

# NEW WORLDS, NEW ANIMALS

From Menagerie to Zoological Park  
in the Nineteenth Century

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*Edited by R. J. Hoage and William A. Deiss*

WITH A FOREWORD BY MICHAEL H. ROBINSON

The Johns Hopkins University Press  
Baltimore and London

To all Smithsonian employees, past and present, on the occasion of the Smithsonian Institution's 150th anniversary (1846-1996), for their devoted efforts to further the goals of the Institution.

This book has been brought to publication with the generous assistance of the Friends of the National Zoo.

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98 97 96      5 4 3 2 1

The Johns Hopkins University Press  
2715 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4319  
The Johns Hopkins Press Ltd., London

Frontispiece: A Berlin monkey house, ca. 1884. For details see caption on p. 67.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data will be found at the end of this book.

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-8018-5110-6    ISBN 0-8018-5373-7 (pbk.)

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## THE VALUE OF OLD PHOTOGRAPHS OF ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

**T**he collation and study of old photographs is of the greatest importance in an examination of the history of zoos. They show us, more precisely than drawings or verbal descriptions, what the zoos of the past looked like and how their inhabitants were housed and managed. More generally, they may confirm what we already know or strongly suspect. They also evoke the atmosphere of these institutions in the past and furnish a clue to the function they played in society. A passage from Heini Hediger's book *Man and Animal in the Zoo* (1969) explains very well the significance of records, of which photographs form an important part:

[T]he lack of respect shown to old buildings, and the summary way in which outmoded structures are dealt with is greatly to be deplored. When a decision has been made to build a new animal house . . . the zoo director is so delighted that he arranges for the demolition to go ahead without taking the trouble to record, even in pictorial form, what the old building with all its ancient equipment [looked] like.

This attitude is understandable but it leads to the irretrievable loss of historical material as, unfortunately, there is still not a single . . . museum [for zoos] anywhere in the world today. . . . [S]ome of the earlier breeding successes are no longer achieved today and it is possible that we [could] learn more about the reasons for this by studying the external conditions under which the animals [once] were kept.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the decades that have passed since Hediger's plea, no zoo museum has been established, and this failure gives photographic records an enhanced value.

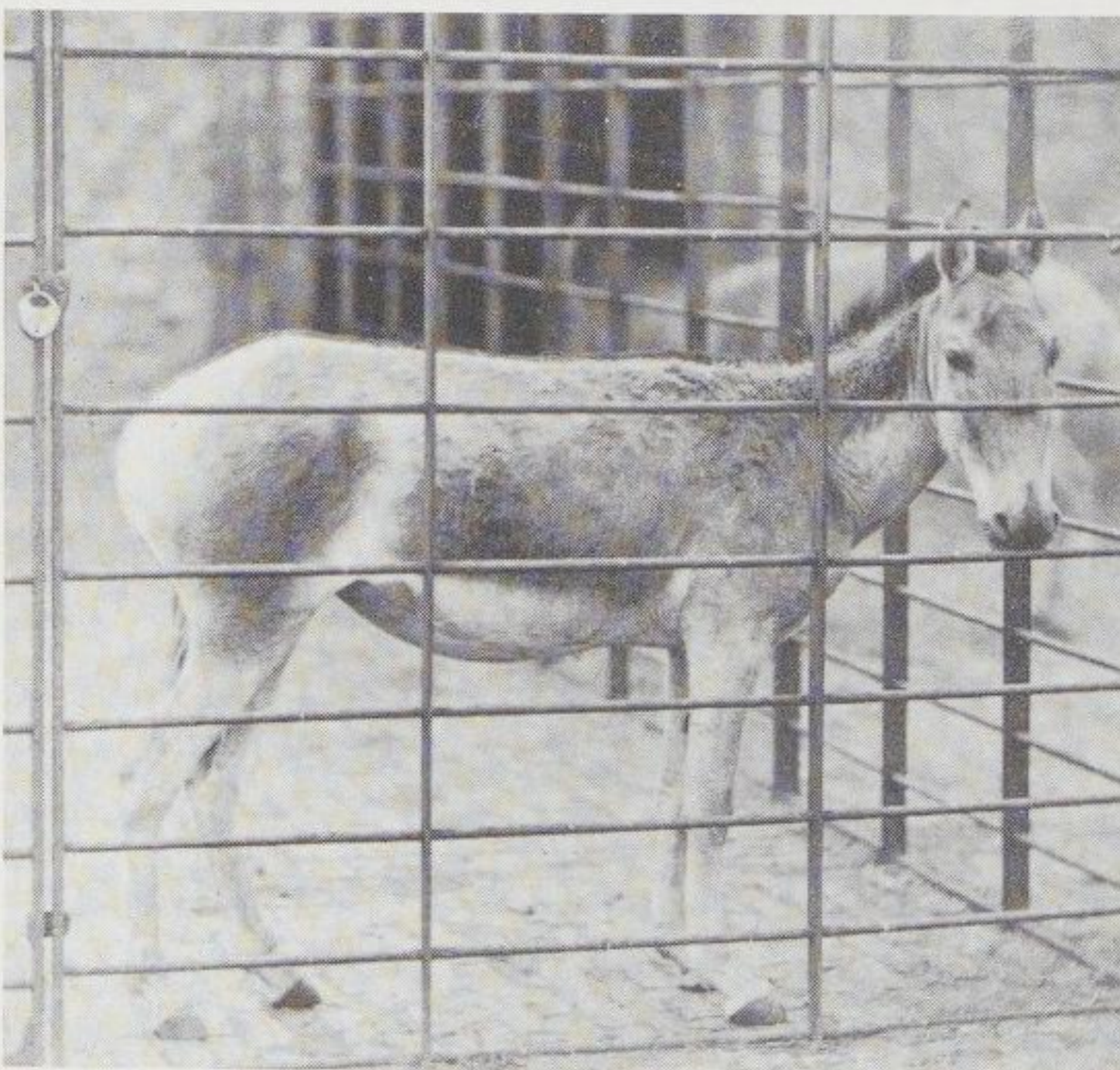
Moving from emphasis on zoo buildings to their inhabitants, we must remember that until the last few decades, almost all the specimens exhibited in zoological collections were either wild caught or the immediate offspring of wild-caught animals. This is no longer so, and as time passes, stock of any one species is likely to become hybridized and inbred; eventually the animals may lose some of their resemblance to their wild ancestors. In these circumstances, the impor-

