Beauty and the Beasts

A history of Taronga Zoo, Western Plains Zoo and their antecedents

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Chapter 4

The Hallstrom Era (1941–1967)

THE 1941 annual report of the Chairman of the Taronga Zoological Park Trust, Colonel Spain, to the Minister for Lands, the Hon. J. M. Tully, MLA, included an extraordinary statement:

> "Mr. A. F. Bassett Hull, MBE, who was gazetted a Trustee on the 8th October 1926, resigned conditionally on the appointment of Mr E. J. L. Hallstrom."

The astonishing word in the passage is "conditionally", for the appointment of a Trustee was the absolute prerogative of the Minister. Although all sorts of influences might be brought to bear on a Minister to appoint a particular person to the Trust, it should have been unthinkable that a Trustee could resign on the condition that he nominate his replacement. Yet, such an agreement was reached between Bassett Hull and Hallstrom, supported by Spain, and endorsed by the Minister. Hallstrom was gazetted a Trustee in January 1941.

In formal terms, he had been recommended for membership of the Trust by the Royal Zoological Society, which he had joined in 1933. Since the earliest days of the Trust, such nominees had been eminent naturalists or zoologists and, usually, officers of the Society. Hallstrom did not fit any of these categories but he was interested in aviculture. He had already made an impression on the Trust by donating two Black Rhinoceroses in 1938 (the cost of transport of which was estimated at £1,500) and, in 1940, he donated two Glossy Black Cockatoos and a number of other parrots.

At the end of 1941, after 29 years on the Trust, Colonel Spain retired and The Hon. D. Clyne, MLA, replaced him as Chairman. Nevertheless, it was Hallstrom who dominated the Zoo for the next 26 years.

With the entry of Japan into the war and the possibility that Sydney would be bombed, the Trust began to consider the disposal of lions and other dangerous animals: Hallstrom offered to bear the cost of construction of secure shelters for such species, but the offer was not taken up. However, the Trust was pleased to accept his donation of 2,000 litres of fuel oil as a reserve for heating the tropical section of the aquarium.

In the course of a few weeks in July and August 1943, a giraffe, two hippopotamuses and a rhinoceros died, putting the Superintendent, Patten, under a cloud. Dr Noble, Government Veterinarian and a Trustee since 1942, sent two of his veterinary officers to conduct autopsies on the animals but, although all showed inflammation of the alimentary canal, no bacteriological or pathological tests were performed and they were unable to determine the cause of death. Some of the Trustees had no such doubt. Clyne (a lawyer) Pursell (an insurance broker) and Hallstrom (a manufacturer of refrigerators) had attended some of the post-mortems and were convinced that the animals had died from eating too much sand or gravel with their food. This, in turn, reflected on Patten who — according to these Trustees — had taken insufficient care to feed the animals in such a way that their food was kept clear of the ground. It is conceivable that the design and management of animal enclosures led to ingestion of an abnormal amount of sand but nobody asked why such practices — extending over years or decades — had led to a number of deaths *within a few weeks.* Rather, it seems, three men with no knowledge of physiology or pathology rejected Noble's open finding and settled on a simple *physical* cause of death, which they could understand.

Hallstrom brought down his own report on the matter. Having aired a rumour that Patten falsified his own autopsy reports, he remarked that in recent weeks he had received greater co-operation from him and that Patten now rang him for advice on animal husbandry. He concluded his report with notice of a motion that:

> "The Trust or the Works Committee take full responsibility for all the recent losses that have occurred, and Mr Patten be exonerated from blame."

He remarked that he did not expect his motion to be passed but that it would have the effect of "throwing the recent tragedies open for full discussion."

The Trust declined to accept any blame but it did not censure Patten. It noted that, due to wartime loss of staff, he was doing the work of three men, so Dr Noble's offer to assist him with professional advice was much appreciated. The main outcome, however, was acceptance of Hallstrom's unsolicited report that his inspection of 27 ungulate and kangaroo enclosures revealed that only ten were satisfactory. By his standards, 11 were in bad condition and five were very bad. The Trust accepted his offer to deploy men from his factory to build wooden mangers for many of these enclosures and to

make urgent repairs to some of the yards. Since all of the enclosures regarded as satisfactory were floored with concrete and/or rock, Hallstrom's enthusiasm for that type of construction can be traced to an early stage in his Zoo career.

