

Nature-loving Londoners Make Pets of the Animals at Regent's Park, 125-year-old Zoo, and Its Country Branch, Whipsnade

BY THOMAS GARNER JAMES

ONE thing that startles visitors to London is the social status that animals enjoy there. Best estimates indicate that there is at least one pet for every man, woman, and child in the city.

Cats alone are estimated at five million. And to this figure must be added the dogs, birds, fish, ponies, rabbits, tortoises, monkeys, hamsters, and other far more novel beasts which are privileged members of many a London household.

The most famous and favored of London's pets, however, do not share anyone's household. They have their own 34-acre estate in Regent's Park, since 1828 the preserve of the Zoological Society of London. There are 7,000 of them, including the birds, beasts, and the 3,000 fish, and they are probably the most thoroughly observed, admired, adored, and talked about animals alive. They are, for better or for worse, *everyone's* pets—or, at least, the pets of everyone who can squeeze in.

On a fine holiday afternoon 50,000 visitors may crowd into the London Zoo. In a year two million pay admission, about as many people as go to all of London's famous (and mostly free) art galleries and museums combined.

Fellows Fraternize with Inmates

It was my privilege to meet the zoo's leading citizens on a more exclusive basis. I was introduced to them on Sunday morning, when the Zoological Society of London reserves its Regent's Park home for a sort of weekly private party. It is then that the zoo's 7,000 or so permanent guests, furred, feathered, and finned, receive, as intimately as anyone could desire, the 7,000 or so Fellows of the Zoological Society, the voting, dues-paying members who run the Society and elect its officers.

Not all the Fellows, of course, come every Sunday. My host, David Strang, was one who does. An artist-engraver by weekday vocation, Mr. Strang confessed to me as we finished lunch in the Fellows' Restaurant: "I failed to come once, years ago, when I was too ill to get out of bed." He hadn't missed since.

While he spoke he was wrapping in a napkin the rind of the melon he had just eaten for dessert. His other guest, 13-year-old Jane Kerr, was doing the same; so of course I did too.

Later Jane transferred the tidbits from the napkins to the cavernous mouth of Lorna, the zoo's black African rhinoceros, and while she

did so we scratched a certain place behind Lorna's right ear. Rumbling happily, Lorna squatted back on her piglike tail and haunches like a clumsy puppy—both tons of her.

As an African, Lorna came equipped with two horns instead of the single one possessed by her Indian cousins. Rhino horns, which grow from the skin not the skeleton, are normally worn away in zoo life by constant rubbing on the enclosure walls, as in the case of the zoo's Indian rhino, Mohan (page 781).

Merely a Cobra Killer

We began our morning rounds with Tiki and Chummy, two tiny capuchin monkeys from South America. Next, Mr. Strang called into his gentle arms a quick-moving meerkat, an African species of mongoose.

"This is Merely," he said, "merely a meerkat, one of three that arrived at the zoo together. I named them Merely, Nearly, and Quite; but on his house they have spelled his name 'Mearly,' which *nearly* misses the point, don't you think?"

"Merely is everyone's friend," Mr. Strang went on, cuddling the neat little body against his tweed jacket, "everyone, that is, except a snake in the grass."