tance of photographs is obvious and need not be labored. An excellent example of the use of photographs in this context is Dr. Erna Mohr's 1959 work on Przewalski's wild horse.<sup>2</sup> Since her time, many studbooks (pedigree files) contain photographs of key breeding animals.

We can also learn about the way in which animals were handled. Thus the photograph of the London Zoo's Asiatic bull elephant, Dr. Jim, reveals the unnecessary risks taken by Edwardian era keepers. There are few modern primate keepers who can suppress a shudder when they are shown photographs of children embracing a subadult male chimpanzee (capable of ripping them limb

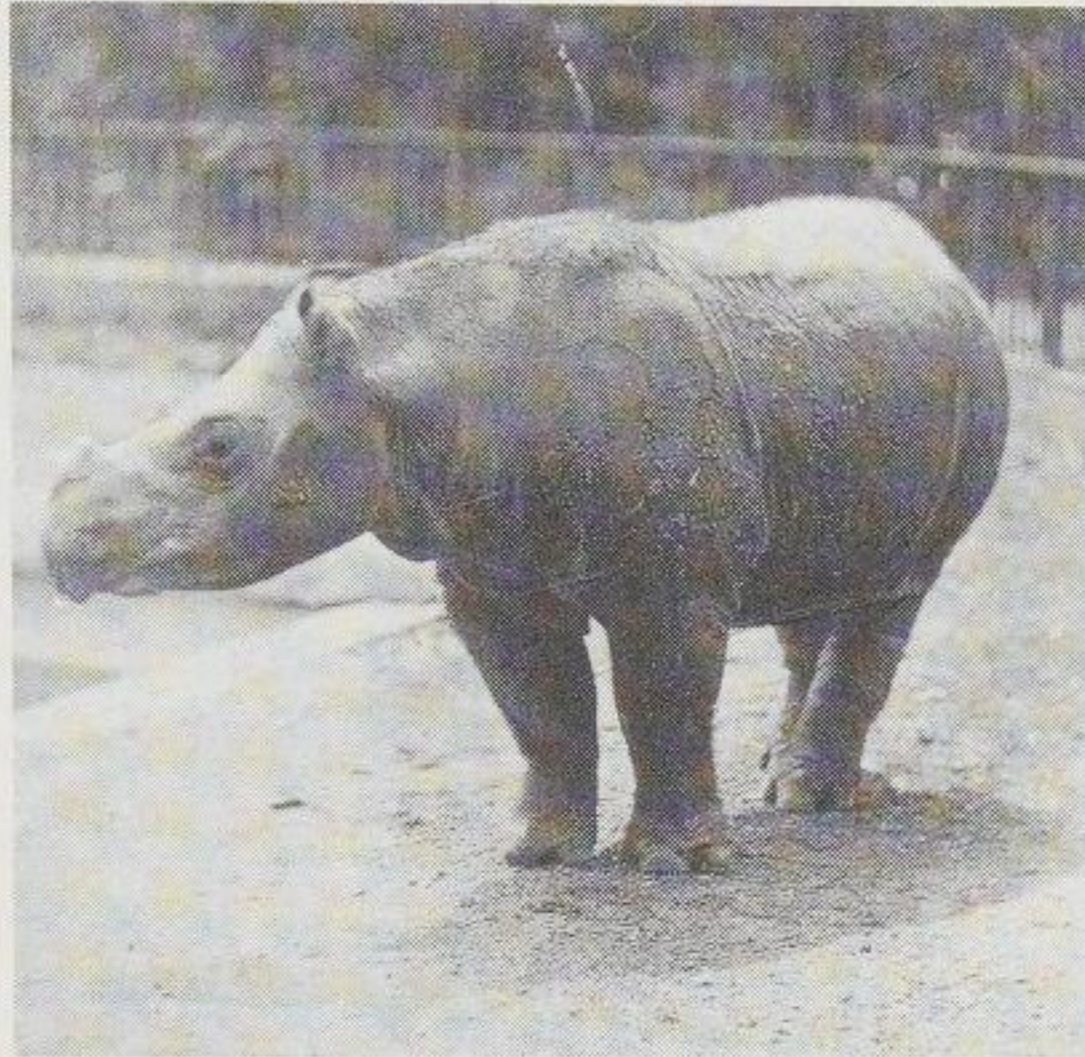


Quagga (*Equus quagga*): one of two photographs taken at the London Zoo by Frederick York, summer 1870. Three additional photos of the same animal, probably taken by Frank Haes in 1864, still exist. This female, purchased from animal dealer Carl Jamrach in 1851, was the only one of her kind to be photographed alive. Her skin is now imaginatively exhibited in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, Scotland, and her skeleton is in the Peabody Museum at Yale University. The last quagga died in Amsterdam in 1883. (Collection of John Edwards)

