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**A SUNSET FOR THE GIANT:
Remembering Bill Conway**

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The Triangle and the Pope

"Ah, King Conway!" (It rhymes with King Kong, of course) It was late at night. At zoo conferences back in the 1970s, it was customary for animal dealers to set up "watering holes" at conference hotel rooms to provide alcoholic beverages for zoo delegates. They spent thousands of dollars on unlimited amounts of Scotch, Vodka, or what have you. Gulping down hard liqueur offered by animal dealers would be utterly unthinkable for those who entered zoo employment recently. Already I had had one too many and staggered out of one watering hole. Out of nowhere, it seemed, appeared sure-footed and well-dressed William G. Conway, the General Director of the Bronx Zoo, just looking around. He smiled and did not seem offended by my quipping.

"King" was hardly the only royal headdress people put on him. Behind his back some called him Lord Conway or Prince William. Now fast forward to 2003. One sunny afternoon in August a rabbi from the Bronx knocked on my door, unexpectedly. It was at Staten Island Zoo where I was General Curator. Apparently a zoo enthusiast, he began shoptalk. He once came up with a triangle of Hornaday, Hagenbeck and Hediger, but now he had to think where to place Conway, he said.

"At the Bronx Zoo, going through the Wild Asia makes you feel guilty with information on how many trees are cut down per minute, and so forth. The zoo is so focused on conservation that it is a church with Conway as the Pope." So the King was also Pope. The clergyman continued:

"The National Zoo offers a contrast. It is a very thoughtful zoo; in the graphics it talks about history and animal study. For Atlanta Zoo Andrew Young brought in Terry Maple at a time the zoo was in trouble. The zoo, in essence, was a civil rights institution, with Mayor William Hartsfield as Nelson Mandela. Maple's zoo, too, emphasizes conservation but he interprets the Pope's words. The Pope says this, so we will do it." It was a refreshing viewpoint.

Nearly two decades later, in retirement I sat in my study in New Mexico, reminiscing about zoo workers and zoo-visiting crowd. As of 2020, in the United States young adults, 20 to 34 years in age, occupied roughly one-third of the population both male and female. Would they have any idea who Nelson Mandela or Andrew Young was? Limiting to the zoo field, we need not go back to Hornaday. Do young staff members know, for instance, who Terry Maple is? Mark Rosenthal shared his experience at Lincoln Park Zoo, Chicago. "I remember when I wanted to show the keepers some old Marlin Perkins Zoo Parade over lunchtime and no one signed up. I figured they did not want to give up their lunchtime so I went to a young lady keeper and asked why she did not sign up. She said, 'Well, who is Marlin Perkins?'" (Email, 19 March 2022)

It is doubtful that she ever gave herself permission to be her own person, to wake up and learn. But the future cannot wait for her. Anyway, since Richard Marlin Perkins served as Lincoln Park Zoo Director from 1944 until 1962, her illiteracy in history is particularly troubling and disappointing. An inevitable question comes to mind: Does the young lady keeper know the name Bill Conway? A passage to the information Dark Age is hardly confined to the zoo field. Rather, it is a national pandemic. "According to a recent survey, fewer than half of American high school students know when the Civil War oc-

curred," observed David McCullough (and that was a decade and a half ago). He noted, "For at least 25 years, we've been raising young Americans who are, by and large, historically illiterate. ... History has not just been pushed to the back burner, it's been pushed off the stove." (Anon., 2008)

Zoos in this country have accumulated a vast reservoir of experience, knowledge and wisdom nurtured by our predecessors over the period spanning more than a century and a half. The reservoir is open to everyone, and some of us visited this wealth of resources. It satisfied our thirst; we also contributed to this body by feeding it our share of experience, thereby enriching the reservoir. Recently, however, the road to the reservoir has been covered with overgrown weeds. Cross-generational transfer of our heritage requires two-way streets. Yet the process has been ignored by younger generations, epitomized by the lady keeper in Chicago. Possibly there is a little hole in the bank of the reservoir, slowly draining the content. Only the current generation can plug that hole. Indifference and apathy must be behind it but why? Maybe generational chauvinism, the belief that the current generation is superior to all the past generations, will do it. Or simply, they don't care.

The passing of Bill Conway (21 October 2021) generated profound sorrows amongst colleagues across the globe. A few examples of emails I received:

- He was my favorite zoo director for all the reasons enumerated in his obituaries. Paul Linger
- Bill was a jewel in the zoo world. Charles Hoessle
- A giant indeed. A true legend of our world. The zoo world is poorer for it. Nayer Youakim
- I idolized Bill and think the profession needs more people with his kind of vision for the future and the role of zoos and aquariums. I will miss him. Ed Diebold
- The sad news words cannot describe. Josef Lindholm
- A conservation giant has fallen. Simon Stewart

There is an impression that with Conway's passing, the little opening in the bank of the reservoir may turn into a gaping hole and that, over time, his name may be in danger of being tossed into a sepia-toned, dust-collecting shelf in zoos' collective attic. But preserving zoo history is preserving history, so it may be worthwhile to take a quick look at Bill's professional trail. In particular, that may benefit younger generations to help commemorating his legacy if, and that is a big IF, this account ever catches their eyes. More colleagues may continue to write about Bill, so there is little need to repeat Who's Who or an encyclopedic description of the man. Some may complain about missing pieces of information. Be reminded that my account is a journal article and not even a chapter of a book, that it will only represent a snapshot of Bill Conway's life.