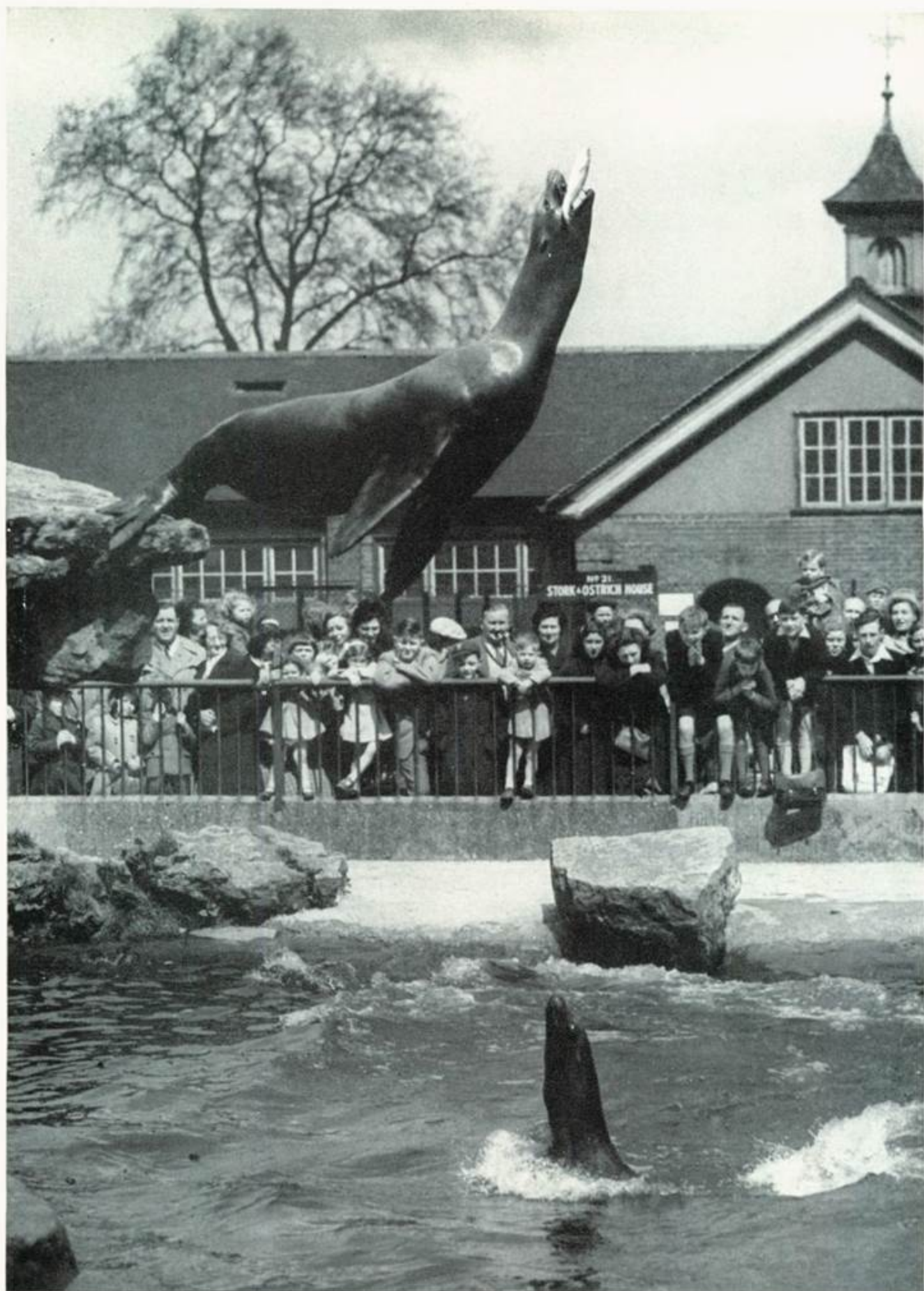
A mongoose, he explained, is not immune to snake venom, as some people think. Like Rudyard Kipling's Rikki-tikki-tavi, it risks its life in destroying its ancient enemy, the cobra, pitting nothing but dexterity, sharp teeth, and courage against the poisonous fangs.

Next on the list came Prince, a cheetah, the most fastidiously handsome animal I have ever seen (page 786). Prince is so tame that his comfortable quarters are usually filled with Sunday admirers. Fleetest of animals, the cheetah, or hunting leopard, can hit 70 miles an hour or more in dashes after the gazelles of its native deserts.

After Prince and lunch and Lorna, and before the public gates were opened to admit the Sunday-afternoon queues, Jane and I were embraced, literally, by some young pythons and boas slithering across our shoulders.

A 25-pound, 10-foot python, I admit, would make a good masseur if one's nerves were in top shape. His tail anchors itself with a clove hitch around one arm, say, while the rest of him slides steadily and powerfully over one's tingling chest muscles.

My python seemed to enjoy our exercise almost as much as the grinning keepers, while



A Leaping Sea Lion Fields a Herring. His Friend in the Water Hopes for an Error
Feeding time brings a crowd to the pool in London's Regent's Park zoo. Keepers toss fish in the air, and sea lions soon learn that extra dividends reward the ones that climb the rocky ledge (left) for a flying leap.



Portrait of George Thomson, Keeper of the Lion.

A Londoner Raised Lions in His Yard, Moved Him to the Zoo During the Blitz

This lion was only a cub when George Thomson, a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London, took him home. In 1940, when bombs began to fall, Mr. Thomson moved his pet to London's Zoo. In 1942 he paid the lion to Winston Churchill, who subsequently left him when he was 30 years old.

the lion on Jane's shoulder looked me in the eye as if it did not like the experience. I slowly tried to assure my reptilian friend that there was nothing for either of us to get excited about (page 783).

Thousands of Amateur Animal Tenders

The London Zoo's animals, in short, don't act quite like ordinary lions. But then, neither do Londoners act quite like ordinary zoo crowds.

"Look at the people coming through these gates," said Mr. Strang. "Almost any one of them is an experienced animal tender."

By the time I myself had been "tamed" by many a visit to Regent's Park, I had to agree that Mr. Strang was right.

The feel of the place is evident any sunny summer afternoon in the Children's Zoo, a special pet's corner. Here ferrets, guinea pigs, rabbits, parrots, chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs, parrots, pigs, geese, ducks, and even a rammer and a bull, elephant—all cared for by pretty housewives—mean truly in kind and to be kissed by their visitors (page 777).