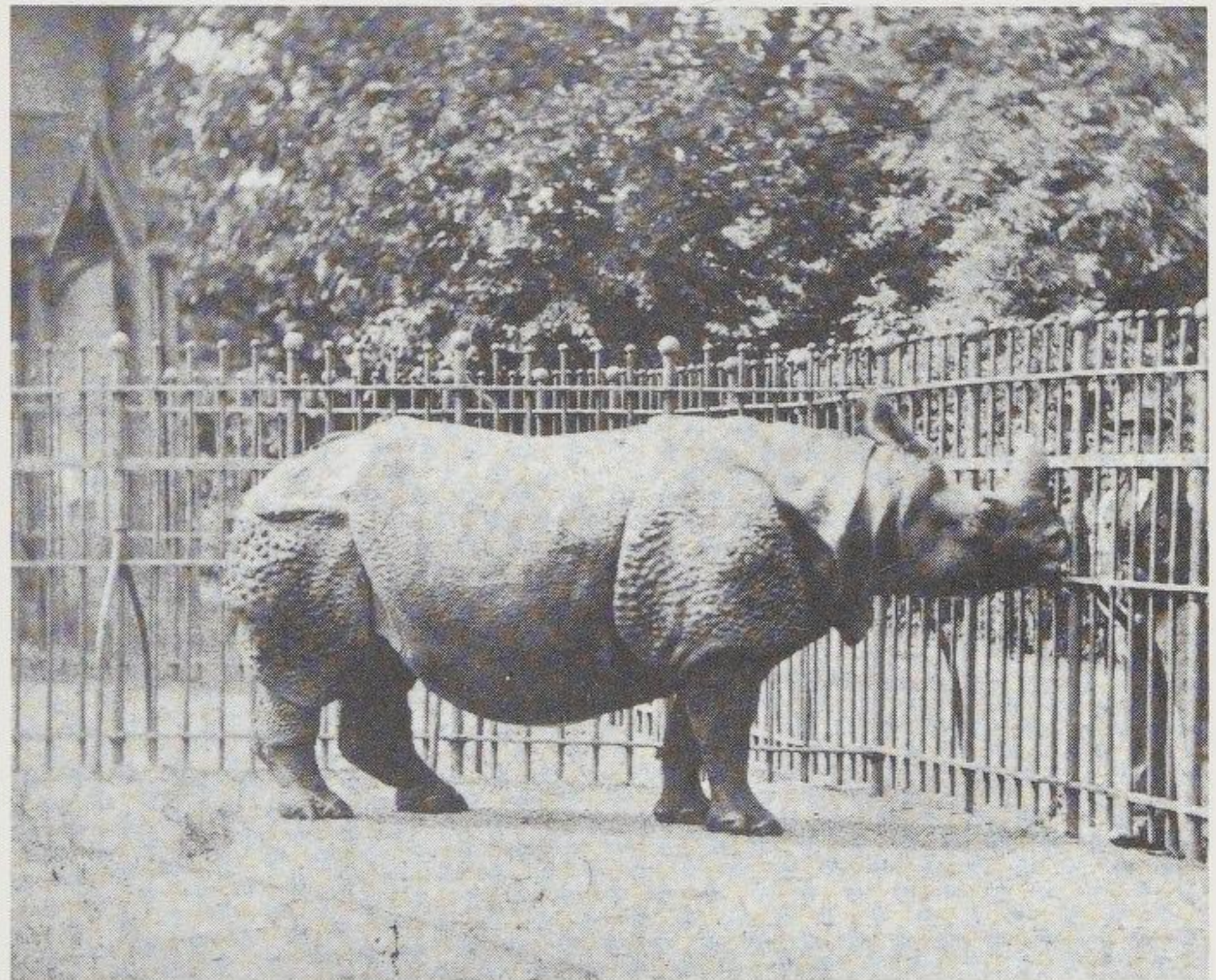


Syrian wild ass (*Equus hemionus hemippus*) at the London Zoo, photographed by Frederick York about 1870. This subspecies, the smallest of the modern equids, is believed to have become extinct about 1930. (Collection of John Edwards)

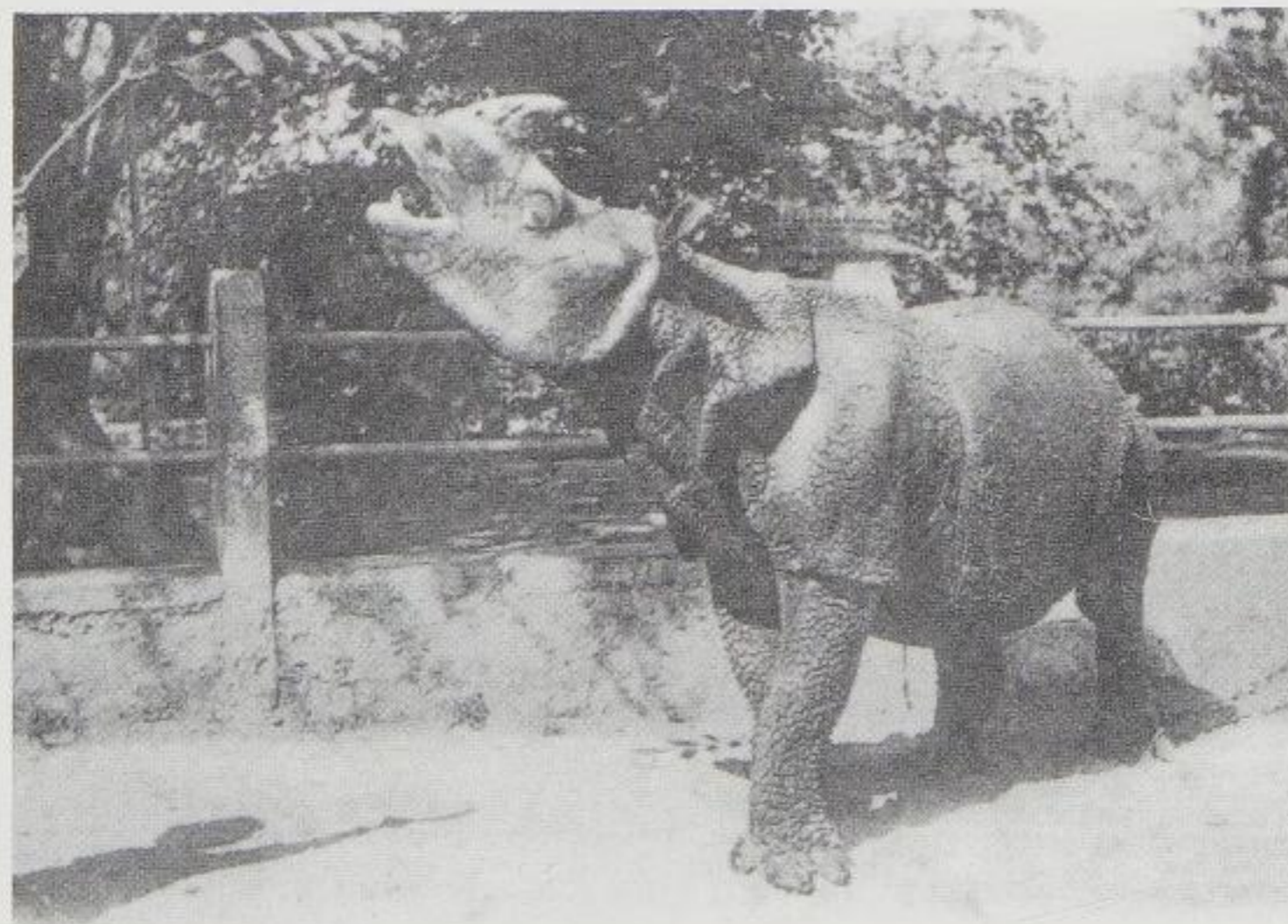
Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) at the London Zoo, August or September 1872. A relatively common exhibit in late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century zoos, this, the smallest of living rhinos, is today one of the rarest and most sought-after species. (Collection of John Edwards)



Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), "Miss Bet," the London Zoo's second rhino, photographed by Frank Haes in summer 1864. This and a similar photograph taken at the same time, now preserved in the archives of the Zoological Society of London, are probably the first photographs ever taken of a living rhinoceros. (Collection of John Edwards)



Javan rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) in an Indian zoo (ca. 1900). This species is one of the rarest placental mammals and has not been seen in captivity since one died in the Adelaide Zoo, Australia, in 1907. (Collection of John Edwards)

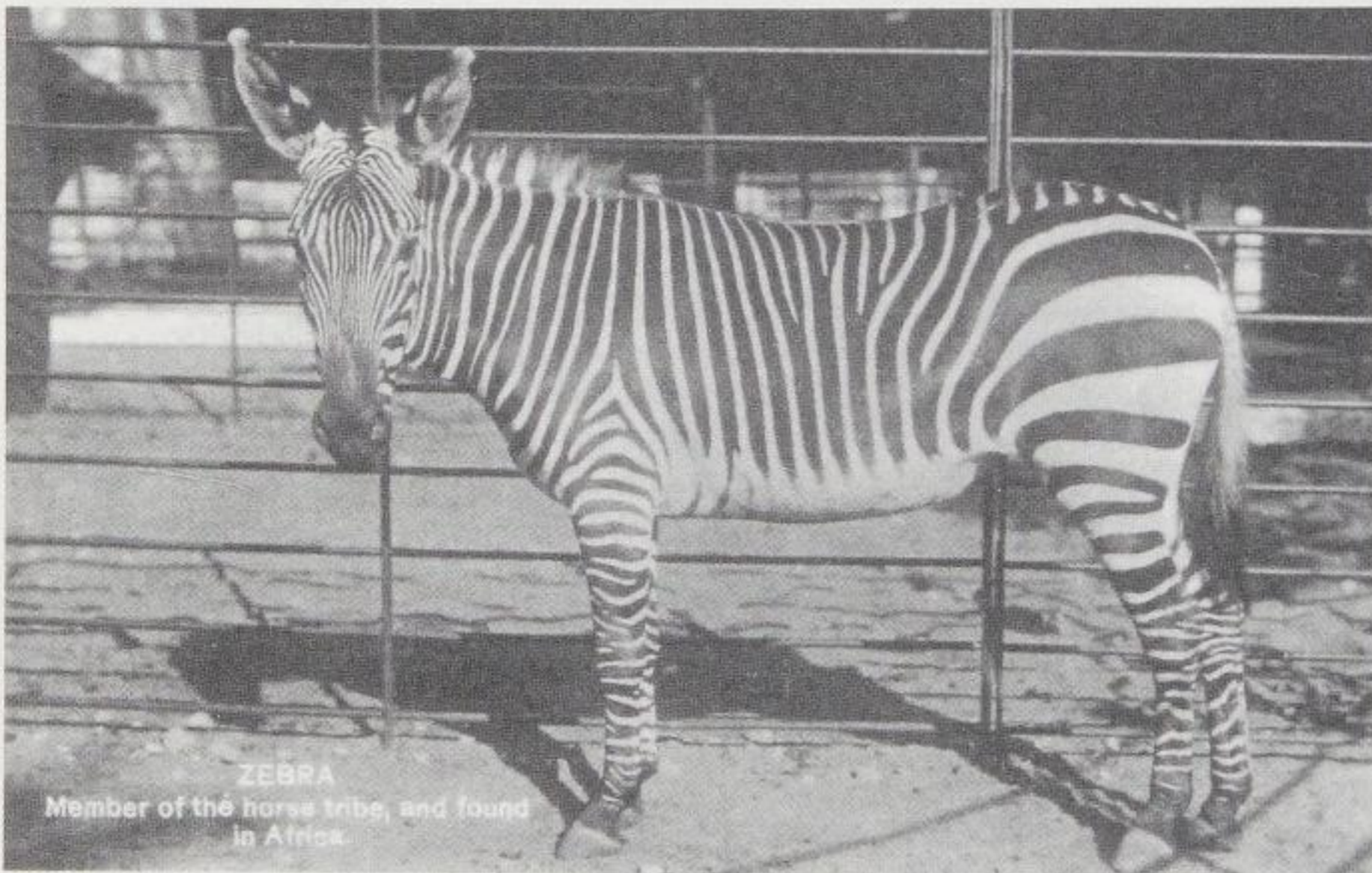


from limb) in the Children's Zoo at the London Zoo in 1938. Other photographs reveal how hoofed stock were often kept on insufficiently hard surfaces, resulting in grotesquely overgrown hooves. On the positive side, other photos provide evidence of the affection that existed between keeper and kept.