"Roots" is a popular term nowadays. Returning to early years, Bill was a teenager when World War II ended. Typically, his most active years started during the post-war economic prosperity. Around that period, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean it was a different story; Europe was left in ashes and ruins. Soon, a group who endured formidable war years emerged to rebuild zoos. They worked on infrastructure, per-

sonnel and animal collections. It was an era characterized by changing dynamics in the society. Memorable names from this moment included Walter van den Bergh (Antwerp), Heini Hediger (Zurich), Katharine Heinroth, Heinrich Dathe and Heinz-Georg Klös (Berlin). Among them one distinguished name stood out: Bernhard Grzimek (1909-1987) of Frankfurt. His legacy far exceeded the realm of a zoo director. His pioneering conservation endeavor in Serengeti (now in Tanzania) will long be remembered. Also he was a producer of film as well as an author and editor. At the height of his career Grzimek was Mr. Zoo of the world.

In the parade of fascinating personalities Bill Conway, born in 1929, was a junior member of this league of elites. Young as he was, the weight to represent this side of the Atlantic Ocean and beyond was soon to fall on his shoulders.

The Sunday New York Times carries Book Review section and one page, titled "By the Book", is devoted to celebrity interview. An oft-asked question is "You've organized a literary dinner party. Which three writers, dead or alive, do you invite?" and that question can be easily applied to other fields including zoos. (I do not mean to keep beating the dead horse, but it's tempting to cast the question upon the young lady keeper in Chicago. She would be totally lost.) If a prominent zoo person is asked the same question, quite possibly the names would be picked from a list consisting of Hagenbeck (Carl), Hornaday, Grzimek and Conway among other luminaries, all encased in the time capsule. Suppose the same question was asked half a century from now. It may not be all that surprising if Grzimek or Conway, maybe both, will still be considered for the dinner party.

Herpetology was His First Love

It is legendary now that at age four Conway began a personal menagerie by assembling butterflies, and presented it to his elementary school upon graduation. Entry into zoos came much later. Some seven decades or so ago, if you stepped into a zoo you would have been greeted with an odd scene: No WAZA, SSP, EEP or Species 360. That was where young Conway cut his teeth. One of his early writings was a full-page account on hatching reptile eggs. Here is the introductory part:

About the author: William Conway is a junior at Washington University, where he is majoring in zoology. During the summer season of 1948 Bill worked part time at the Reptile House and part time at the shows. This year he is in charge of the boys who sell ice cream and novelties at the shows. Although he doesn't like the job very much, he does the work with the earnestness and attention to detail that are characteristic of him. Bill wants to make herpetology his life work. [More on "shows" later.]

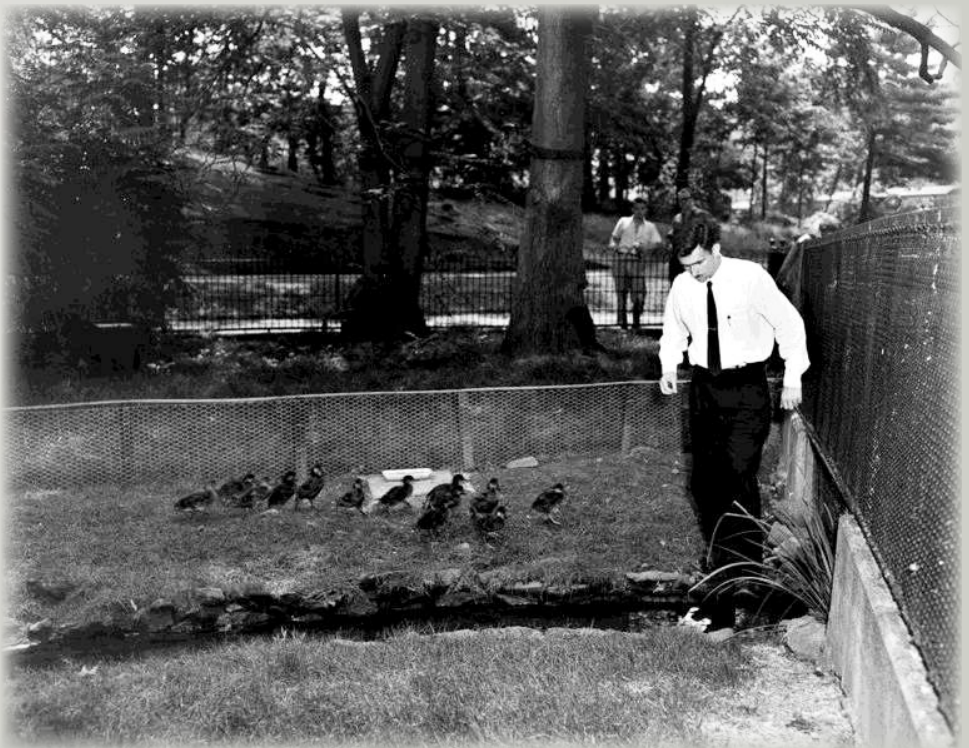
"On June 14, 1948, when a stoical gila monster, oblivious of the importance at the moment, complacently laid an infertile egg, a peculiar experiment was undertaken", the article began, then continued: "A reptile egg

hatchery was set up at the St. Louis Zoo Reptile House with the permission of M. J. R. Lentz, Curator of the Reptile House, and under the incubation of the author, figuratively speaking". Conway cited Clifford H. Pope and also, apparently communicated with another well-known name, C. B. Perkins, herpetologist at the San Diego Zoo. Bill went on to other species such as the American chameleon and Texas horned "toad". (Conway, 1949) Bill explored captive breeding of reptiles, a subject not yet common nationwide back in the 1940s. The short article is methodically organized and jam-packed with data. That implied a prestigious future for the young student. Decades later Bill commented, "Reptiles and Amphibians were my first zoological species love." (Email, 2 August 2019) The article may have marked his debut in the zoological world, something I meant to ask him. It is too late now.