This special Children's Zoo was opened in 1935 to bring together zoo babies and London babies even more intimately than the larger enclosure would allow. Like many other Regent's Park "firsts," it has since been copied all over around the world.

Here on an August bank holiday I watched a flower, trapped within a ring of weeping children, consenting to a Cockney baron



National Geographic Photographer Volkmar Wentzel

So-So Gulps Her "Tea" While Susan Holds Out Her Cup for a Refill

The chimpanzees' tea party, a major attraction at Regent's Park (page 774), has been widely copied by other zoos. Young chimps, with little training, learn to eat porridge with a spoon, drink milk from cups, and politely pass fruit (page 785). Rarely is one so ill-mannered as to upturn his bowl and wear it as a hat.

of love—until the ultimate sticky-handed caress drove her to forget her zoo manners and spit accurately and impartially at all the genus *Homo* in sight.

The spray had no deterrent effect on my zoo mates, however. My last sight of the llama's resigned face, disappearing beneath the advancing sea of stroking hands, seemed to sum up all that London animals have sacrificed for the sake of taming the Londoner.

Thoughtfully, the Children's Zoo has provided low child-proof fences over which the pets can escape. The thicker skinned among the pets hold their own against the petters. I watched two goats climbing a stout lady's well-defended ramparts to the apples bursting out of her shopping bag, while a third

happily chewed a small girl's hair ribbon. A fourth sampled my incautiously opened notebook.

This hilarious corner for children, where old clothes are advisable, carries to conclusion the logic of the zoo as a whole. As G. W. Graves, head keeper of the Rodent House and a member of the National Geographic Society, told me: "We put people cheek by jowl with animals here that most zoos would fear to let near strangers."

While he was speaking, a kinkajou named Goldie was sitting on my head eating grapes and dribbling grape juice down my ear. On the Broad Walk beyond, the riding elephant was sharing an old gentleman's proffered lunch basket, and next door a two-year-old baby

was sticking up to put a peanut into the open nose of Marauder, the 150-pound gorilla.

"We soon get to know which people are too wild to be treated with our animals," Graves said. "But if you try to shut the tame ones off from rubbing noses with their favorite creatures, you might as well close the zoo."

First Aid for Nipped Fingers

All the really dangerous exhibits are muzzed and labeled. Even so, the zoo's first-aid booth handles an average of more than a hundred cases a day, minor cutaneous rips and knockdowns being considered part of the learning process as people and beasts get to know each other.

Naturally, the keepers themselves seldom suffer "occupational injuries." They know—and are known by—their pets for too well.

"Some people have had a tooth knocked out doing this," said head keeper A. J. Woods of the First House as he placed a cherry between his lips and turned his face up toward Baby, an Indian great hornbill (page 184).

The huge black-white-and-buff bird, with a hook about a foot long, snatched the fruit from his mouth; but, at a word, reluctantly released it.

"The dangerous bit is when she changes her mind just after she's given it back," Woods said. "That hook can do a lot of damage, accidental like."

"But Baby and I are good friends. We both came to the zoo in 1925, and I think she likes me."

He tossed the cherry in the air for Baby to catch. "She hasn't missed a catch yet," he threw several more, left and right, up and down; the snatching hook was as dependable as Jan Dillaggle's glove.

Pickpocket with Four Hands

"I've been living with monkeys so long I think the way they think," joked head keeper Laurie Smith of the Monkey House, "but I just can't never get enough."

A moment before, Smith had wrestled another visitor's forest-pocket handkerchief back from Mr. Jiggs, a red-haired chimpanzee (page 184).

"I could see that kerchief was going to reach his fancy; but he ain't pick a pocket quicker than either you or I can stop him," confessed Smith a bit breathlessly. "You have to remember that they've got four hands."

Mr. Jiggs had not varied his perverse, Buster Keatonish expression one iota.

"He likes to think of himself as a ladies' man," Smith grinned. We had already seen that nothing pleased Mr. Jiggs more than to have his picture taken set on the lawn, arms around any pretty girl he could persuade to

pose with him. But whenever he started to walk the young lady back toward his cage, a keeper was always there to intervene. No wonder Mr. Jiggs looked perverse.

Gay, a 6-year-old, 150-pound gorilla, had also gone a round with Smith that morning, snatching his gorilla checkers as he and his friend rolled over and over across the floor.

"He has a ticklish spot on the back of his neck, and if I lay one finger there, he's almost helpless," Smith explained. "But in another few weeks at the rate he's growing, Gay is going to be too big for me or anyone else to wrestle with."

"But what would you do if you were really caught?" we asked.

Send "Smoker" for Dabney

"If I want to make him misbehave, I always can," said Smith. "I don't like to frighten him, so I won't get too close. But watch this."