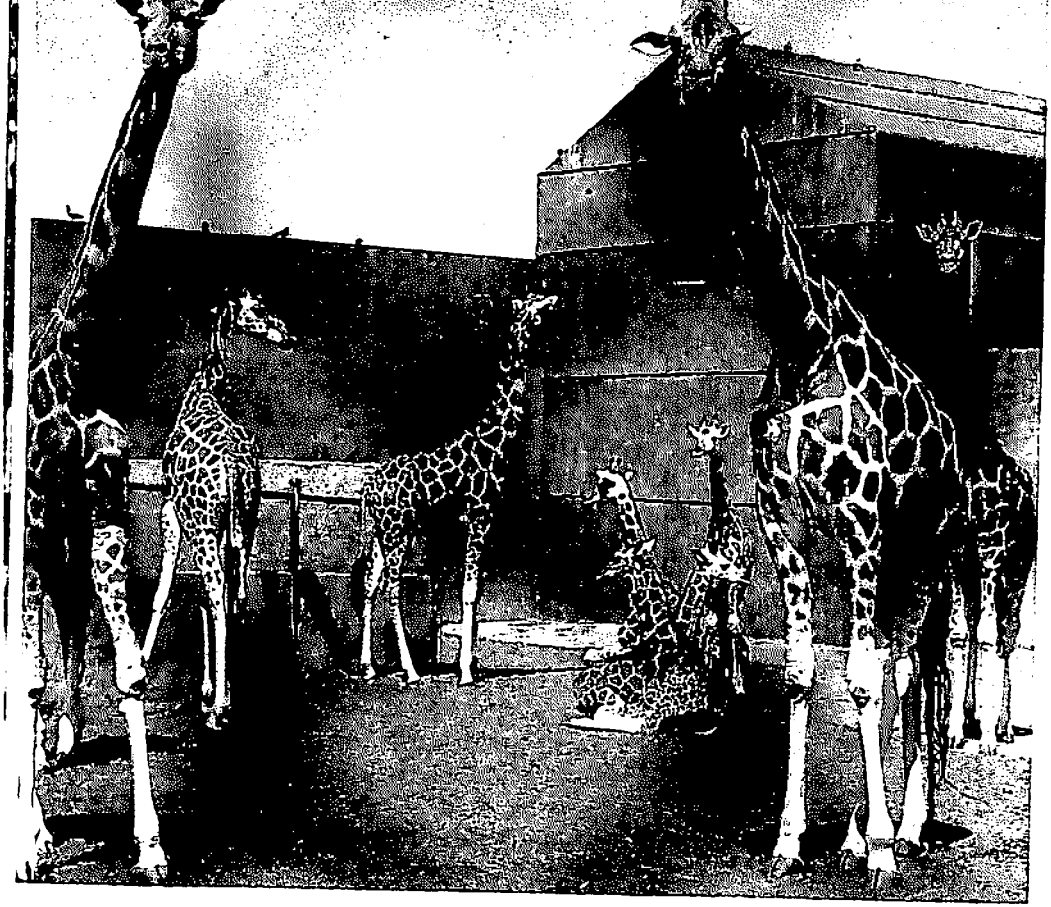
Mention was made in the previous chapter of a fire that destroyed the eastern half of the Refreshment Rooms in July 1943. There was no difficulty in recovering the insurance but building materials were hard to obtain in wartime and completion of the work by December was largely due to Hallstrom's influence and assistance. He provided labour and materials to the value of about £1,000 but declined to charge for this and, to mark the completion of the work, he donated another £1,000 to the Animal Fund.

The fire had also removed most of the Zoo's office space, so the Trust was pleased to accept Hallstrom's offer to supervise the erection of a two-storey office block and to lend the money for this (£8,500) at no interest. At the formal opening in January 1945 it was named "Hallstrom House" and Hallstrom marked the occasion by cancelling the debt. In that month, Pursell stepped down from the Vice-Chairmanship that he had occupied since 1941 and Hallstrom was elected in his place.

His generosity continued. In November 1945 he undertook to build a stone wall around the southeastern boundary of the Zoo and to erect a row of parrot aviaries. The work was estimated to cost £2,250 and the Trust noted that this had brought his contributions during the year to about £12,000.

