

THE KIWIS KAIROS

Back in May 2023, an outburst of news coverage from Miami attracted zoo enthusiasts' attention internationally. It centred around a nocturnal bird with no crowd-drawing power, yet holding a larger-than-life image for enthusiasts: the kiwi. As many know, it is the national symbol of New Zealand. In America the first kiwis – one North Island Brown (*Apteryx mantelli*) and one Little Spotted (*A. owenii*) – arrived at Philadelphia Zoo on 7 May 1898 from the animal dealer Jamrach (Weigl, email 4 June 2023). These obscure (in the public's mind) flightless birds caused a media sensation, soaring high in both northern and southern hemispheres. (Incidentally, news accounts did not specify which species of kiwi was the story's focus). Kairos is a Greek word for "the right time".

Recently an 'encounter' with a North Island Kiwi was offered by Zoo Miami, in which visitors to the zoo could physically touch the bird. Soon this event was picked up by social media videos. The encounter, previously offered four times per week with a bird named Paora, was "a one of a kind experience you'll be sure to cherish forever" the zoo's website gushed – before that encounter was removed. "Are you ready for a once-in-a-lifetime encounter?" asked a voiceover, adding that Zoo Miami was the only place in the USA that offered such a 'close-up' opportunity (The zoo initially charged \$25 each to pet a kiwi according to an inside source). A video advertising the encounter was posted to Zoo Miami social media accounts in March 2023; footage showed people stroking and scratching the kiwi's head in a well-lit room. This went viral on social media on 23 May, as Paora looked visibly agitated when visitors patted him under the lights. Moreover, at times the bird tried to retreat into darkness.

Such is the foolish case of zoo staff who have not yet grasped the full essence of what a zoo is. In a strange way they resemble a customer who steps into a restaurant but would not know what goes on in the kitchen. Anyway, unsurprisingly New Zealanders were outraged. The uproar was swift and widespread, prompting an online petition and comments from New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins, who thanked the zoo for taking public concerns seriously: "They've acknowledged what they were doing wasn't appropriate, or wasn't right, or wasn't fair, to the kiwi" Mr. Hipkins told a press conference. [Note: quote by Mr. Hipkins was kindly provided by Sean Rovai]

The zoo released a statement: "On behalf of everyone at Zoo Miami, please accept our most profound and sincere apology for the stress initiated by a video on social media depicting the handling



A now discontinued kiwi handling session at Miami Zoo

ANIMAL AND PEOPLE POTPOURRI

Cogitations from a zoo dinosaur

By Ken Kawata

and housing of Paora, the kiwi that is under our care. The concerns expressed have been taken very seriously and as a result, effective immediately, the Kiwi Encounter will no longer be offered".

Another video, posted on TikTok by a zoo-goer who had experienced the encounter, showed a handler luring the kiwi into a dark box, only to then open the lid to show visitors the bird. Both videos have since been deleted, but only after going viral and eventually becoming national news in New Zealand, where

TV stations repeatedly replayed the footage of people handling the bird. An online petition to 'save' Paora collected more than 10,000 signatures. Ultimately, officials from the New Zealand Department of Conservation said they would be discussing the situation with AZA to address the concerns. Ron Magill, Miami Zoo's communications director, told Radio New Zealand that the paid-for visitor encounter "had not been well conceived and we were wrong. We give you our word that the public will never handle Paora again. Paora's exposure to light was minimal but still wrong. I'm embarrassed that we are in this position".

A best-practice manual for handling kiwis, published by New Zealand's Department of Conservation, says the preferred model for public events with kiwis is for people to have their photograph taken near to a specimen that was being held by an accredited handler rather than allowing them to touch one. The manual goes on to explain that Kiwis are more delicate than they appear because they lack the sternum and associated muscles that are present in most other birds. These protect a bird's ribcage and vital organs.

Paora hatched at the zoo in 2019, and was the first kiwi bred in the state of Florida. A naming ceremony was attended by New Zealand's ambassador to the USA, Rosemary Banks, and Maori leaders Chis McKenzie and the bird's namesake Paora Haitana. Banks stated that "Having had "the honour of hosting that ceremony made it especially painful to have offended New Zealanders". (Incidentally, the media report does not specify exactly which species of kiwi Paora is – Miami Zoo's director is an aquarium/marine mammal type of man). The term only appears a few times in the above account which is a reminder of an era when collectors of species dominated in zoos. Some decades ago a 'zoo wife' – at a time when zoos were a men's universe – observed that she routinely heard three words at zoo conferences: "first", "only" and "most". We were the *first* to exhibit or breed a species; we were the *only* zoo to have this or that, and no one has *more* species of whatever the taxa but us, etc. Then arrived the New Age crowd. For them 'conservation' is the secular religion. Conversely, the three words disappeared into history's trash bin and old-timers were headed toward extinction.