He took from a handy shelf a foot-long piece of black steel spring. It wriggled in his hand like something alive, and the young gorilla instantly retreated toward the far corner.

"He thinks it's a snake," Smith explained. "He's never seen one, of course, but the jungle legend is there."

As we turned to go, four silver voices rose in protest. "They know I haven't yet given them their cigarettes," said Smith. He turned a key in a door and was softly buried under leaping chimpanzees.

Brother Coopey and sister So-So, Nana, and baby rapidly disarmed themselves when Smith asked where their cups were. Then they lined up contentedly, rings in hairy hands, as he passed them out their morning milk.

"You don't have to teach them any tricks," said Smith. "They know too many of their own already. Watch this." He held out his key ring, which had a dozen keys. So-So took but a moment to select the one that would unlock his cage door.

Since arriving from Sierra Leone in 1934, Sally, So-So, Nana, and Coopey have splendidly developed England's bestial manner, entertaining an audience totaling a million or so at some 300 of the zoo's forest chimpanzee tea parties (page 223).

But even chimpanzee children eventually grow up. On a wintry evening his last year in the BBC's Lime Grove studios, I watched three of this legging lemurine give their frail public tea party before the television camera.

Smoo was indisposed; but brother Coopey

*So, in the *National Geographic Magazine*: "Blue," *Closed Chimpanzee (April)*; "Anand 1935," and "Monkey Puk," *May, 1935*; both by William K. Moore.

led sisters Sally and So-So to their proper chairs and acted generally as any brother should, except for snatching a banana from So-So's plate when her back was turned.

Sally, unfortunately, spilled her milk. Knowing she had been naughty, she placed both hands on top of her head and rocked back and forth in contrite disgrace while So-So helped keeper Smith wipe up the damage. But no one was so impudic as to stand on the table or try to make a party last out of an empty plate *à la* time. All in all, it was a very successful "tea," with Corps waving a final goodbye to the televisioners from the arms of a zoo official.

"What is difficult for us to explain to young children," the same official told me later, "is that the dear little Samus they have watched growing up has now reached an age when she is more than a match in witicism and strength for any five grown men."

"There is some special perversity about chimpanzees, inside that makes it, weight for weight, many times more powerful than human muscle; and, like some of us humans, the older a chimp grows, the more crudelity he or she sometimes gets. When they are starting seven years old, as these chimpanzees are, we just don't think it fair to them to take any chances with their newly adult temper."

Whipsnade Gives Animals Ethnocentrism

In addition to the Regent's Park menagerie, the Zoological Society also owns and administers a country branch at Whipsnade, 50 miles north of London. Here it keeps another 1,100 animals on duty in conditions that contrast sharply with those at Regent's Park.

"You could drop all the 22-acre London gardens into one of our extra paddocks," Whipsnade's superintendent, E. H. Tong, pointed out.

Whipsnade Zoological Park, draped over more than 100 acres of the off-limits land west of Dransdale Downs, was planned as an intermediate step between an urban menagerie and a natural preserve like South Africa's great Kruger National Park.*

In appearance, Whipsnade rather resembles an English gentleman's country estate—except for the carrels, antelope, lions, elephants, and giraffes circulating among the deer and ponies (pages 175 and 193-194).

The site of Whipsnade, too, is particularly pleasant even for the English countryside. It is best, I think, on a windy day when gliders and their human pilots take off from the steep slopes of the high downs. They soar in the shading-waves updrafts like silent sailboats wheeling in and fro over the rivers, meadows, farms, and woodlands.

Whipsnade, once landward, was acquired by

the Zoological Society of London beginning in 1913. On its 100-foot crest waters, herons, and wild birds find sanctuary in a dark pine and fir grove. From the ridge-top the western slope drops 500 feet to the Eelsfield Way, the Roman Age track of ancient far-clad Britons that runs from the northwest corner of Wiltshire into Norfolk County.

The Zoological Society's first Secretary, Sir Percy Chalmers Mitchell, and its then superintendent, Dr. Geoffrey Vernon, started hundreds of flat pools when developing the Whipsnade site—conditions of the days when war in Britain based on terrifyingly rapid tests with the war collect mostly dinosaurs and mammals.

Great White Lion Plays with Clouds

At the suggestion of a Society Fellow fond of the great white horses (some of them believed to be prehistoric) cut elsewhere in Britain's chalk downs, Mitchell ordered to be carried on the western slope of the Whipsnade downs a white lion 100 yards long. It was laid out to a true perspective design by artist E. S. Brook-Greaves.

Seen now from the Eelsfield Way, the 100-yard-tall lion plays with cloud shadows on the slope while his real-life counterparts stroll the lions in their ridge-top pits.