Early in 1946, Hallstrom guaranteed £2,000 to cover the purchase and transport of two pairs of Black Rinoceroses and African Elephants from Africa. Originally to be handled by the Zoo Secretary, H. B. Brown, the project rapidly developed into the rather grandiosely styled "Australian Zoological Expedition to Africa", comprising Brown, John Hallstrom (Hallstrom's son) and an experienced keeper, E. Hargreaves. Over about 18 months, the Expedition made three shipments, comprising 64 mammals, about 30 reptiles, and some 1,800 birds. Among the mammals were two African Elephants, three Black Rhinoceroses, four Chimpanzees, four Chacma Baboons, ten Cheetahs, five African Lions, two Leopards, three Zebras and a Giraffe. Notable birds included six Ostriches, six Crowned Cranes, two Stanley Cranes and nine Hornbills. The collection was far larger than any of those that have served as the subject of adventure stories by David Attenborough or Gerald Durrell and was the more remarkable because the small team had no previous experience in the movement of captive wild animals on such a scale. The magnitude of the operation was not given adequate recognition outside the Zoo but John Hallstrom was made a Trustee in 1948.

The second consignment from Africa arrived in April 1947 and, in the same month, Hallstrom announced the donation of 28 birds of paradise from New Guinea. Six months later, he arranged another shipment of 90 birds of paradise, 13 cassowaries



◁ *Giraffe exhibit — about 1960.*

▽ *First birth of a Black Rhinoceros Taronga Zoo — August 1958.*

and 18 tree-kangaroos. All of these African and New Guinean animals were formally donated to the Zoo at a complimentary luncheon held by the Trust in Hallstrom's honour in November 1947. No value was put on the donation but the total expenditure is unlikely to have been less than £5,000. If a commercial (re-sale) value were put on the New Guinean animals, the figure could be trebled.

The pace of animal donations was maintained. In mid-1948, 40 macaws and 80 Chilean Flamingos arrived from South America. Towards the end of 1950, the Zoo received 190 birds from New Guinea, comprising 14 species of birds of paradise and a number of parrots. As with subsequent consignments from New Guinea, not all of these animals remained in Taronga Zoo: as donor, Hallstrom exercised his prerogative to re-export some of these to public or private institutions, on the basis of exchange or as private gifts. His generosity was often recognized by the conferring of institutional or national honours: already famous as a benefactor in New South Wales, he became well known in overseas zoo circles.

Following Clyne's retirement from the Trust at the end of 1941, Hallstrom was elected as its head. Since 1916, this position had been Chairman but, on Hallstrom's elevation, the title was changed to President. Then 65, he was not only the Zoo's greatest benefactor (in fact, the *only* significant donor) but the most active Trustee. Minutes of the Trust from the time of his appointment until his retirement from the Honorary Directorship demonstrate that almost every action taken by the Trust was on his initiative, endorsed with fulsome praise by his colleagues. Over that period only one other Trustee, the long-serving Vice-Chairman and Vice-President, F. Pursell, made any original recommendations. Well ahead of his time, he pressed for a reversed-daylight exhibit (nocturnal house) in which marsupials could be displayed during the day; and for an active role of the Zoo in education. Fiercely loyal to Hallstrom, he never complained when his proposals were put aside "for future consideration".

As mentioned earlier, Hallstrom's first contribution to zoo policy was his determination to put all the animals on concrete floors: this aim was achieved in 1956. He was also concerned to reduce the impact of cold southerly winds on the stock. Fences that had been totally mesh were enclosed by concrete to a height of a metre or so. High walls replaced the moats that had originally provided the southern boundary of the enclosures for bears (animals accustomed to cold winds) and, by locating the viewing path on the northern side, these were transformed from Hagenbeck-type exhibits to classical bear-pits. The giraffe enclosure, already burdened with one of the Zoo's more inappropriate examples of mock-rock, was given a tall concrete "log cabin", a rectangular barn, and a high wall joining the latter structures. These works extended over many years.

The structures designed or supervised by Hallstrom were starkly geometrical but were sometimes decorated by a member of the staff artist, S. Radecki, who was responsible for such details as the bark and grain on the concrete log-cabins and for painted concrete "vines" on otherwise stark concrete walls. With access to the kilns in Hallstrom's factory, Radecki also produced enamelled labels for animal exhibits: these were often colourful but seldom informative.