An interesting use of photographs is to be found in a 1940 issue of the American periodical *Parks and Recreation*. The superintendent of Sydney's Taronga Zoo used photographs of the aged cow elephant "Jessie," taken during the previous fifty-seven years (the first in 1882, the second in 1939), in order to solicit estimates of her age.<sup>3</sup>

Cape mountain zebra (*Equus zebra*) at the Berlin Zoo (ca. 1905). Despite being known as the "common zebra," this, the smallest of living zebras,

was accorded special protection as early as 1656, and by the beginning of the twentieth century it was one of the most prestigious and valuable exhibits in such Western zoos as New York, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, and London. At the time of the outbreak of the Second World War there were barely fifty individuals left in South Africa. Since then numbers have increased slowly, but there are none to be seen outside Africa. (Collection of John Edwards)



ZEBRA  
Member of the horse tribe, and found  
in Africa.



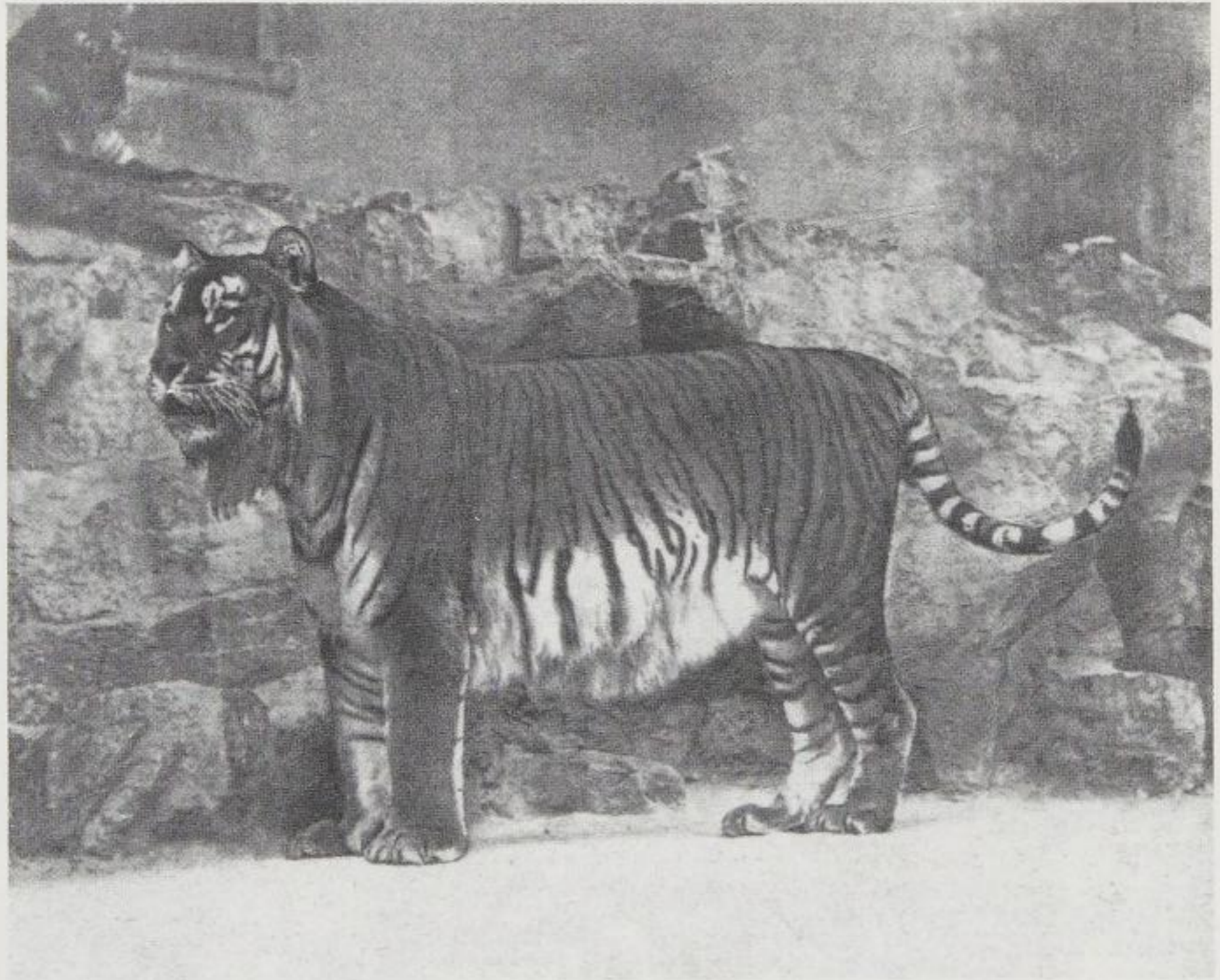
Thylacines, or Tasmanian wolves (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*), at Beaumaris, Hobart, Tasmania (ca. 1910). This carnivorous marsupial is probably extinct; none has been seen in captivity since 1936. (Collection of John Edwards)



Most important, however, photographs are the best method for showing what extinct animals looked like. Mounted specimens, however well prepared, generally distort and fade with time. Thus we owe our most satisfactory images of many now extinct animals, such as the quagga, the Syrian wild ass, the thylacine, the Bubal hartebeest, Schomburgk's deer, and the pink-headed duck, to the photograph.