A feature of Whipsnade's natural charm is the way several species share a single paddock. Fallow deer and bantings may hold one field, for example, with cranes and cattle in another. Concorded means are replacing fences wherever possible, so that few barriers are visible.

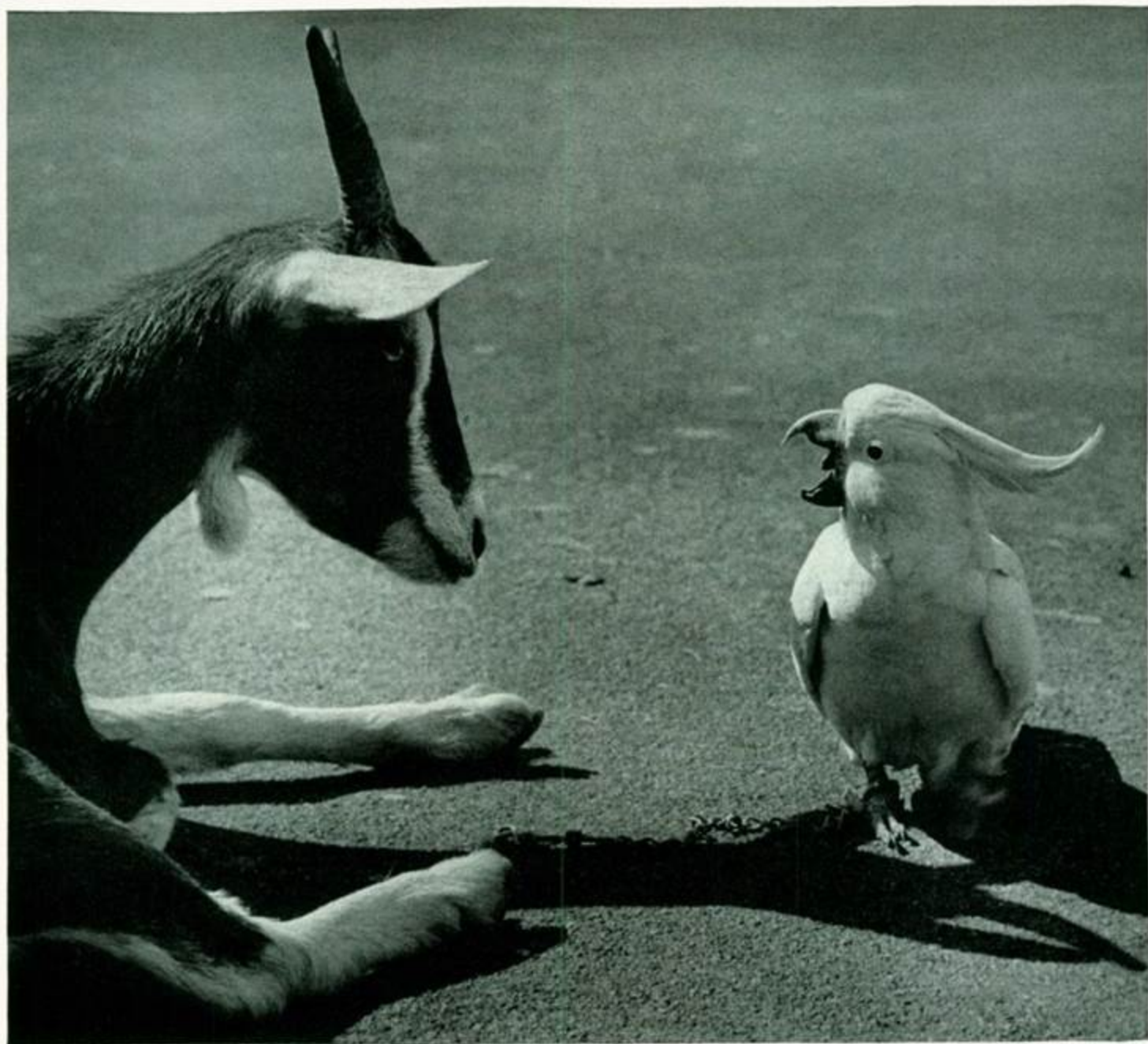
Native birds and mammals are welcome to join the animal husbandry at Whipsnade except where they might endanger valuable exotic exhibits. Thus the wooden fence' dell, where great caribou live and play like kittens, may also see a wild rabbit or two. The fence seems to consider the rabbits beneath their notice. The humans, on the other hand, know better than to tempt the tigers freely next door.

Rare Sheep Keep Grass Cut

Roam-rubbing lions are frustrated not only by the perimeter fence but also by the hares, deer, or antelope herds sometimes kept purposely in the same enclosure with the more valuable birds.

Flocks of New sheep and rare four-legged Jacob's sheep move from paddock to paddock, serving the very practical purpose of grazing down the long grass which might otherwise harbor injurious parasites.

