

John Aspinall

by Jeremy Watson, Howletts and Port Lympne Wild Animal Parks, UK



Photo: Roy Lister

John Aspinall (aged 74) died on 29 June 2000 after fighting cancer for three years. He bought Howletts Zoo in 1958 and built it up into one of the world's most important zoological collections. Famous Howletts successes include the four breeding groups of gorillas (now over 65 in number), tigers (over 300 bred), and the 16 African elephants (see also EAZA News 19, p.17 and EAZA News 20, p.18). John bought Port Lympne in 1973 to house the burgeoning herds of animals including black rhinos (see also EAZA News 29, p.16), Indian elephants and many species of deer and antelope.

When John first started out in the zoo world he was regarded as a maverick figure and not taken too seriously. Forty years on, his innovative ideas such as keeping gorillas in family groups are now conventional zoo thinking. The reintroduction programme that the John Aspinall Foundation funds for gorillas in the Congo and Gabon are an excellent example of how zoos can directly contribute to conservation in the wild.

He has ensured, through the foundation, that his life's work and passion will continue.