Having acknowledged this, we must ask why nineteenth-century zoos made so very little use of photography. The first photographs ever taken in a zoo were almost certainly those taken by the count of Montizon at the London Zoo in the

Caspian tiger (*Panthera tigris virgata*) at the Berlin Zoo (ca. 1895). This subspecies has seldom been seen in zoos and is now probably extinct. (Collection of John Edwards)



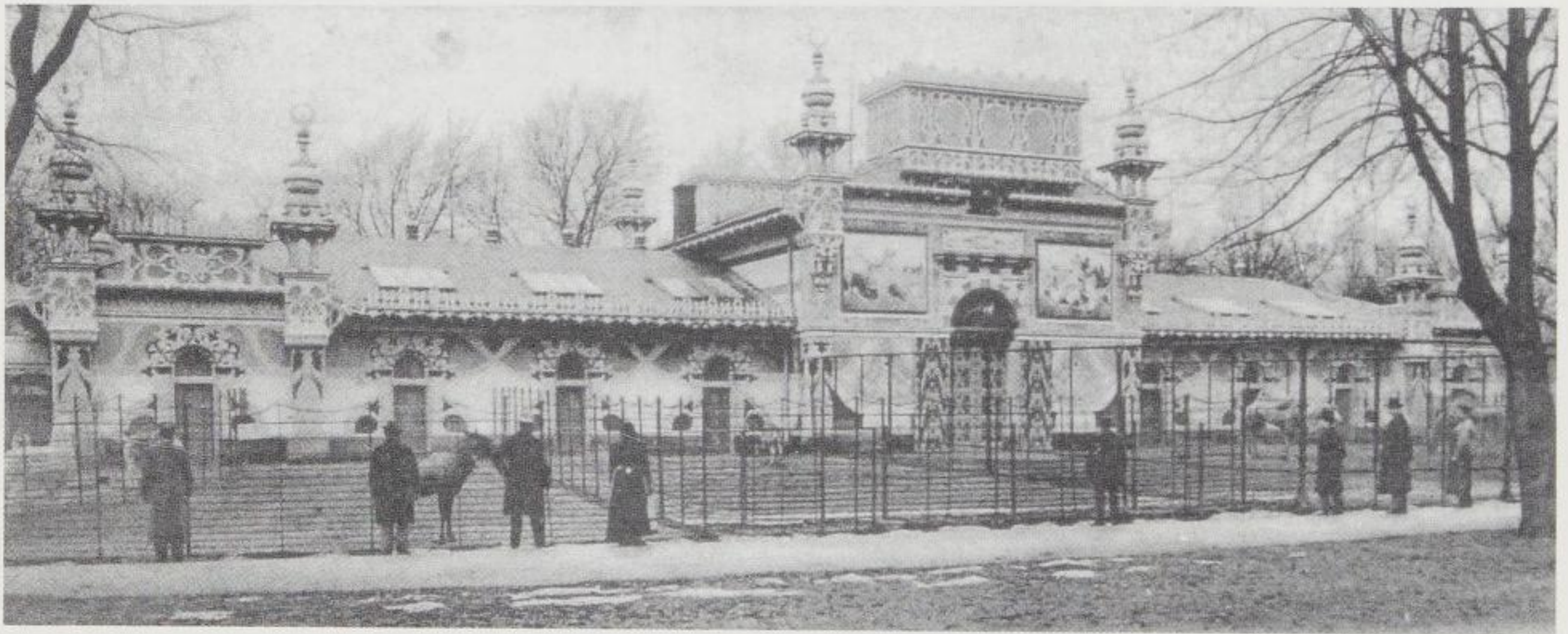
Specimens from the Hagenbeck importation of Przewalski's wild horse (*Equus przewalskii*) at the London Zoo in the spring of 1902. (Collection of John Edwards)



summer of 1852. The photos were exhibited at the Royal Society of Arts in December of that year where they were admired by Queen Victoria. Montizon's reason for working at the London Zoo seems to have been to display his skill as a photographer, rather than to record the appearance of animals. Remember that the long exposures and wet plates of the period meant that many hours could be spent in procuring an image of which a modern child would be ashamed. The Zoological Society of London showed polite interest in one of the images (a

Antelope House at the Dresden Zoo (ca. 1900). It was built in the once fashionable Moorish style for antelope, camels, zebras, and giraffes, and its bars were placed so

close together that feeding by the public was impossible—an unusual feature for the time. (Collection of John Edwards)



Asiatic bull elephant "Dr. Jim" at the London Zoo (ca. 1905). The keeper is a long way from the elephant, perhaps the most dangerous zoo animal, despite the fact that it is laden with passengers, including a boy astride its neck. Such overconfidence was almost disastrous, for in 1908 this elephant tried to kill his keeper, who was saved only by the courageous intervention of the head elephant keeper, Charles Eyles. Shortly after this incident, Dr. Jim was sold to the Buenos Aires Zoo. (Collection of John Edwards)

African elephants, “Jumbo” and “Alice,” photographed by Frederick York at the London Zoo about 1870. This photograph disproves the frequent assertion that these famous elephants never saw each other. (Collection of John Edwards)



Cape lion (*Panthera leo melanochaitus*) by an unknown photographer in the Jardin des Plantes, Paris (ca. 1860). This subspecies became extinct about 1865. This is the only known photograph of a living specimen. (Collection of John Edwards)