Hallstrom's first large project (for which he also provided the funds) was an ape-house, consisting of five exhibit compartments. Completed in 1949, it was said to have been designed "on the latest advice from America" but the exhibit spaces were simply large rooms with mesh fronts: another wall of mesh kept visitors at a safe distance. Although chimpanzees and orangs-utan bred well in the facility, it was a poor exhibit and extremely boring for the animals. On the other hand, the rear of each compartment opened into well-organized sleeping dens and transfer facilities.

Zoo visitors seldom pause to consider what happens to an animal when it leaves its exhibit area, but this is where an enclosure becomes complicated. As well as a sleeping den, the "backstage" facilities for a large animal require compartments that can be used to hold animals securely while the exhibit area is being cleaned, and to separate one or more animals from the others. There also needs to be safe arrangement for moving animals between adjoining exhibits, or removing them completely into travelling crates. All the sliding doors involved in a shift facility have to be remotely controlled by a keeper who can see where the animals are at every moment. In this respect, the ape-house was excellent, as were the other major animal houses for which Hallstrom was responsible.

His strengths and weaknesses in zoo design are generally recognized. His approach was that of an engineer and it could be said that, like le Corbusier, he built "machines for living in" (but without that architect's sensitivity). Members of the staff in Hallstrom's time used to say that he designed by sketching an outline in the dust with the tip of his walking stick and while this was an exaggeration, it was expressive of his "no-nonsense" approach.

He had little knowledge of the science of nutrition but took the view that animals should have fresh food of the highest quality. With this in mind in 1947, he bought some farmland at Mona Vale, about half an hour's drive from the Zoo. Under irrigation, it produced lucerne (alfalfa), maize and root vegetables such as carrots. Within hours of harvesting, the fodder was sent to the Zoo and fed to the animals, initally at the rate of two truckloads a week. Manure from the Zoo was used to fertilize the farm.

From the outset, Hallstrom pressed the Zoo to take the farm over and repay his capital cost but the Trust's authority did not extend beyond its grounds and such a deal was impossible. For many years, a compromise was reached whereby the Zoo paid the

running costs of the farm, now providing five truckloads of food each week, but it was not until 1961 that an amendment was made to the Taronga Zoological Park Act, clearing the way for purchase of the property. The Valuer-General assessed the 16 hectares at £45,000 in terms of the current zoning but about £250,000 when re-zoned in the near future as residential land. Although Hallstrom claimed to have spent £130,000 on improvements, he asked for only £32,000, which was provided by a special grant to the Trust from the State Government.

Some years later, it became apparent that, while the maize and root vegetables were valuable foods for many of the Zoo's herbivorous animals, a daily diet of fresh green lucerne was inappropriately rich for many of them. Most of the hoofed animals and kangaroos in the Zoo are adapted to eating coarse, dry grasses and herbs with a rather low protein content and these animals would have been better fed on dried lucerne hay, mixed with oaten hay, which has less protein. A proportion of fresh lucerne would have made a welcome addition to this diet.

In the summer, far more lucerne was harvested at Mona Vale than could be consumed by the animals: in winter, insufficient was produced. It would have made sense to convert the surplus into hay but this was not practicable at the farm. A further problem surfaced in the 1960s when the Mona Vale lucerne was analyzed and found to be seriously and inexplicable deficient in Vitamin E — to such an extent that it was necessary to provide this in a pelleted supplement. The situation was not resolved until the creation of the Western Plains Zoo, with its associated farms, at Dubbo. It was then possible to make and store hay at Dubbo for both zoos. Once this was accomplished, the need for a suburban farm diminished. The value of the land increased so greatly that it was eventually sold to provide capital for zoo development.

Hallstrom donated two Hippopotamuses to the Zoo in 1951. Early in 1952, he provided £3,000 to cover the cost of a large shipment of animals from the USA, many of which were in exchange for New Guinean animals that he had provided.

