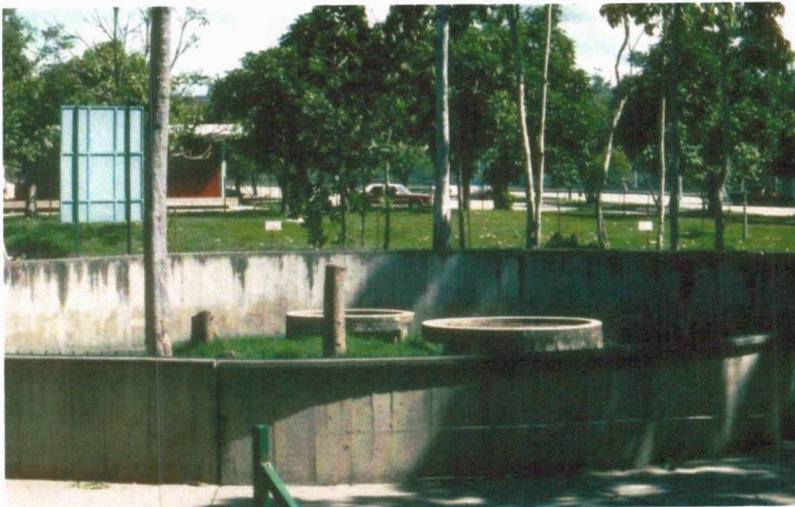


PARQUE ZOOLOGICO CARICUAO

Christopher Brack

During a visit to Peru in 1979, on the flight back to Germany, the Aero Peru DC 8, made a stop-over in Bogotá, Colombia then in Caracas, Venezuela. I had already made arrangements to visit the new zoo on the outskirts of Caracas, which was still not regularly open to visitors. In the city there were already two other older zoos, El Pinar and Parque Del Estes. I only had time to see Parque Del Estes before driving out to Caricuao, as this was the zoo which had a diverse collection of South American species. The city park Del Estes was mainly designated as a recreational area for the growing city population, it had nevertheless a small zoo, the 76 hectares includes the whole park! The highlights were Giant otters, kept in circular concrete enclosures, which had bred on many occasions since the 1970s but none of the cubs could be



raised to adulthood, perhaps the feeding of peanuts, popcorn and potato chips from the visitors did not help? A well stocked Reptile house/garden, which is described in an early International Zoo News (No. 129 Aug/Sept 1975) one large male Orinoco crocodile with its wonderful jagged back bones very dinosaur like, a wonderful African Llon enclosure and a reconstructed "Santa Maria" from Christopher Columbus.

Left: Giant otter enclosure in Parque Del Estes.

The former director of the Venezuelan Zoo organisation Dr Pedro Trebbau and all three Caracas Zoos had just resigned before my arrival. His successor was the former zoologist Dr. Carlos Rivera Blanco, who had worked previously at the San Diego Zoo; he is a herpetologist, which explained the centre piece exhibit, the outdoor enclosure for the then great rarity in zoos, 3 New Guinea monitors *Varanus salvadorii* (IZYB. No.20. recorded 2.1.4 in 4 collections). The rhino/elephant enclosures were finished, the African plains exhibit was nearing completion, the off-show holding areas full with South African hoof stock i.e. Cape Giraffe, Blue-necked ostrich, Blue wildebeest etc. The Felid collection was also interesting with various Ocelot subspecies or races, dark forest individuals *Leopardus p. aequatorialis* and paler patterned savannah types *L. p. mitis* according to Monica Thiel zoologist, all caged off show, the first red Jaguarondi I had seen was among other grey coloured individuals. A very natural Jaguar enclosure with animals from North American zoos! It was wonderfully overgrown with large trees, and that was the reason why they could not be let out into the large outside enclosure, as Monica was afraid of the Jaguars jumping out. I was shown a large tapir, which I was told was of an intermediate form between the Lowland and Mountain species. To me it looked just like a well built *Tapirus terrestris*. Many Maguari storks *Ciconia maguari* inhabited the 25 acres of the proposed zoo grounds; this white stork of the Americas has always been scarce in zoos outside of its natural distribution. The total area of mountain terrain was well over a 1,000 acres which included a nature reserve and agricultural aspects, surrounding the park grounds was a large government housing estate. The two African female elephants arrived just as the zoo was being established in 1977 as did the pair of White Rhino.



Salvator monitors and, bottom right, Orinoco crocodile.

The rhino came (as I am sure did the two elephants) from the Carabobo Safari Park, created 7th March 1974, and two hours drive from Caracas, where the murder rate is the highest in the country. The Park was owned by the son of a private banker in Venezuela, who had his own private airstrip there with helicopters etc. As one of the (3.4) newly imported White rhinos, arriving from the Natal Parks Board via Ruhe's German parks was being loaded for Caracas, a keeper was gored, although he flew him to a major hospital in his private aircraft the keeper died later. Another died picking mangos from a tree in the lion enclosure! This park was never a member of the Venezuelan zoo association being privately owned. It was set up by Herman Ruhe KG, the animal dealing business who ran Gelsenkirchen, and employed many of his staff - which included Roy Smith. Bernd Lindner ran the park for three or four years before returning to Germany for other duties. According to Roy Smith (owner of Interzoo) over 12 km of roads had to be built before the park was opened, 60 species of African and Venezuelan species were exhibited; African elephant, White rhino etc. shipments went by sea but lion, and tiger via air. After the owner fell into political disfavour he had to leave the country quickly and the safari park fell apart and was dissolved in 1998; today it is a housing estate!

I had tried to contact the zoo association in Venezuela, I did receive one reply, unfortunately I was not able to get any direct information on the situation in Caracas. In the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung from the 13th April 2017 kindly supplied by Herman Reichenbach, was an article on the death of "Ruperta" the last of the two elephants, (at one stage described as a Forest elephant, which she certainly was not) died emaciated! Not surprising in a country near civil war, although one of the richest countries in the world. Dr. Pedro Trebbau is still alive although well over eighty now, he had always helped supply German zoos with South American species; he supported Dr Wolfgang Gewalt in his efforts to catch and import 5 Amazon River dolphin *Inia geoffrensis* to Duisburg Zoo back in 1975 and lastly also 3 confiscated Red Howler monkeys *Alouatta seniculus* for Cologne Zoo in 2001.

Unfortunately it has not been possible to find any records of the origin or history of the elephants supplied by Ruhe to South America zoos i.e Carabobo, Caracas or Havanna, the later zoo had animals supplied by both Chipperfields and Ruhe in the early eighties for the new National Zoologico on the outskirts of Havanna.



*Elephants
and White
rhinoceroses
at Parque
Zoologico
Caricuau*

***All photos
with the
article by
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