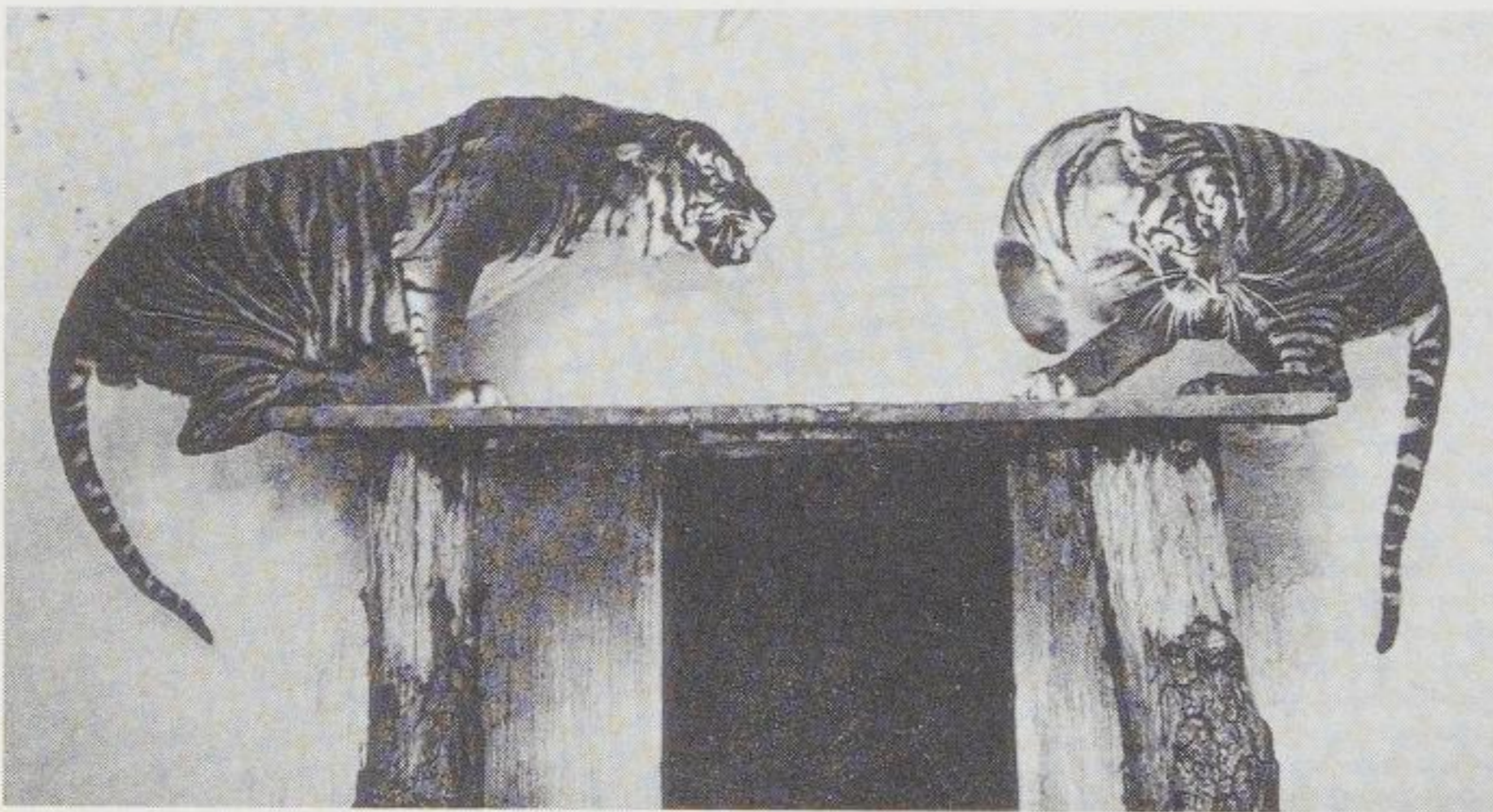


Burchell’s zebra, or “bontequagga” (*Equus burchelli burchelli*), in the Philadelphia Zoo (ca. 1875). This subspecies, which had no stripes on its legs, is believed to have become extinct about 1915.



photograph of a pike) but continued throughout the nineteenth century to lavish considerable sums on illustrating its “Proceedings” and “Transactions” with commissioned watercolors of its most interesting specimens from artists such as Edward Lear, John Gould, or Joseph Wolf. One reason for this may have been that a watercolorist, unlike a photographer, could record the plumage of birds accurately.

Later photographers, such as Frank Haes, Frederick York, T. J. Dixon, George Washington Wilson, or Gambier Bolton, were professionals whose motive was profit, not the establishment of a scientific record. This lack of interest is all the more surprising in that photographs were occasionally used in a scientific context; a celebrated instance of this occurred during a meeting of the Zoological Society of London in 1873 when the secretary, Dr. Sclater, exhibited a photograph of the first pygmy hippopotamus to be brought to Europe. Unfortunately, this print has not survived, which is perhaps evidence that it was regarded as an ephemeral item, too insignificant for preservation in the society’s archives. In a similar spirit, the Zoological Society of London continued to illustrate its guide



Javan tigers (*Panthera tigris sondaica*) in the Berlin Zoo (ca. 1908). This, the smallest living subspecies, is now either extinct or reduced to a handful of animals. (Collection of John Edwards)