*See "Building Britain's Natural Zoo," by W. Robert Brown, *Naturalist* (Imperial Museum, Black, 1955).



International News Photos

Goat Bends a Languid Ear to a Cockatoo's Gossiping Tongue

In the Children's Zoo, a special section of Regent's Park reserved for young people, tamer animals wander at will (page 772). Here Sally, a 35-year-old cockatoo, has left her perch to chat with Toggs, a hybrid goat.

"You notice that the wire overhang on our fence faces outward rather than inward," said Whipsnade overseer Phil Bates as we joined in his daily tour of inspection. "We changed it around like that when we found that more animals were trying to break in than out."

Moor Hen Moves In with Vipers

"Native and migratory birds are as free as the wind, naturally. We are pleased to have them join us for a spell until they get restless again."

"Perhaps we hadn't fully realized what a sanctuary for bird life we had become until the summer of 1950. That year a wild moor hen built her nest and raised her family of chicks right in the middle of our reptiliary,

sitting there on her clutch undisturbed among the indifferent vipers.

"You might say that the only 'escapes' we've had, really, were some flightless pheasants, which were surprised and bewildered one day when the wind picked them up off the downs just as it lifts the glidermen."

"If you were an animal pensioner on the Whipsnade ration roll, would you want to leave?"

We stopped to say hello to Dixie, the 50-year-old, mouth-organ-playing Indian elephant.

"Dixie and her keeper came here together from a circus the year we opened," said Bates. "They're now Whipsnade's oldest inhabitants." Then he smiled, "Except for myself, that is. I was farming here at Whip-

snade, you see, before the Zoological Society took over. You might say I'm still a farmer, one who has just learned to prefer waterfowl and Kodiak bears to pigs and chickens."

If any farmer could be too well liked by his animal charges, Bates is perhaps the man. When Whipsnade was shorthanded during World War II, he was almost killed by a chimpanzee that had grown suddenly jealous of the attention he was paying another.

As we walked along, birds and beasts alike recognized Bates from a distance and moved up to the barrier to nibble at an apple or to beg a puppy biscuit from his bulging pockets. A young nilgai, or Indian antelope, Bambi, grabbed and held on to his coattails with her muzzle.

"Bambi is one of the many Whipsnade bottle babies I've had to rear by hand," Phil explained. "It's hopeless now for me to try to convince her that I'm not her mother."

Whipsnade has become, to some extent, a zoo breeding ground. With more privacy and fewer visitors than Regent's Park, animal courtship thrives. Surely among a Briton's most rewarding experiences is to hold a pair of field glasses on a May morning to watch a new gnu or gentle giraffe child, a bright-eyed baby wallaby peeping from its mother's pouch, or perhaps a tawny tiger cub learning what an English spring is like.

Zoo Began with a Private Collection

In 1826, a little more than 100 years before the lions and kangaroos invaded Whipsnade, the Zoological Society of London held its first meeting. Its president and one of its prime movers was Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, colonial administrator, founder of Singapore, and amateur zoologist. Another promoter was Sir Humphry Davy, famous chemist, who invented a miner's safety lamp in which metal gauze absorbed the flame's heat.

It was Sir Stamford's own Malaysian collection that started the zoo off, though the best of his shipments from Singapore was lost at sea. The menagerie at Regent's Park, with its "collection of living animals," opened its gates to the public in 1828, and the following year the Zoological Society was granted its royal charter.

The charter empowered it to import "new and curious subjects of the Animal Kingdom," but also specified that the Society was to promote scientific studies of breeding, acclimatization, and other aspects of animal physiology.

Today the Zoological Society owns the largest collection of "new and curious subjects" in the world. Its scientific meetings and dinners, begun in the 1830's, are still held each month. The Society's learned papers,

monographs, and reports fill long shelves in libraries around the world.

But at the meetings, though the members may be deep in a discussion of parasitology or genetics, they are not at all surprised if a keeper leads a tame Komodo dragon lizard into the conclave, or if a young elephant is marched down the aisle of the book-lined lecture hall to show her excellent condition.

"Living Laboratory" for Scientists

The alliance between the Society's animals and its scientists is a highly practical one.

"Whenever the fact finder wants to," a zoo official explained to me, "he can check his library research against the 'living laboratory' of the menagerie simply by stepping out of the door. He could spend a lifetime in Africa or traveling about the wilds before he could ever see in the flesh more than a fraction of the various living forms of birds or apes, for example, that the Society has gathered here."

The animals, of course, contribute in another important way to the scientific research; they finance it. The truly unique fact about the patrician Zoological Society of London is that it gets along without any Government financial support whatsoever; it has met its 125 years of heavy expenses almost entirely from daily gate receipts. While paying its own way, the Society has served as model for hundreds of state-supported zoos and aquaria around the world and has rung up a list of scientific "firsts" long as a giraffe's neck.