The above account may come as a surprise to some, for, in terms of taxonomical grouping Bill was known for his interest and contributions to ornithology and aviculture. Prior to becoming Associate Curator of Birds at the Bronx Zoo he was St. Louis Zoo's Curator of Birds from 1950 to 1956.

"The 1953 edition of the Zoo's guidebook includes photos of such species as Central American White-eared Hummingbird (*Basilinna l. leucotis*), Small-billed Whooping Motmot (*Momotus subrufescens conexus*), Red Shining Parrot, and Long-wattled Umbrellabird. 1953 was also the year that St. Louis took part in a shipment of 72 Birds of Paradise from Sir Edward Hallstrom's (qv) Nondugl Station, coordinated by the Bronx Zoo and divided among four U.S. collections. Conway's first *Avicultural Magazine* article appeared in 1956, discussing in detail the planting and landscaping of 17 pheasant aviaries, with advice from Jean Delacour, to simulate a range of habitats, the first time this had been done with pheasants in a U.S. public zoo," according to Josef Lindholm.

Conway had a brief stint at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Colorado Springs, Colorado in 1956. Conway "served as con-



Bill Conway with ducklings at the Bronx Zoo, 1958. Courtesy of Wildlife Conservation Society

sultant for a new bird house featuring an open-fronted aviary and glass-fronted displays, with such birds as Hawaiian Gallinule, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Russet-crowned Motmot (*Momotus mexicanus*), Abyssinian Roller, Spot-crowned Barbet (*Capito maculicoronatus*), Scarlet and Guianan Cocks of the Rock, and Greater and Red Birds of Paradise,” Josef Lindholm explained. In 1956 he became Associate Curator of Birds at the Bronx Zoo. Headed for New York he “had driven all night from Chicago, and he was lost in the Bronx. The streets were stone empty and seemed eerily endless. Suddenly, he heard a siren, and he was arrested for drifting through a red light. ‘I almost turned around and went back,’ he said. But he stayed.” (Martin, 1999) Now back to Lindholm.

At the Bronx Zoo, “On 31 December 1956, 571 taxa of birds were present. On 31 December 1957, the collection stood at 636 taxa, the largest number since the end of 1941. The addition of the Northern Yellow-throated Tanager (*Iridosornis analis porphyrocephala*), and three other species of tanagers (as then understood) new to the collection, brought the tanager collection to ‘numbering nearly 30 species... certainly among the world’s finest’. One of the new Curator’s first achievements was designing a planted exhibit where the Long-wattled Umbrella bird, collected by Charles Cordier in 1950.” Also, “Of great future significance was arrival of young Atlantic Puffins ... initiating research that would eventually result in the today’s establishment of captive alcids.”

Many zoo enthusiasts may associate Conway with flamingos. Lindholm continues: “In 1958, the year his title became Curator of Birds, experiments were conducted with a commercial poultry supplement containing carrot oil, resulting in a convenient and relatively inexpensive method of retaining color in flamingos. By March of 1959, the Bronx Zoo exhibited four taxa of flamingos (five, if one considers as a separate taxon the two birds from the Galapagos, among the nineteen American Flamingos kept). All taxa could be seen at the Bronx in 1960, when Conway led an expedition, featured in both *National Geographic* and *Life Magazine* to Laguna Colorada, in the Bolivian Andes, where under difficult and uncomfortable conditions, 20 James’ and one Andean Flamingo were captured with foot-nooses, the first in captivity. Further Andean Flamingos were received later that year. Puna Tinamous, Andean Gulls, and a Tarapaca Tawny Tucotuco (*Ctenomys f. fulvus*) were also brought to New York.”