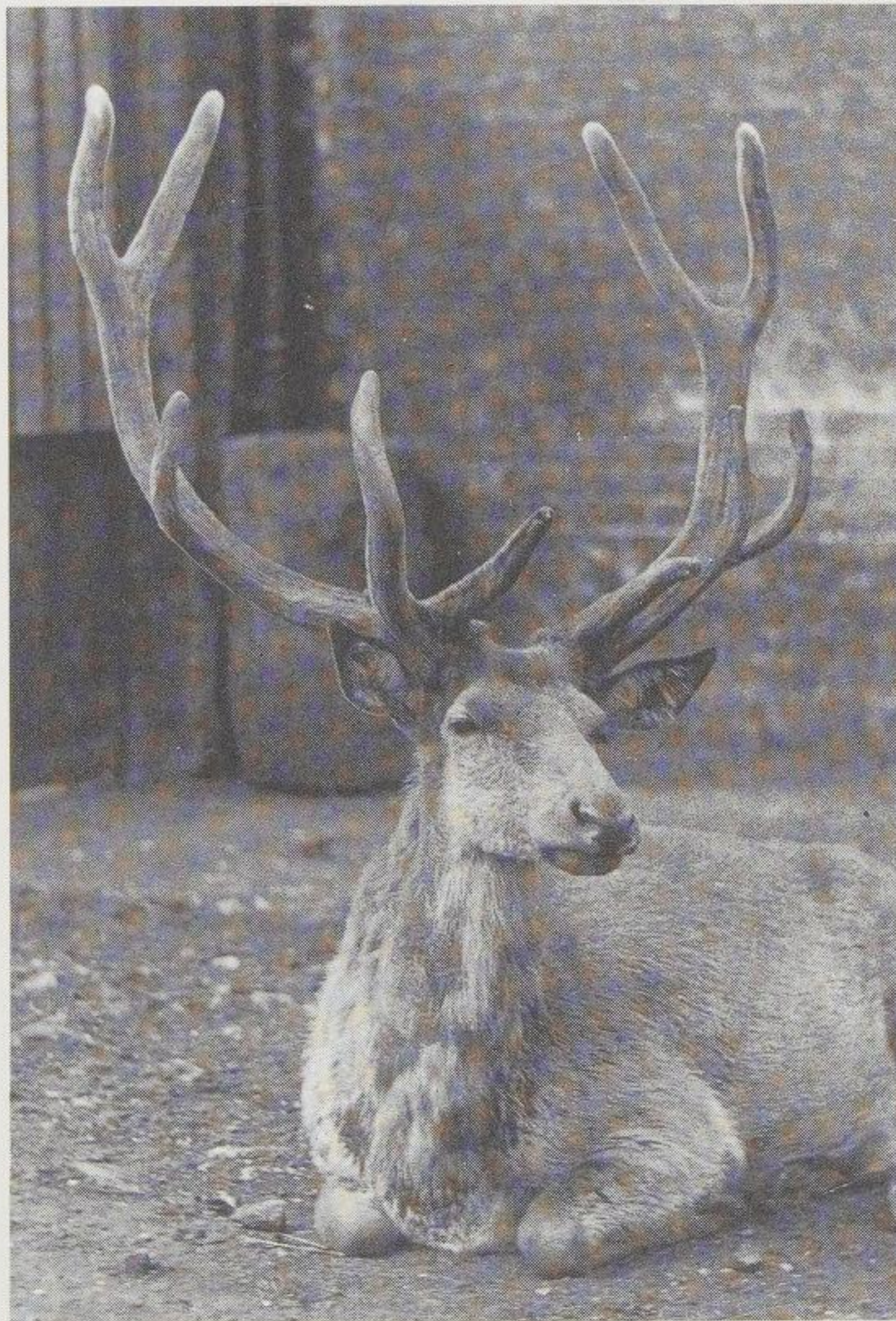
Pink-headed ducks (*Rhodessa carophyllacea*) from northeastern India, photographed by David Seth-Smith about 1925, in the collection of Sir Alfred Ezra, council member of the Zoological Society of London, at Foxwarren Park, Surrey, England. The last representatives of this beautiful species, possibly these animals depicted, died in this collection during the Second World War. (Zoological Society of London)

with crude woodblocks until the edition of 1904, despite the fact that almost twenty years earlier the first half-tone illustrations to be published in England were made from photographs taken at the London Zoo. It is also fair to record that in the 1920s, motion pictures were made of certain rare animals in the zoo (including the last thylacine to leave Tasmania) on the orders of Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, secretary to the Zoological Society (1903–35).

If the Zoological Society of London did not take photography very seriously in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at least it did not actively discourage it, as was the case in other zoological collections of the period. This is demonstrated in almost every chapter of the 1903 classic volume *The Zoological Gardens of Europe*, in which the author, C. V. A. Peel, recorded various methods used to prevent him from using his camera.<sup>4</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic, the New York Zoological Society prohibited photography in the Bronx Zoo for many years, although, to its eternal credit, it has maintained its own comprehensive and technically superb photographic record of its animals. It is this refusal by so many zoological collections to tolerate

Wallich's deer, or "shou" (*Cervus elaphus wallchi*), in velvet (ca. 1925). Photographed by F. Martin Duncan (1873–1961), librarian to the Zoological Society of London, which now owns his collection of photographs. This specimen, which died in 1926, was presented to the society by its patron, King George V, in 1912 and was the only specimen ever to reach a Western zoo. Note the very distinctive long, sinuous, "pixie" ears, unlike those of any other living deer. By the early 1980s it was believed to be extinct, but in 1987 specimens were discovered in a menagerie of native animals in the gardens of the former Dalai Lama's palace in Lhasa, Tibet. (Zoological Society of London)



photography within their confines, and not bias on the part of the present writer, which explains why so many of the reproductions that accompany this appendix were taken at the London Zoo. Even there, however, many of the most significant early photographs were taken as a result of private enterprise and with little or no idea of their significance. Such as have survived the passage of time are now to be found either in private collections or, as in the case of the Zoological Society of London, in former private collections that have subsequently come to rest in its archives.

If part of the motive for studying our photographic records is to improve wild animal husbandry, it must not be forgotten that this is not an end in itself. Our reason for wishing to maintain animals is that civilized people take pleasure in contemplating the creatures with which they share the planet. It would be a sad day if our posterity had only photographs to explain the source of earlier generations' delight. Viewed in this way, photographs become silent warning of awesome eloquence and assume a value beyond that of mere records.