WATCHER AND BEING WATCHED

Today, there is so much emphasis on the need for formal education it is almost a 'must' practice in many American zoos to hire young people with a four-year degree. Too often, a college campus is a hatching point for false expectations, as if it guarantees a qualification for any type of work. In short, a degree could lure a young person into developing an entitlement and birth-right mentality; you've completed the education so now you are a better person. Or are you? Not so, as I discussed (Kawata, 2020). Higher education has little to do with zoos. While I was a curator in several American zoos I interviewed dozens of young people. Only a few seemed to have a grasp on reality. It is a myth that a degree prepares you well for zoo work. If you are sold on that idea, then at some point the scales over your eyes must be peeled off. As opposed to high-tech

biology, studying natural history will give you a broader sense about wild animals. Yet the trend in biology steeps into molecular level and natural history, in turn, has been pushed aside or downright forgotten. Mammalogy, ornithology and herpetology will help, a little, to understand zoo animals. In this aspect, please refer to Clyde Hill (1971). Yet not many colleges offer such courses. This moves students far away from living breathing creatures and the following topic may surprise them.

Zoo animals know more about us than we know about them. We old-timers knew from gut experience that animals think, that they are watching and listening to us. Primates that live in a hierarchical society recognise similar hierarchies in zoo staff. An account from Christian Schmidt reveals a very serious consequence: “When in autumn 1985 the famous male Chimpanzee ‘Petermann’ and a female escaped in Cologne Zoo, he pushed away keepers but viciously attacked Gunther Nogge, the zoo director, because he was the top man and worthy to be the Chimp’s rival. As far as I remember Gunther needed seven hours of surgery from three surgeons. This incident was closely entangled with the foundation of the EEP”.

In June 1985 six European zoo directors, Gunther Nogge and Christian (as the only non-director) had met in Antwerp and decided to start the EEP. After the Chimpanzee incident another six officials were invited to Cologne in November 1985 for the formal foundation. Christian continued: “Gunther was still in hospital, so that we had a meeting beside his hospital bed. Gunther came directly from hospital to the first official meeting. Because of his accident he suggested Wilbert Neugebauer as first chairman of the EEP. ECAZA and then EAZA was founded only a few years later”. (Email, 14 February 2022)

The key word in the above account here is ‘rival’. Chimps have encounters with keepers daily and uncomfortable situations arise when keepers do things that chimps don’t like. Examples would include separating an infant from its mother, moving the apes into small holding cages or introducing vets into the enclosure. Chimps

are individuals just as we are: some like certain keepers some don’t. Yet the keepers were not the target of the Cologne attack. Being fully cognisant of the hierarchy in the human workforce, chimps may have perceived keepers as comrades and the their boss as a common enemy.

For a moment we switch gears and move into the field of domestic animals. They have been around humans for thousands of generations and know the way humans are, assumedly, perhaps, more than their wild counterparts do. So the following example should not come as a surprise. A decade or so ago my wife and I were in a tour group in Switzerland. Near the Matterhorn, the group was introduced to a three-year old St. Bernard dog named Nana. She was used for petting and posing for photos. I was in the middle of about three-dozen tourists. Spontaneously I mumbled “Please come here” in German. Immediately and in a straight line she came to me and rubbed herself against me. Stunned, I did not know what to do. After returning home, I relayed this episode to a retired zoo man Paul Linger, this is his comment: “When reading about your observations of the animals listening to us – if you ever had a pet dog you would be amazed at how much they pay attention to everything that we do, and especially at how much human language they take in and respond to. Also, how accurate their sense of time is, particularly for activities taken at a regular time”. (Email, 12 February 2022).

It takes years of experience to reach an insight into animal/human encounters. Stretching the point a little bit, and into the mode of communication and understanding between humans, David Streitfeld quoted the Authors Alliance, in 2023: “Authors of all types fight constantly against the risk of digital obscurity; for many readers, especially young readers, if a book is not online, it effectively does not exist...” Not a comforting thought for me, and I often wonder how many young zoo personnel, so into the internet, would ever read articles by old timers, including those by myself? Because I do hope we still have a thing or two to offer. Yet learning by reading print media may soon be a thing of the past. But come to think of it, it is not that ancient, dating back only several centuries to Johannes Gutenberg (who died in 1468).