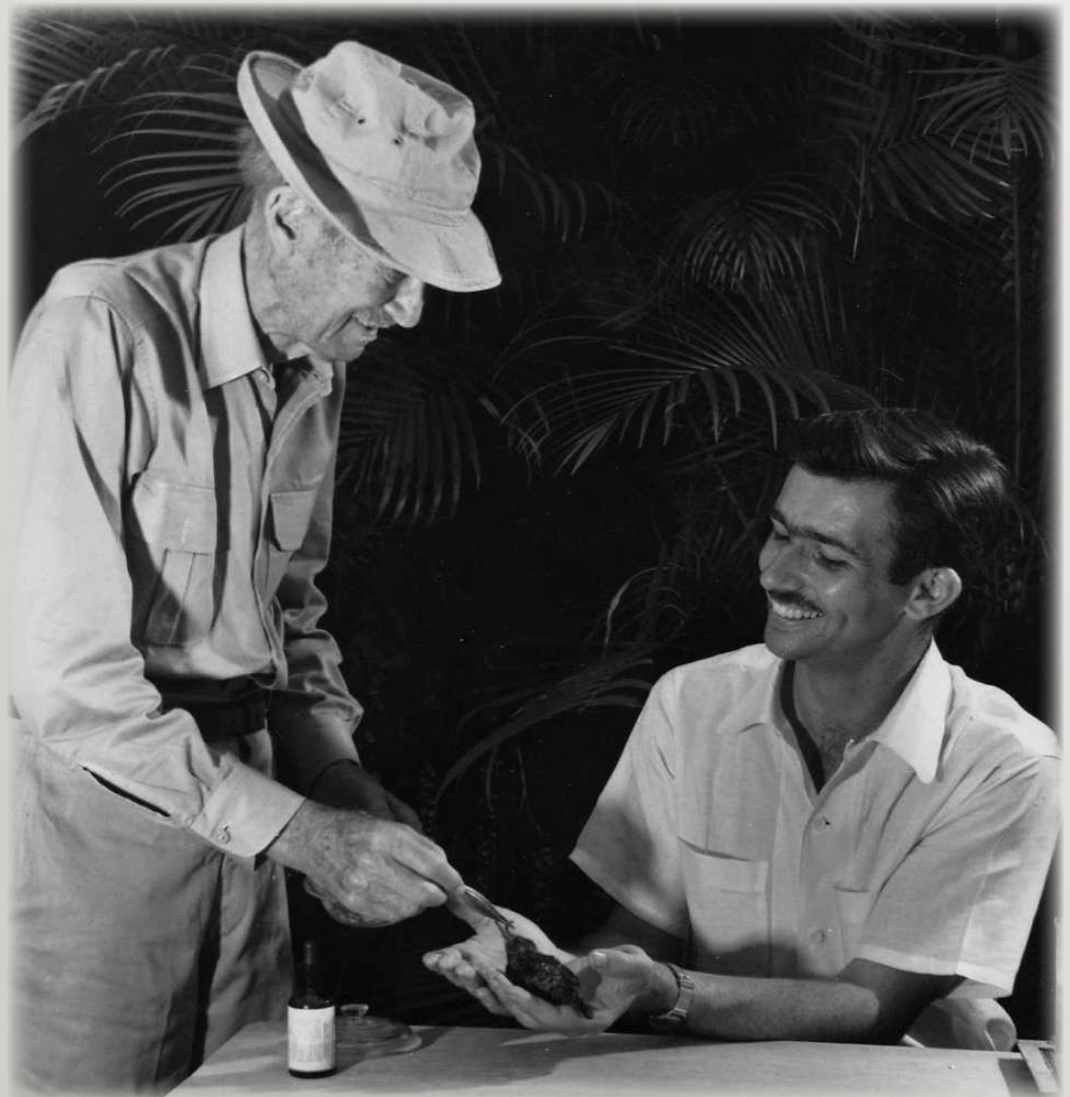
Amazingly enough, his work still continued. “In 1959, Conway had stayed at William Beebe’s (qv) Simla Research station, in Trinidad, mist

netting hummingbirds, tanagers, manakins, Rufous-tailed Jacamars (the only members of their family ever exhibited in a public zoo), and a male Bearded Bellbird, the first in captivity. The Bronx Zoo already had a Bare-throated and Three-wattled Bellbird, making a unique display. Three White-necked Rockfowl, the first in the U.S., were purchased in 1959. The series of toucans, already the finest in the world, was enhanced with the purchase of the first Plate-billed Mountain Toucan in an American Zoo in 1961. 640 taxa were present 31 December, 1961, but it was noted in the 1961 annual report that “The Society’s bird collection has now been equaled, in the United States, by that of the San Diego Zoological Society.... However, the proposed new Aquatic Bird House and the World of Birds building are planned to exhibit the finest live bird exhibits anywhere.” (Josef Lindholm, email, 22 October 2021)

Bill Conway’s concern extended beyond exotic species into native North American species; in the following case a highly endangered one.

A Hope Called Conway

Down to 14 individuals left in the late 1930s, the whooping crane was on the verge of extinction. The population of the entire species still hinged on about two dozen specimens nearly two decades later, as ably chronicled by Faith McNulty.



Conway with William Beebe, 1959, Trinidad. Courtesy of Mark Rosenthal

There was a well-publicized pair, named Josephine and Crip, at a zoo in New Orleans, and they successfully raised young. During the 1957 breeding season McNulty noted, in part: "The chicks took their first food when they were approximately a day old. At this stage the behavior of the birds was recorded by William Conway, Curator of Birds at the Bronx Zoo, who had come to New Orleans especially to see the infant cranes. 'The entire feeding process,' he wrote, 'is one that shows a delicacy of relationship and a degree of parental attentiveness that some ornithologists might be loath to credit to a bird.' He noted how carefully the parent worked the food in its bill and then, gently and precisely, offered small particle, perhaps a piece of shrimp or dragonfly, putting it directly in front of the chick's bill without quite touching it. If the chick failed to take it, the adult might cock its head and softly drop the food in front of the chick. The chicks at first pecked clumsily at the offerings, and then, with increasing strength, became more accurate." "Conway was fascinated by the interplay that accompanied Josephine's brooding of the chicks," she added. (McNulty, 1966)

New Orleans hosted the 1981-82 AAZPA annual conference. Conway appeared nostalgic in this town, and I asked him:

"Remembering McNulty?"

"Yes," he answered with a smile.