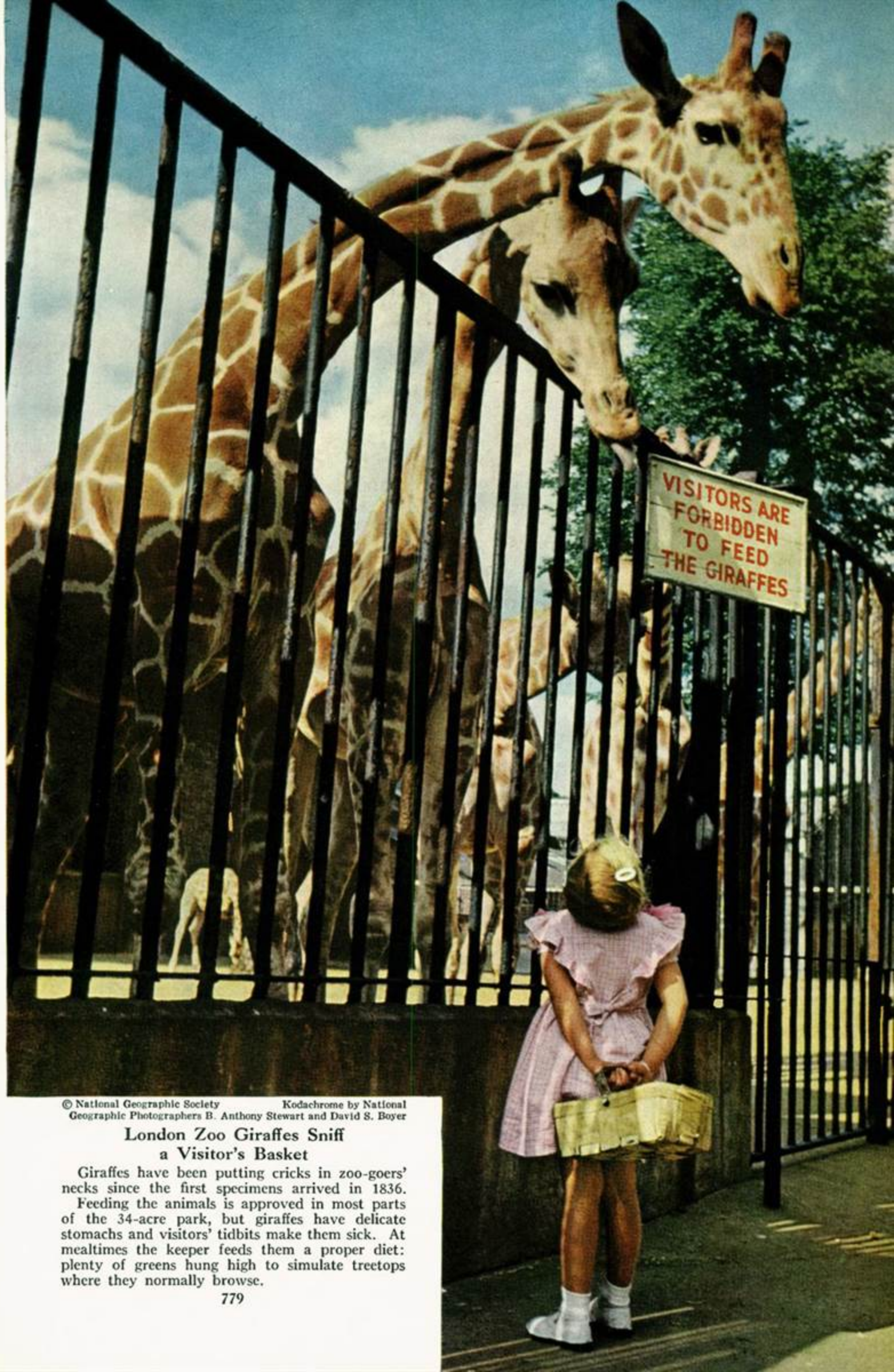
Self-support gives the animals' and keepers' "public relations" a fundamental importance hardly true of other scientific institutions. The zoo's natural-history lessons must be popular week in and week out, as measured by the public's jingling coins, or the whole concept of the Society fails.

Wild Animals Need Friends

The animals, of course, get their benefits in return. Already discoveries about the care and feeding of some species have extended their average life span in the zoo to several times what it would be in the wild.

"We think of it this way," said the Society's director, Dr. L. Harrison Matthews. "The British Commonwealth of Nations includes many of the world's remaining wild-animal habitats, and this heritage carries with it a real responsibility."

"An animal these days needs all the friends it can get. The Zoological Society's job for the next century and a quarter—as it has been for the last—is simply to gather those friends together in the pleasure of sharing a voluntary acceptance of responsibility for animal welfare."