In the Queen's Birthday Honours for 1952, Edward John Lees Hallstrom was made a Knight Bachelor. He might well have merited this honour for no more than his generosity to Taronga Zoo but he had also been a notable benefactor in many other areas, particularly medical research, and there was no doubt in the public mind that Sir Edward Hallstrom was worthy of his title. Nevertheless, the press could not resist drawing attention to the brand-name of his refrigerators, "Silent Knight", and suggesting, in view of this penchant for publicity, that he be dubbed the "Not So Silent Knight".

There was great excitement in 1953 when a female Giraffe was born, first of the herd for which Taronga was later to become famed. That year also saw the death of a male Hippopotamus, "Dizzy", which had been acquired from Wirth's Circus as a mature animal in 1915. Assuming that it was five years old when it came to the Zoo, it had lived for 43 years in captivity (close to the record of 49 years claimed by the New York

Zoological Society). Exchange animals continued to arrive from America and in 1954, Sir Edward was pleased to announce that this had led to mates being found for most of the species that had hitherto been represented by only one sex. He contributed £5,500 towards the cost of these transactions.

He was also active in the Zoo. The minutes of the Trust meeting of March 1954 record that:

> "Tribute was paid to Sir Edward's splendid work in connection with the eye trouble suffered by the Koalas. After the animals were unsuccessfully treated by the staff, the President ordered special treatment, and within a few days the animals were completely cured."

Dramatic statements such as these were not uncommon. Sir Edward often made claims for the almost miraculous efficacy of his methods or theories, without revealing what these were or how his supposed successes had been evaluated.

In consequence, he was regarded by some people as a revolutionary expert, while scientists found it impossible to communicate with him in a common language. For many years he fed Vitamin E to animals as his own "secret" stimulant to reproduction and claimed great success, but, since this vitamin was almost absent from the Mona Vale lucerne, he may well have been doing no more than correct a deficiency. Certainly, he convinced the Trust that matters of animal husbandry could be left in his hands and that veterinary assistance was required only in emergencies.

Patten, who held the positions of Superintendent and Curator, was a veterinarian. When he retired in 1954, the Trust requested its Works and Finance Committee to consider the appointment of another veterinarian but it declined to do so. The position of Curator was abolished and the Superintendent was appointed from among the senior keepers, none of whom had more than primary education. Thereafter, no staff member directly concerned with animal management was acknowledged on the title page of the official Guidebook.

Given its dependency upon one person, it was unusual for the Zoo itself to make a massive purchase of animals. Nevertheless, in 1955, it bought 53 Entellus Langurs (Indian Sacred Monkeys) to repopulate the enormous monkey pit near the main entrance. Sir Edward was nevertheless involved in the project, having donated the reinforcing steel with which to strengthen the southern wall and to provide a partial roof. In keeping with the prevailing style, night accommodation was provided in the form of a concrete log-cabin. Re-opened in 1956, it was proclaimed by the Trust to be "the greatest ever of its kind" but, while it may have been the biggest monkey pit in the world, with the largest aggregation of the species in captivity, the exhibit represented a reaffirmation of nineteenth-century principles. Ten years later, the population of the pit had dwindled to a dozen or so.

When it was established, the Taronga Zoological Park Trust resembled most other trusts that had been given control of public land. It had the power to do many things but the original legislation was not appropriate to the commercial enterprise that the Zoo had become. Some of the anomalies were corrected by an Act of Parliament, assented to on 20th September 1956, which made the Trust a body corporate (in many respects equivalent to a public company). The same Act was unique in that it extended Hallstrom's term of office from the statutory age-limit of 70 to 73. This extraordinary gesture of confidence came just in the nick of time — six days before his 70th birthday.

In addition to a convenient ferry service, Taronga had been served, from its early years, by a magnificent tramway system that brought visitors from the ferry wharf and from most of the lower shore and deposited them at the main entrance. In 1957 the Trust was given notice that the entire system would be terminated by 1959 and replaced by buses. Access by buses to the ferry wharf would require the excavation of a turning circle and, since the road was the property of the Trust, it seemed that it would have to bear the cost of this. But the Trust had powerful friends in government and a neat solution was found whereby the road to the wharf was designated a main road (to be maintained by the Main Roads Board), while remaining the property of the Trust. An increasing number of visitors were coming to the Zoo in private cars and, with the loss of the tram system, these could be expected to increase. The Trust therefore found it convenient to accept the request of Mosman Council to use the area between the Zoo and Whiting Beach Road as a temporary rubbish dump which, a few years later, was levelled to provide a large parking area.