LION FOOD? A CASE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

A few years back I was touring a European zoo. An announcement was made via a public address system and a small crowd began to gather. Soon a man showed up with a small raptor perched on his gloved wrist, and a dead mouse in his hand. As he gave a talk the bird grabbed the mouse, ripped open its abdomen and devoured the viscera. But watching the crowd was more interesting to me. A young mother and her little girl watched the demonstration and the mother kept smiling. A parents attitude is delicately reflected in their children and that’s how a culture is transferred from one generation to the next. If this was the USA I wondered, what would the mother’s reaction be? Possibly, “Oh, how gross!” Then in the summer of 2023 my wife Jean and I were again visiting European zoos. At Basel, whilst chatting with zoo staff, we learned that surplus ungulates were fed to carnivores there. They are called ‘lion food’. Why waste them? Seriously. It is such a practical approach to animal husbandry, yet unthinkable in the USA. If animal advocate groups and the media found out that cute *Bambi* lookalikes were fed to the Lions, the zoo’s directors might be accused of ‘cruelty’. That is the key word which opens the door to controversy. Such a chasm in viewing animals in general, and nature in broader scope, seems historical and cultural. And another European/American cultural difference: In the USA dogs are not allowed in zoos. So American visitors to continental Europe are probably surprised to see dogs in zoos. The big difference is perhaps European dogs are better disciplined, like obedient children in a kindergarten, than American dogs?



Newspaper report of the chimp attack at Cologne Zoo in 1985

Back to animal husbandry: American zoos purchase commercially manufactured nutritionally complete diets and the range of zoo consumers nowadays includes nearly all taxa, from mammals to fish. As for the big cats, all they know in their zoo life is a meat mixed in with other ingredients in the form of sausage. This is frozen and delivered by truck. Have the zoo staff ever wondered how wild Lions forage? Have they read the literature, for instance, George B. Schaller's classic work about Lions in the Serengeti? How can you care for captive Lions effectively without knowing the way they live, unmanaged in the African savannah? And that question applies to all other animals, therefore it is a good mental practice, from time to time, to switch gears, to review wildlife in *in-situ* populations. We are accustomed to focus on wild animals in captivity. Wild animals are, after all, a product of nature. (Relating to this aspect, albeit distantly, an odd historical twist appeared in a newspaper during the American Great Depression: A local newspaper advertisement offered for sale deer and wild boar meat from a zoo to local hotels and restaurants. See Winter *et al.*, 2014).

ANIMALS YOU CAN HEAR BUT CANNOT SEE

My friend David Hancocks sent me a book entitled *The Great Divide* by Peter Watson (2012). It talks about Maya culture, a subject that generated my curiosity. So in February 2018 I found myself joining an escorted tour group to learn about Mayan ruins, history and culture in Guatemala and Honduras. (Incidentally, there is a fine zoo in Guatemala: See Kawata, 2018). It began with a tough start: after a late arrival at our hotel, and after barely three hours of sleep, we faced a merciless wake-up call at 4:15am to go to the airport. Rubbing my eyes, I looked around inside the aircraft: we were a small group of 16. High humidity was evident as we stepped out of the aircraft in Flores. From there, we were taken in a bus to Mayan ruins. Loud calls of spider monkeys welcomed us as we arrived at the hotel. Even in my room I heard them. Yet they turned out to be 'ghost' monkeys, as I looked for them through thick foliage, only to be disappointed. Later on during a stroll, I overheard tourists talking about monkeys. Way up in the tree canopy I had a glance at just the tails and hands of two spider monkeys, presumably *Ateles geoffroyi yucatanensis*. More likely to be seen is the White-nosed Coati (*Nasua narica*), a species much darker in colour than I had expected. One day a coati appeared in a tourist area at the Tikal ruin site where there were shops and benches. It was hurrying from A to B, paying no attention to us, and then disappeared into the forest. Three other tour group members followed this fellow to snap photos, but all they got was its tail. This animal, like others in the tourist areas, appeared to expect no hand-outs (unlike some animals in certain locations in the USA and Africa). Another coati was encountered on a forest trail, but like the first one it was in a hurry. Maybe we were lucky that we saw that much. Also with luck, at the Copan ruin site the local guide pointed to an agouti in the distance. In the forest it was standing still like a brown sculpture. Compared with mammals, birds were more visible. They were everywhere; you hear them from all directions. However, frustration number one: I couldn't see them. Number two: even if I did see them, I didn't know what they were (I'm sorry Dr. Grigsby, my graduate school ornithology professor back in Oklahoma, I am still an undisciplined student). Early one morning on the hotel grounds there was a loud call coming from a high branch. It was a gallinaceous bird but not a curassow. When someone asked me, I answered "guan". But the bird made me a liar; it turned out to be a chachalaca. Animals always seem to be laughing at me! In the historic site, Tikal, an Ocellated Turkey quietly stood on top of a scale model of the site in the crowded visitor centre as if posing for photographers (to inject a bit of anthropomorphism). Later, seven or eight of them were marching down the street with no fear of people. They did not seem to be looking for handouts either. In

