



The Bartlett Society

NEWSLETTER - September 1998

Page 5

ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS NEED A CENTRAL LIBRARY !

When I was a teenager, interested in how and where animals were kept in captivity, and wanting to use newly acquired language skills, I wrote letters to a random selection of zoological gardens in different parts of the world. I asked for their annual report, or guide-book, or similar information. Actually the response, as I can remember after many years, was quite good. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of zoos, safariparks, aquariums and other types of animal collections around this globe. Many regularly publish guide-books, annual reports, and more occasionally postcards or posters. Some have their own magazine usually designed to keep members informed about the happenings in the zoo. A few have their history in bookform. They also produce press releases with the latest information.

I believe to be correct in saying that it is a remarkable fact that there is no depository for all this literature. There are, of course, many private collectors, often aiming to assemble the material from a certain region or focussing on a specific type (like postcards). However, this information is not really accessible to the general public. But where can we go to search for older annual reports or zoo magazines? Where do I find titles like *America's First Zoo*, *The Journal of Indian Zoo Directors*, *Arbeitsplatz Zoo*, *AZK Bulletin*, or even a complete run of *International Zoo News*, just to name some random examples? If I have the reference and I write to the zoo in question, I might be lucky, but only if the institution still exists, and anyway, how many people ever refer to the short notes in this kind of literature?

Of course, some of this can be found in general zoological libraries, like the one of the Zoological Society of London or the Artis Library formerly part of the Amsterdam Zoo. I suppose that in most countries there is such a collection. However, as far as I am aware, the collection in these places is either regionally restricted or haphazard in their contents. I mean to say that they keep what happens to come their way, but there is no conscious effort to collect and preserve the material. A lot of information becomes quickly very much inaccessible.

There should be a central place where the material produced by zoological gardens and other animal collections is assembled and stored, and where it is made accessible to all interested persons. This would be a great asset to anybody interested in zoos and their history, as well as those studying the maintenance and exhibition of particular species of animals. Maybe this idea can be taken up and one day become a reality ?

Dr Kees Rookmaaker, Curator, The Rhino Museum, P.O.Box 381, Bedfordview 2008, South Africa.