In many ways, Conway was an exceptional individual. Kimio Honda observed the leading zoo directors across Europe and North America. He noted some are genuine but lacked charisma; some wield big charisma, highly active, political and vocal but not a visionary. To sum up: "Generally speaking I feel that the zoo and aquarium professionals have become more insular, staying in their own bubbles. Curators mind their collection and the cooperative population managements but have no idea what is going on on a different continent. Directors mind their organizations and their causes but not about united power beyond the regional association. Of course there are exceptions but the zoo management has become very complex and so have the public communications. I see individual directors who do excellent things but it's really hard to stand out and all the critical topics such as world population have become hot buttons for public controversy, making it too risky to touch upon these issues." Conway did not fit in this category at all. "Conway was truly unique." (Email, 12 November 2021)

Bill created a new zoo and meshed it into something more than a zoo. Conway "redefined what zoos and aquariums should be and how they should operate," said Jim Breheny, the Director of the Bronx Zoo; "By the time Dr. Conway retired after 43 years, the society [WCS] was involved in more than 300 conservation projects in 52 countries. In the preceding decade, attendance at the city's zoos and aquarium had grown to 4.4 million from 3.1 million; the society's budget had more than doubled, to \$78 million; membership had tripled, to nearly 95,000; and private fundraising had doubled, to \$21 million." (Roberts, 2021) "At the Bronx Zoo, he [Conway] incorporated deep knowledge and understanding of animals and animal behavior into

exhibit design, creating some of the most cutting edge and best zoo exhibits in the world. These include the World of Darkness, World of Birds, Wild Asia, Children's Zoo, JungleWorld and Congo Gorilla Forest." (OurWCS Broadcast: Staff Information, 2021) "The city has consistently forked over money---including \$10.6 million for Congo---with few questions asked. In part, this is a result of Mr. Conway's razer-sharp negotiating skills." (Martin, 1999)

Of all innovative exhibits, I like to spend a few minutes at the Aquatic Bird House when I visit the Bronx Zoo. It is the prototype that shows basic design principles for the newer and much larger World of Birds. Personal choices aside, Congo Gorilla Forest is a true masterpiece out of all exhibits built during Conway's administration. Gorilla is used as a mannequin, so to speak, to get visitors to the door. Once inside it is a holistic introduction to creatures and their environment, using Africa as a tool. Without claiming to be "landscape immersion" it is a beautiful immersive approach.

Onto the inner circle of zoo men, as early as in 1999 "the old zoo men---or silverbacks as they like to call themselves, in honor of dominant male apes---mourn the impending loss of their leader. 'Bill is the guru of our profession,' said Ed Maruska, Director of the Cincinnati Zoo. George Rabb, Director of Chicago's Brookfield Zoo, called him 'the leader in terms of maintaining the relevance of our institutions in modern society.'" (Martin, 1999) Also, Conway's cordiality came in many ways.

When I publish a journal article I forward a pdf to a long list of colleagues across the world. Also, when I find an interesting document or news items I forward it to the members of the list. Yet not everyone acknowledges the receipt of such materials. In fact only a few would do so, although it only takes two words, "thank you" or just one, "Thanks", to respond via email. The response may depend on the recipients' age; the older, more amicable while the younger crowd, less responsive. They may not realize that just one little reprint can provide an opportunity to reap the dividends of their predecessor's toil. Maybe they think that receiving such materials is their birthright, their entitlement. Maybe the material is worthless, or simply they don't care. The only exception to the above was



At a 1960 AAZPA conference, from left: Paul Breese, Warren Thomas, (two persons in the middle unidentified) Bill Conway and Don Davis. Courtesy of Paul Breese

Bill Conway and that alone separated him from everyone else. Each time he responded with comments, brief or at times quite lengthy, adding his opinion. As far as I know, Bill treated others in the same courteous manner.

It is a fair assumption that many in the zoo and wildlife conservation circles wished that they had known him more. But Bill often projected the façade of the Pope, as the rabbi from the Bronx mentioned previously. To put it another way, it was the high priest image of the “Conservation Cathedral” (WCS) that may have kept folks at a distance. “Dr. Conway’s tweedy attire, and his use of Britishism like ‘cheerio’ suggested that he hailed from the Midlands rather than the Midwest (he was born in St. Louis).” (Roberts, 2021) Yet, once that perceived barrier crumbled down, you would find a man with flesh and blood. David Oehler remembers:

“Bill spoke fondly of Beebe and his time on Trinidad. The only negative period was when he and Bell [Joe] drove off the road, flipping their car several times down the steep embankment. This resulted in a lifetime issue with back pain. As only Bill could do, he made the story very interesting to hear. If you have ever been to Trinidad and traveled to the research center and/or Asa Wright Nature Centre, you know that the roads there are treacherous, narrow, winding, and carved into steep hillsides. He and Bell were driving up to the center with a car load of camera equipment. They found themselves off the road, tumbling down the hillside into a creek bed. The camera equipment was thrown throughout the path down the hill. Bill was impressed with the help he received from the locals and the fact that they retrieved all of the equipment and returned it to them in a neat package. The funny part, particularly if you insert his cadence and distinct inflections, was that Bell had suffered a fairly nasty gash above his eye that required stitches. The locals helped transport them to the doctor and the wound was cleaned and prepared for closure. Then the doctor runs the suture material through his mouth, in the same manner a seamstress would do when threading a needle. This amused Bill to no end. Anyway, this is just one example of why I so enjoyed meeting up with him and having our lunches...great stories!” (Email to Kimio Honda and Ken Kawata, 18 February 2022)

Bits and Pieces

Three men, the story goes, dragged American zoos into the twenty-first century while they were screaming and kicking. They were: Ulie Seal, George Rabb and of course, Bill Conway. Your writer was extremely fortunate and privileged to have known these men as dear friends. In his later years Bill Conway and I frequently exchanged emails, comparing views and values, and informed each other. He also provided me photos, many of which he took during his overseas excursions (see examples in this account). Here follows a selection of his emails. He often closed his emails with “Warm regards, Bill.”