There was much excitement in 1959, in anticipation of the arrival of Australia's first gorilla. It had long been Sir Edward's ambition to display this species and, having arranged the purchase of an animal, he hastened to build a cage for it, not far from the Zoo entrance. Named "Gorilla Villa", the structure was completed by the middle of the year to accommodate a young adult male: the cost of the animal and the exhibit was estimated to be about £12,000. With a touch of the showmanship for which he was renowned, Sir Edward named the animal "King Kong", thus evoking in the public mind images of the gigantic, destructive, lustful beast that had been the star of a notorious B-grade movie. Whereas documentary films now give us the image of gorillas as gentle giants, the Sydney public of that period flocked to the Zoo to see a frightful monster and the paid attendance of 914,000 in 1959/60 was a record (26% above the average for the previous decade).

The year 1959 was also significant because it marked the 73-year age-limit for Sir Edward's term on the Trust, which crisis was circumvented by a resolution of the Trustees, a week before his birthday, that he be appointed Honorary Director and hold that position until his resignation, death, or removal by a resolution of the Trustees.

This made Sir Edward a servant of the Trust, rather than its head, but the likelihood of conflict was reduced by the election of his son, John Hallstrom, to the Presidency. Whatever the formalities, Sir Edward remained the mainspring of the Zoo.

His interest in gorillas was unquenchable. Two infants arrived in August 1960 and another two in October 1961. Taronga now had seven animals — thought to be the largest number in any zoo at that time. Accommodation was a problem which was solved by taking over a recently built gibbon house and converting it into a nursery. Extensions to Gorilla Villa in 1963 provided cages for two pairs: "George" and "Mary", "Buluman" and "Annabelle". The total outlay on the gorillas and their housing is unlikely to have been less than £40,000.

Having a deep interest in the rhinoceroses that he had donated, Sir Edward was justifiably proud when a second birth took place in 1960. In that year he also made a consignment from New Guinea of a number of tree-kangaroos, some *Dorcopsis* wallabies, 12 cuscuses and 40 Green Tree Pythons. Some of these were destined for San Diego Zoo as part of an ongoing exchange programme with North American zoos, from which Taronga received many animals, including Tigers, Giant Anteaters and Canadian Otters.

The first stage of a new Snake House, adjacent to the gorilla nursery, was completed in 1962. An exhibit was built for the Canadian Otters, with glass windows on one side to provide a view of the animals when they were swimming under water. The giraffe herd now comprised ten females and two males. Three pairs of young tigers received from America were without appropriate accommodation, so Sir Edward began to build a tiger enclosure, the last of his major works.

It consisted of five, long, sloping cages, side by side, and viewed through a barred window at the upper end. As with the ape and gorilla houses, a wire-mesh fence separated visitors from the front of the exhibits. Inside the cages, rectangular concrete shelves provided resting places above the concrete floor. This was probably an ultimate expression of Sir Edward's views on zoo design — a completely concrete enclosure, without sand or soil or any niches that could harbour parasites or contaminate food: with a few sweeps of a broom and jets from a hose, each exhibit area could be made scrupulously clean. As in the ape-house and Gorilla Villa, the shift facilities were first-class.

In 1964 the International Union of Directors of Zoological Gardens (IUDZG) accepted Hallstrom's invitation to hold its annual conference in Taronga Zoo. Founded in Europe in 1935 and soon extending to North America, the IUDZG is an exclusive body, membership of which is restricted to the chief executives of non-commercial zoos of high repute. In principle, only zoologists and veterinarians are admitted but exceptions are made, from time to time, for unqualified directors of major zoos. Most

of the members are from Europe and North America but several come from South America and Asia. Until 1964, no Australian had been a member but Sir Edward and Mr W. Lancaster (Director of the Adelaide Zoo) were admitted to membership at the Sydney meeting. Travel to Australia was beyond the normal budget of many of the European zoo directors and some were glad to receive financial assistance from Sir Edward. The conference was a success but it was probably more important that a number of the world's eminent zoo directors saw Taronga Zoo for the first time.