the forest a flock of Montezuma Oropendolas flew by. These were a mere hint of what was to come. On the list of birds we saw, the most brightly coloured and largest was the Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao cyanopterus*), the national bird of Honduras. One sunny day as we entered the Copan archeological site, a flock of seven or eight of them flew in the forest opening calling loudly, it was spectacular. In most of the world's zoos we are so accustomed to seeing them in a small metal and concrete space with perhaps a log or two. Only rarely do we see free flight shows where they fly above our heads. But a flock of truly wild macaws spreading their wings with their long tail feathers perfectly weightless is a refreshing sight. Nay, the word 'refreshing' does not describe the sensation. Naïve questions came to my mind: Where do they sleep? Find food? Nest?

CRANE AND CIRCUS CHARACTERISE COMMUNITY

I always experience nostalgia in Baraboo, Wisconsin, the home of a museum called Circus World and the former winter home of the Ringling Brothers Circus. The town is also home to the International Crane Foundation (ICF). Since I am into circus history and a zoo man, this town is very special. When I began to visit Baraboo in the 1970s it was a small community with a population of around 8,000. This note was originally sent to Hannah Field of the ICF in September 2021: "In 1972 a Canadian named George Archibald, said to be a Cornell alumnus first showed up at Ueno Zoo, Tokyo. It was an early stage of his world-travelling to wherever cranes were, to study and promote crane and wetland conservation, as well as visit zoos. His travelling included the northern mainland of Hokkaido, known for the breeding flock of Manchurian Cranes (*Grus japonensis*). His activities began to attract Japan's news media. On television he stated that he planned to start an organisation for crane conservation in Baraboo, Wisconsin and displayed a map. But he was apparently unfamiliar with midwestern USA geography, and pointed to a spot far away from Baraboo. Anyway, at Ueno Zoo he talked about cranes, but the zoo staff did not know what to make of this young man and asked me about him. At that time I was a keeper at Topeka Zoo, Kansas, but I had never heard of George Archibald. So I called the Ornithology Institute of Cornell – what nerve, come to think of it – the call was transferred from one party to another. I ended up talking to a man but I still don't know who he was. It could have been Professor Thomas Cade himself. I asked him questions in a straightforward manner. After a few minutes of conversation I was able to tell Ueno Zoo staff that George was an okay guy and not to worry. Years later George told me that someone had checked up on him at Cornell. I said it was me and we chuckled. But I'm jumping ahead of the story.

One sunny day I drove up to Baraboo. At that time I worked at Indianapolis Zoo (1973-1975). I had heard about the ICF and wanted to visit. George was out of town but Ron Sauvey welcomed me, a stranger who had popped in unannounced. He said, "You'll spread nice words about us?" Which indicated that the ICF was yet to become well known in the zoo world. He was walking a young Sandhill Crane and we began to chitchat. When the chick tilted its head and looked up at the sky, Ron stopped in mid-sentence and traced its sight line. Sure enough, high up in clear blue sky there was a shiny little dot, an airplane. "Superb eyesight" Ron said, adding "They spot anything in the sky way ahead of us". Adjacent to the crane facility, on top of a hill stood a handsome house, the summer residence of Norman Sauvey, Ron's father. At Ron's house family members were playing the piano and singing. I heard Ron's parents were of Scandinavian and Italian origin. Later, I heard that Ron's family owned a factory in town. Mr. Sauvey had built a barn for Arabian horses, I gathered, only to find that the climate was too cold for them and they were sent to Florida. Ron and George were friends from their Cornell days, and they talked about cranes. Ron's father then suggested they use this ranch for cranes, and thus was

born the International Crane Foundation.

Baraboo caters to another interest of mine, the circus. So early in the morning I would eat breakfast in the house I used to stay in (whose house it was I have no idea), then I'd either watch cranes with Ron or George or drive to Circus World to dig into circus history. (Circus journals often carry interesting data. How about prices of animals offered by animal dealers in 1925? A young elephant, \$3,250; a large, quiet one, \$4,000 and those must have been Asians, since Africans were uncommon then; a hyena \$350 and Rhesus Macaques \$12.50 each. [Bracy and Bracy, 2023]).