Humor is the other side of sorrow. Bill was known for a rather unique sense of hu-

mor.

Once, in my writing I made a basic error and felt bad and circulated a memo:

Ladies and Gentlemen: Boy, my face is red. In my Swiss report a very basic error has been found by one of you and I apologize for this (if you’ve found more, please let me know). On page 3, the third line from the bottom, in 1956 Basel Zoo had the world’s first birth of Indian *rhinoceros*, not elephant! The report was whipped up in a hurry, but that makes no excuse.

Here comes Bill’s response:

“As you know, perfection is unacceptable.” (19 October 2013)

A few years later I heard that Bill was ill and required to stay home; in other words, he was quarantined. Sorry to hear about that, I said. His response:

“I have been informed that the new drink, which must be taken alone, is the Quarantini.

Well, let’s hope for the best.” (12 March 2020) (Sorry, this one is not so funny.)

Bill candidly mourned the loss of friends. Over the passing of George Rabb (27 July 2017) he noted:

“As you probably know, George and I were personal friends as well as colleagues for many many years. We often made a point of touring zoos at conferences together and bouncing observations back and forth. When I first knew him he was essentially a lab biologist but he developed rapidly when given more authority. Mary [George’s wife] ran the best zoo book shop I ever saw.”

When Gary Clarke died (13 January 2020) Bill had this to say:

[Initially] “I’m shocked! Gary and I just had a lengthy and delightful talk on the phone and he just sent me some more stuff.” [Later he noted] “When Gary and I were both on the AZA board, Gary was always on the good side of an issue, in my



Conway with zoo’s Asian elephants. Courtesy of Mark Rosenthal

opinion and was a very real help when I was trying to get the Accreditation Program approved. A Friend sorely missed."

The current zoo staff deserves a critical eye every now and then. Here is Bill's two cents.

"I hope zoo professionals don't lose sight of what it takes to be a professional. I well remember the situation before we introduced accreditation and, a few years later SSP. Without those checks, balances and leashes, I fear that animal rights people would have had good reason to close zoos. Unfortunately, some colleagues tell me that the importance of zoological administration is not being sufficiently emphasized these days. This surprises me." (8 October 2019)

One day our discussion expanded and reached overseas. Bill remembered the Heck family, a zoo dynasty in Europe.

"As it happens, I was acquainted with some of the Hecks and with the St. Louis panda (Pao Bei) which I cared for briefly in Saint Louis as young teen-ager. I knew Heinz Heck the younger and Heinz Heck the older and Ludwig Heck (slightly), former director of Berlin, and I visited with Heinz Heck, Director of the Munich Zoo in 1963. There were a multitude of Hecks (zoo directors) and Ruhe's, Animal Dealers. The Hecks were quite disliked by the majority of German Zoo directors who put them out of the German association—Nazi associations, I heard.

Young Lutz I knew slightly, but it was his uncle Heinz that

I knew best and the Heinz of the Munich Zoo. Among other things Munich's Heck was important to the development of a studbook for Przewalski Horses. I remember him as being exceptionally well informed and a terrific observer and am grateful for some of the things he told me about grouse. His house on the Munich Zoo grounds had a lovely collection of animal paintings." (26 January 2020)

Back to the U.S., he sent me an inquiry about my email address. That is a question I love to answer. Back in the old Indianapolis Zoo I studied red-tailed hawk parental behavior which became my master's degree thesis, and later published in Germany. I felt closeness (kinship, perhaps) to the red-tailed hawk. Hence the email address.

"Being naturally curious, I've long wondered why you chose a genus of broad-wing hawks [*Buteo*] to initiate your e-mail address?

While still in St. Louis, I studied red-tailed hawks and kept one brought to me as a nestling for years. He wasn't very good at hunting and my skill was about the same. But he did not starve and roadkills were useful.

I spent much time in the top of a huge Sycamore making a lecture film about the nest and took some terrific falls climbing icy bark in the winter! But, I remember red-tails fondly." (2 November 2020)

Once upon a time St. Louis Zoo had a circus, a jaw-dropping history for younger zoo professionals. Even more sinful, Bill Conway was a part of it!

"As an intern, I worked with all three of the Saint Louis Zoo shows. The elephant trainer pictured is Floyd Smith, the big cat trainer, as noted, is Jules Jacot, the chimp trainer on the left is Mike Kostial (His father was the previous lion trainer) and the unidentified trainer on the right is Ben Fredericks. The big central elephant is Clara Bell, named for her do-



Floyd Smith with elephants at St. Louis Zoo. Photos courtesy of Buckles Blog, 27 September 2014



*Jules Jacot with cats at St. Louis Zoo. Photos courtesy of Buckles Blog, 27 September 2014
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Mike Kostial with chimps at St. Louis Zoo. Photos courtesy of Buckles Blog, 27 September 2014

nor, Clara Bell Walsh, who moved to NYC and was one of the famous widows living in the Plaza Hotel. I met her there and had dinner with her about 1951 or 2. The elephant on Clara Bell's right, in the first and second picture, is Vi." (29 September 2014)