During the 1960s a number of commercial marine parks were established along the eastern Australian coast to display performing dolphins. Sir Edward had been thinking of putting whales on exhibit and, to this end, part of the seal pond had been deepened but, in 1965, he settled for dolphins. The animals were trained to exhibit various behaviours but their average longevity in captivity was low and it was necessary to bring in new animals rather too frequently. In this respect, Taronga was not very different from commercial marine parks, where the average longevity at that time was well short of a year and operations were impossible without the regular services of a skilled dolphin-catcher.

Most of the behaviour elicited by the trainer was natural but leaping through a flaming hoop put the dolphins on the same level as the performing elephants, polar bears and lions in the Zoo circus. Of this aspect of the Zoo's operations little good can be said.

Sir Edward had become President of the Trust at the age of 65 and Honorary Director at the age of 73, still retaining control of his refrigerator factory. His love for the Zoo was intense and there can be no doubt of his overwhelming influence over the direction of its major developments. In the public view, as in his own, Hallstrom and Taronga were inseparable and people spoke of "Hallstrom's Zoo". He was pleased to be praised for what he claimed to be "the best zoo in the world" but he was blind to its shortcomings and to mounting criticism of these. This statement is almost literally true, for his sight and his legs were failing and, in general, his view of the Zoo was restricted to what he could see from his Rolls Royce (number plate ZO 000) as it was driven around the more accessible roads.

While undoubtedly in control of major projects, he did not have the capacity to attend to the multitudinous day-to-day details that keep a *full-time* director busy. Nor did he have a recognized and competent deputy. In 1943, the administration of the Zoo had been in the hands of five officers: the Secretary (effectively the Chief Administrative Officer, responsible to the Trust); the Accountant (responsible for business matters); the Superintendent/Curator (head of the zoological side of the Zoo); the Officer-in-Charge of the Aquarium; and the Catering Manager. By 1960, the full-time administrative positions had been reduced to two: the Manager, L. E. Coleman (in charge of business matters) and the Catering Manager. There was still a member of the

office staff, Miss H. Cole, who held the title of Secretary, but her responsibilities were essentially clerical: when not acting as personal secretary to Sir Edward, she kept minutes of meetings and maintained animal records. As mentioned earlier, the position of Superintendent had been downgraded after the retirement of Patten: it was further reduced to Supervisor (effectively senior keeper, with undefined authority over other head keepers.) Some 23 drivers, tradesmen and labourers, plus ten gardeners, were nominally under the control of the Manager, but he had little opportunity to supervise their work. The outcome was that, except in those areas where Sir Edward had a personal interest, each section of the Zoo tended to run itself, nudged from time to time but often guided by little more than tradition.

At a meeting of the Trust on 1st September 1965, the President observed that

> "The Trustees must consider that Sir Edward will not always be able to continue working as he is now and it is necessary to get someone in training as Assistant Director to be trained to follow in the way the Trustees wish."

Nothing was done immediately and matters were to some extent taken out of the hands of the Trust when the Hon. T. L. Lewis, Minister for Lands, appointed two inspectors from the Public Service Board, N. Thomson and J. T. Quinn, to investigate and report on the administrative and business aspects of the Zoo. Their study began in January 1966 and the report was released in May, it paid tribute to Sir Edward as a great philanthropist and nature lover who

> "... has not spared his wealth, time or energy in carrying out those things which, in his view, furthered his aim to make and keep Taronga Zoological Gardens in the forefront of the world's leading zoos.
>
> "... We would not attempt to put an approximate value on these gifts and contributions. There is no doubt, however, that the Zoo has benefitted tremendously over the years from Sir Edward Hallstrom's association with its work and activities."

Homage having been paid, the authors turned to less pleasant findings, of which the first was that, in February 1966, the Trust had net liabilities of about £30,000, compared with funds of some £67,000 two years previously — a reduction of almost £100,000. This was attributed to expenditure on a number of capital works which, in the view of the authors, had not been well budgeted. In response to the Zoo's current financial situation, they recommended a two-year moratorium on all but the most necessary capital works and looked for ways to reduce expenditure and increase revenue. They found, for example, that while catering and sales regularly produced a surplus, the Refreshment Room itself operated at a loss: they suggested that it be made into a cafeteria. Food for animals was bought at prices that, in general, were significantly higher than need have been paid if purchased from government contractors. Similarly,

Chapter 8

Western Plains Zoo (1972–1991)

