's zoo history. It is not to be taken lightly by the students of that history.

(On a personal note and jumping around chronology, some of us, now decreasing in number, grew up on the losing side during the war and the difficult period that followed. Regardless of which country we were in, we immediately understand specific issues. In major cities in Germany, one of the frequently noticeable phrases during casual conversations is that such

and such “*were destroyed during the last World War*”, as if it were last year. That sounds so familiar - I was eight years old, on the losing side in Japan, when the war ended.)

East Berlin Led the Way.

Before World War II, only Dresden and Leipzig zoos had major animal collections in what was to become the GDR; in a few years they found themselves behind the Iron Curtain (the former was still in complete ruins). Then the starburst event took place in 1955: the Tierpark opened in East Berlin. The prominence of this zoo and the aforementioned Dr. Heinrich Dathe, its leader, requires a special note. The Tierpark was built in the backdrop of West Berlin, a fraternal twin which already had the world-renowned Zoo Berlin. The birth of the Tierpark marked a Cold War cultural competition, incarnating an antithesis to the showcasing of democracy and capitalism by West Berlin - a city surrounded by the ‘other’ Germany under the communist regime.

Tierpark Berlin was often viewed as a model. “*The first director, Heinrich Dathe, was a well-known scientist. He edited five scientific journals and wrote more than 1,000 scientific and popular papers and books. Under his guidance, the Tierpark Berlin-Friedrichsfelde became one of the leading zoos of the world with many rare breeding groups of birds and mammals*” (Strehlow, 2001). His name still surfaces today when chatting with zoo people in Europe. His idea of specializing on waterfowl for Cottbus has already been mentioned. Dr. Dathe’s influence extended beyond the GDR, into the Soviet Bloc, as well as the rest of Europe and America.

GDR-style Collection

The GDR era left historical baggage, reflective of a political and social system different from that of the FRG; it affected not only the lives of ordinary citizens, but also institutions such as zoos. Medium to small zoos built during the GDR era in the 1950s and 1960s often had a set of animal collection guidelines. In 2008 I visited the zoo in Chemnitz, which gave me a hint of the so-called GDR-style collection. The municipal zoo opened in 1964 during the Cold War. According to the curator, the focus was on domesticated stock and animals from the Soviet Union. (She added that after the 1990s the collection was expanded to a world-wide scope, to include endangered species.) There were reasons for such a collection scheme, other than the lack of adequate funds.

From what I hear, construction materials for animal housing were not easily available, unlike in other countries (and typically the other Germany). Even with serviceable buildings, resources such as fuel to keep animals warm during harsh German winters were scarce. This explains the reason for the absence of solidly built, large animal houses in Schwerin and Cottbus. In those zoos sizeable buildings, so common in Europe, are largely missing for animals such as primates and tropical birds. Thus the collection structure of the GDR zoos that focused on domestic and native species had its reasons. Not only because of the readily availability of those animals, but also their requirements in captivity were easier to accommodate.

But Each Zoo is Different.

A commonly heard comment throughout most GDR zoos is that not enough resources were given to zoos, thus handicapping their growth. It is said that, especially toward the end of the GDR era, not enough funds were allocated for the upkeep of aging facilities. Such a history, however, was probably not shared equally across the board. The degree of society’s recovery from the war varies from one city to the other, as does the pace of zoo development, during the GDR administration. The process was probably compounded by such factors as the uniqueness of the given municipality and politics. So each zoo must be looked at for its own historic journey. As for funding allocation, for example, the large house for elephants, hippos and rhinos in Magdeburg was built in 1967 during the GDR administration.

In conclusion: the four former GDR-managed zoos have done well, within limits and at varying paces, to upgrade themselves during the nearly three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall. As Bernd Müller, a zoo enthusiast who lives near Frankfurt, noted about the former GDR zoos: "In the last 20 years they have had a lot to do, in order to modernize the exhibits while at the same time to provide a healthy financial base. But I think that is a theme for all zoos worldwide, isn't it?" (email, 2017) Going back to the earlier review on the trends of German zoos, Green politics does not seem to play a role (yet) on these four zoos, at least on the surface. Also it is encouraging that they have followed the course of the traditional zoological garden, with no trace of an inclination toward the theme park concept.

It is a brave act for someone who does not read German to write an account such as this one. Hopefully this essay will encourage, however imperfectly, future authors to examine this transitional period in the world's zoo history. In particular, in today's prevailing worldwide climate of ignoring even our recent history, the need for studying our past has a renewed significance, especially for the younger generation of zoo professionals.

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