Regarding Jules Jacot: "He was a remarkably athletic man and continued to work with the big cats until he appeared quite elderly. I had several memorable experiences while helping him. Once, watching him train a leopard to charge him (and stop just in time) on the end of a safety rope held by a large somewhat 'limited' keeper, a telephone rang. The keeper dropped the rope to get the telephone! What happened next was very special, as what happened after that to the keeper. I knew Jules predecessor, Kostial, father of the famous chimp keeper Michael Kostial, as well. But Jacot was old time circus tradition." (10 November 2014)

For the most part of his career Bill was an administrator, away from shoveling elephant dung in hot and humid summer days, or being chased and kicked by ratites, or bitten by psittacines. Yet, animal care remains the foundation of the zoo world. Bill reminisces St. Louis Zoo days:

"I had the very good fortune to begin as a summer keeper in reptiles, birds and mammals and then to work for years for chimp, lion and elephant trainers and their animals close-up (the cats and bears not so close!). I went to a University next door to the zoo and could attend an 8 a.m. class and be at the zoo by 9:30 a.m. But I always saw zoos as a way of understanding and sustaining nature and, field work and conservation central and zoo work as supportive and peripheral. Which is why I have focused on helping to catalyze parks since retirement.

However, I am convinced that good zoos are the best tool we have to sustain nature, if used well and imaginatively. If not, close 'em! David Attenborough is providing work that must be more closely tied to pushing the role of zoos and wildlife—and the well-being of wildlife." (18 January 2020)

"My direct experience of zookeeping in zoos derives from the Saint Louis Zoo, where I began summer and volunteer keeping in 1945; the Colorado Springs zoo, where I worked as a part-time advisor in the 1950s and, for a short time, as director/curator; and, of course, in the Bronx, Central Park, Queens and Prospect Park zoos where I worked as curator (Bronx) then director. Besides, like you, I have been deeply interested in animal keeping for "donkey's years" and have spent quite a bit of time talking with keepers and curators in Europe and the U.S. and in other parts of the world, learning. Zoo keeping is a fascinating profession and it can be a rewarding life experience."

"Very few species can be successfully managed long-term by a single institution. Viable populations of almost every critter over 20 pounds will almost always require population characteristics too large for a single institution. Sadly, there are still zoo administrators who do not realize that. The time when zoo exhibits could be replenished from nature is drawing to a quick and ungraceful close. Thus, keepers are dealing with a rapidly disappearing resource and the importance of their work is growing ever greater." (3 March 2020)



*Bill Conway in the twilight of his career.
Courtesy of Mark Rosenthal*

And Do Not Forget "the Bullfrog"

Conway published about 200 articles and a book, *Act III in Patagonia* (2005). Russell Tofts was quite impressed with one of the articles. He commented, in part: "I first encountered the name via the International Zoo Year Book, Volume 13 (1973) of this indispensable journal carried an article by William Conway with the intriguing title 'How to exhibit a bullfrog: a bedtime story for zoo men', that had originally appeared in a publication called *Curator II* in 1968. That article, often cited as one of the most influential of our time, echoed my own thoughts. I was fed up with reading simple signs on zoo enclosures that gave only the barest of information, usually little more information than the species' name, scientific name and country of origin. I believed that zoos should do all they can to make every exhibit, a special exhibit, regardless the status of the animal. ... Too many animals, particularly the commoner kinds, were being used as little more than enclosure fillers. ... To an extent, this still goes on in the zoo world. Bill Conway was one of the first to recognize that it didn't have to be this way. He took one familiar species --- a bullfrog --- which traditionally makes quite an unexciting, dare I say it even dull, public exhibit, and showed how it could be presented in a more dynamic way. The possibilities for public education were, he explained, limited only by the imagination of zoo staff." (Tofts, 2021)

Vast experience and knowledge can become a chaotic mass if an author is not careful. The job for him is to find a shape into which the chaos can fit. Conway's work of pulling off a good sentence after the other was trickier than it looked. In addition to a popular approach shown above, Bill authored accounts in a more formalized format. One of them was about the changing role of zoos, presented in the year of his retirement. As usual he based his argument on a wider range of sources, from a CEO of General Electric to E. O. Wilson, continuing to turn his eyes on the world outside zoos. In that arena he discussed conflict between domesticated mammals and wildlife which devastated habitat and spreading diseases.

The dawn of the new millennium was upon us, and he took a critical view on world's zoos.

Looking into the inside of the zoo, education programs, for instance, came under microscopic examination. "We seldom teach the unsettling facts of population biology and even more rarely relate it to our visitor's own behavior," then he asked the question, "How can we modify our vision?" In the end he pointed up to the lofty goal for zoos: "Thus the 21st Century zoo must be redesigned as a hedge against biotic impoverishment; a time machine buying continuance for faltering wildlife populations; a corridor of care between parks and reserves; and, more than ever, humanity's primary introduction to wildlife, promoter of environmental literacy and recruiting center for conservationists." (Conway, 1999)

A decade after retirement away from the daily pressure of administrative duties, his demeanor and worldview hardly showed any signs of relaxation. "...the world's leading zoos commit to focusing their efforts on conserving wildlife... However, to date, this same group of zoos has largely failed to manage its own populations of wildlife sustainably despite

distinguished calls to action over the past 25 years, significant scientific input and much organizational effort.” Getting down to the nitty-gritty of a popular mammal group, the primates, “Checking current figures, I found that only a tiny fraction of SSP *Cercopithecus* is kept in appropriately composed ‘breeding’ populations. In nature, most live in groups. In zoos, they are commonly exhibited in pairs where they rarely breed. For example, in 2007, the 40 Diana monkeys (*Cercopithecus diana*) separated among 16 AZA zoos produced no births. Even mandrills (*Mandrillus sphinx*), which naturally live in large multi-male troops, are mostly kept in unproductive pairs (108 mandrills in 35 zoos, only 2 born in 2009).”