IN 1927, the Zoological Society of London bought a 240-hectare farm about 50 kilometres north of the city to accommodate hoofed animals that had previously been held in crowded conditions in Regent's Park. It was opened to the public in 1931 as Whipsnade Zoo. London's initiative was followed by some other major zoos in Europe and the USA and, from time to time, it was suggested that Taronga might establish a similar rural sister-zoo. Such proposals were not pressed and, when I came to Taronga, my initial opinion was that the Trust should put its existing house in order before taking on another responsibility. It soon became apparent, however, that there was not enough space to accommodate all of its hoofed animals adequately and that — short of wholesale slaughter — rational redevelopment could not proceed unless most of the deer, antelopes and their kin could be moved off the site. I therefore began to commend the need for — and benefits of — a satellite zoo, situated somewhere between Newcastle and Wollongong, where most of the population of New South Wales lives.

The Minister for Lands, the Hon T. L. Lewis, was receptive to the idea and, in 1970, arranged for me to inspect a number of available areas of Crown land in the catchments of the Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers. At one stage, it appeared that a good site had been found on Little Cattai Creek, with the zoo situated between an existing waterfowl sanctuary and an area where the Minister thought of building an Australiana theme-park but, lacking the approval of the Premier, this proposal lapsed.

A somewhat similar possibility arose in 1972, when the Minister requested me to inspect a number of areas in the vicinity of Dubbo (a rural city about 400 kilometres north-west of Sydney) and to advise him which would be most suitable for a zoo, to

as a conservation measure, 21 of these animals were brought to the Western Plains Zoo. Several were put on display but most were retained, off-exhibit, in a special area set aside for breeding rare and endangered hoofed animals. In the following year (1981/82), 13 Przewalski Horses were brought to the Zoo from Europe. This primitive species from Mongolia is extinct, or nearly so, in the wild, but its survival has been virtually guaranteed by captive breeding in many zoos of the world. The herd sent to Western Plains will reduce the risk of its accidental extinction.

Closer to home, a programme for breeding the rare Australian Bustard was instituted in 1981/82. Thanks to financial assistance from Country Comfort Motels, the Bustard Breeding Centre was completed the following year.

Construction of an office building in the Service Area in 1982/83 released much-needed space in the Visitors Centre for catering. Animals were also catered for by a new food store and food-preparation building. Two small exhibits were added to the Zoo: one for Galapagos Tortoises and another for White-handed Gibbons.

In order to spread administrative experience, Butcher was brought to Taronga Zoo as Assistant Director in 1983 and, while still retaining his position as Deputy Director of Taronga Zoo, Finnie moved to Dubbo as Officer-in-Charge. Western Plains Zoo was still a low-maintenance operation. Apart from Finnie and Hogno, there were three office staff, ten keepers, eight grounds staff, an education officer and his clerical assistant, and five people associated with the gates and trading. Casual staff were brought in as required to assist in food and souvenir sales.

Births of a White Rhinoceros and two Onagers in 1983/84 were evidence of good husbandry of these species. It should perhaps be mentioned that the births referred to this chapter are not the *only* ones to have occurred. For example, that year also saw the birth of a Whip-tail Wallaby, a Wallaroo, a Red-necked Wallaby, an Entellus Langur, six Dingos, two White Rhinoceroses, an Arabian Camel, a Llama, 19 Fallow Deer, 13 Red Deer, a Wapiti, a Sambar Deer, seven White-tailed Deer, two Chital, 22 Barbary Sheep, 27 Indian Antelope, five Water Buffalo, eight Eland Antelope, two Bison and nine Banteng. Some species must be discouraged from breeding but surplus stock of several deer species can usually be sold as parental stock to private deer farms. Domestic cattle, brought on to the site to control the growth of grass in some areas, also produced a surplus which was sold at a profit.

The 1984/85 year was an unhappy one. One of the female African Elephants died of an acute viral infection (murine encephalomyocarditis) which is common in mice and sometimes transmitted to pigs during mouse plagues. Central New South Wales was just recovering from a severe plague at that time and it seems that mice were the source of the infection. Equally tragic but less explicable was the death, in the space of two weeks, of the Zoo's seven African Hunting Dogs and two of the five Cheetahs. Extensive pathological, biochemical and toxicological tests were able to demonstrate