The atmosphere in those early years was quite informal. The new (current) ICF campus was not yet on the horizon. George, Ron and I used to sip coffee and enjoy casual conversation. Then one day George brought up the topic of a special man he had met in Tokyo. He stated that "Dr. Tadamichi Koga far exceeds the mental confines of ordinary Japanese". Koga was 'Mr. Zoo' in Japan and a former Ueno Zoo director. His name is intimately connected to cranes; he pioneered the captive breeding of these birds. (As reference, please take a look at profile: Dr. Tadamichi Koga, The Brolga Bugle 3/3, Spring 1977. Also, see my article, 2011a).

At this point, let me explain where I stand in this story. I am a native of Japan. From early childhood I was fascinated by zoos and wildlife and quite naturally Dr. Koga was my boyhood hero and mentor. Looking for better opportunities in the land of second chance I arrived at Los Angeles in 1969. I then began to 'zoo-hop' across the USA; starting as a keeper and later becoming a curator in several zoos. I retired in 2005. For half a century I watched the ICF grow from an embryonic stage to an internationally renowned institution. Wherever I lived, every now and then, I returned to Baraboo.

But back to our casual conversation, George continued to talk about his experience with Dr. Koga. It is no easy task for a foreigner to step into Japan to campaign for wildlife conservation. There's not only the language barrier, but also the country's exclusive culture, firmly stands in the way. But after George met with Dr. Koga in Tokyo, he became immensely impressed with his embracing personality. George pointed out that Koga's global viewpoint, free from stereotypical and traditional entrapment, he was an exceptional Japanese person. Dr. Koga, as my mentor, gave me permission to be the zoo-man I wanted to be. There were wildlife and zoo issues I was able to realise only after I noticed, often casually, his in-depth grasp of nature. George and Ron wished to host Dr. Koga at the ICF and Ron had never met him. The chance came in the fall of 1975 and the occasion was the first international crane symposium. Arrangements were made for me to pick up Dr. Koga in Chicago and drive to Baraboo. The weather was perfect for driving through pasture and cultivated land that unfolded towards the horizon. All the while, however, Dr. Koga didn't seem to pay any attention to the pastoral country. Then he was in his 70s, he kept talking passionately about wildlife conservation and the zoos of the world for hours. We arrived at the ICF late in the afternoon, and we decided to show him around before it got dark. At the office there was a conference room and an incubator area to the left. Outside, a row of cages housed different crane species from around the world, one pair each. Occasionally, piercing calls added an ambience to the scene; forest and prairie continued on a gentle slope beyond the campus as far as the eye could see. The ICF, in a sense, was an incarnation of Koga's vision, something that never materialised in his own country due to a variety of difficulties. George called him a towering giant. I wondered what went through his mind as he toured the facilities. I never asked, but I was quite sure that the 'giant' was extremely pleased that his dream had become a reality, thanks to the efforts of two young men. It was built half way across the world from Japan, but does that matter?

One late afternoon in January 1987, I was reading the local newspaper and froze for a moment. Ron had passed away unexpectedly



Whooping Cranes at the International Crane Foundation

aged just 38. I wished I had read it earlier – to make it to the funeral the following day I would have to leave my home in Milwaukee immediately. The weather was deteriorating rapidly and driving in the winter months is one of the things I hate the most. How my wife Jean and I packed so fast I don't know. We jumped into my Volkswagen Beetle and hit the road, but in the dark the road conditions were getting treacherous. Fortunately there was a motel room available just off the main highway.

Sunny weather greeted us in the morning and we arrived at Baraboo with no trouble. On occasions like that I can usually keep my emotions under control but not that day. I was poorly prepared throughout the day, remaining quite uncomfortable and could not blend into the friendly crowd. I reminisced about Ron, he always had a genuine smile and such an amicable personality, kind and fair to everyone. He once asked me what music I was fond of. Tango, I responded, and immediately he named several tunes and whistled them for me. At his funeral I was so angry. He had no right to leave us behind at that young age. How can you do that to me?

Half a century passed since I stepped into the very young ICF campus but the passage of time is merciless. The name ICF brings up joy and sorrow, laughter and grief. At any rate, a few years back George told me that he had just got back from Tokyo and that Dr. Koga is not there anymore (he died in 1986), we shared the sorrow of the loss of such a giant. ■

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