You can feel frustration and impatience oozing out from every paragraph and it is a convincing presentation. Toward the end Bill returned to the effect of increasing human population growth and habitat destruction. “During the next 100 years, the only hope for many wonderful and charismatic species will be zoo care and park stewardship. The potential zoo role in the intensifying nature of wildlife conservation is unique, and it is up to zoos as well as parks to save as many species as they can for as long as they can, to buy time for wildlife.” (Conway, 2010)

Trees and Binoculars

During the day visitors focus on animal exhibits, rarely seem aware of the towering trees that envelop them. Once the gates close and visitors are gone, the zoo switches itself into a different world. The deep forest comes back alive. The crowd’s cheering is replaced with songbirds’ chirping as they recapture tree canopies even for a brief moment before sunset. Somehow this piece of the Bronx has not been choked up by our repulsive hands.

It was a pleasant evening but I do not recall when; it could have been the 1980s or 1990s, but that matters little. I was strolling the zoo grounds with a staff member when we noted Bill Conway with a pair of binoculars in his hand, apparently

bird watching. We acknowledged each other but spoke no words. Nearby the river flew through the remnant of the forest that survived the human element. Bill always looked younger than his age until he reached the end of middle age. Also, he had a vague resemblance to James Mason, the British actor, especially the eyes. Anyway he was a pioneer, way above the throng. He carved out his niche in the world’s zoos and nature conservation field and now was the leader. Ahead of his time he stood alone, just as he was that evening in the park. All his accomplishments, honors and global fame appeared so distant at that moment. He lived with his wife and they had no children or a pet dog. As a visionary he must have found no one else close to him.

Totally oblivious to such thoughts, the man who resembled James Mason shifted his binoculars to the other hand.

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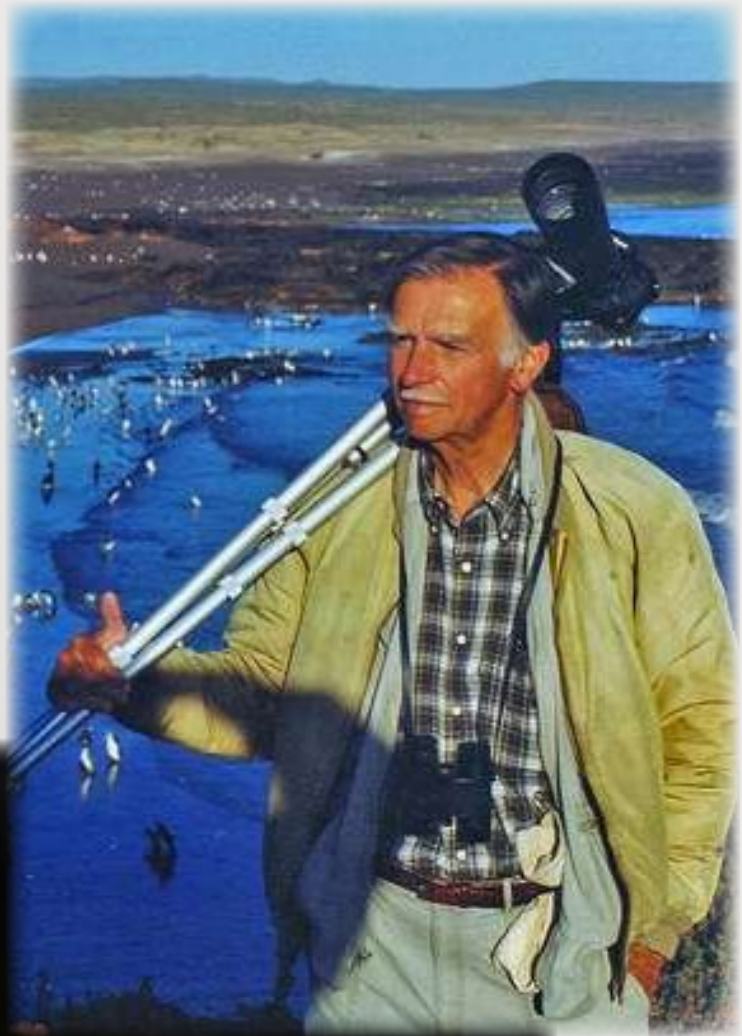
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“Kix [his wife] and I rarely send cards but, every once in a while, I send off one of my pictures and so glorify my hobby. (Some are on the “Wild View” blog of WCS’s Julie Maher). Anyway, here’s favorite from Bogoria, [East Africa] lesser flamingos and rufs.” (Email attachment, 22 December 2015)



Right: Conway in his favorite research field in Tombo, Argentina. Courtesy of Mark Rosenthal

Below: "For your amusement, here is a picture I took of an uncommon cormorant (red-legged) high on a cliff over the Atlantic on my last Patagonian trip. WCS's photographer used it for a "WILDVIEW" valentine." (Email attachment, 15 February 2015)