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London Zoo Giraffes Sniff a Visitor's Basket

Giraffes have been putting cricks in zoo-goers' necks since the first specimens arrived in 1836.

Feeding the animals is approved in most parts of the 34-acre park, but giraffes have delicate stomachs and visitors' tidbits make them sick. At mealtimes the keeper feeds them a proper diet: plenty of greens hung high to simulate treetops where they normally browse.



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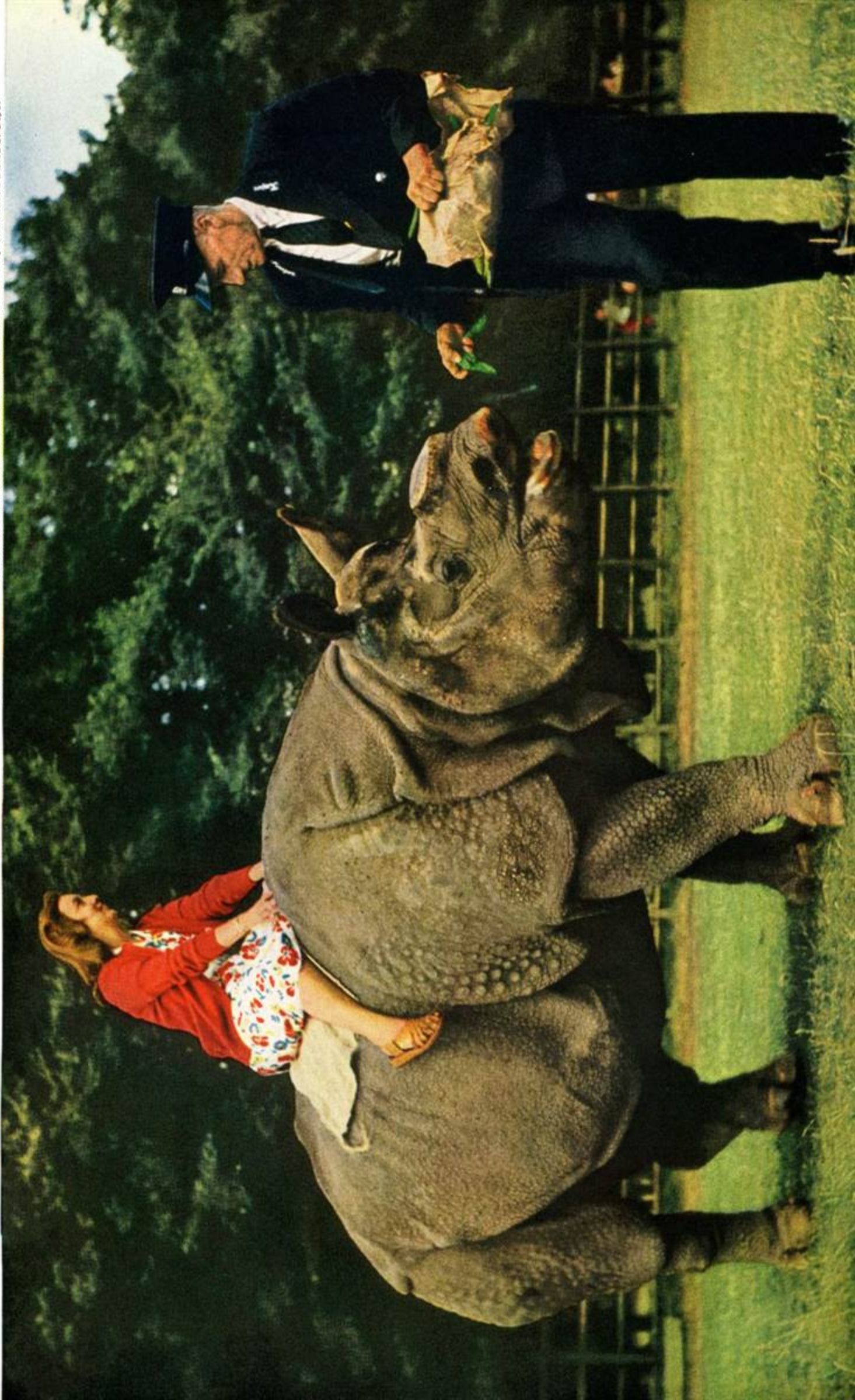
Fearless Children Mount Tame Beasts While Parents Hover on the Sidelines. The Great Jumbo Walked in the Zoo Parade

Each sunny afternoon in summertime, zoo-visiting children get a chance to ride the animals. Elephants are most popular, camels next. Jumbo, the world's most famous elephant, was a zoo favorite at Regent's Park until he was sold to P. T. Barnum in 1882 over Londoners' protests. Before any animal is allowed to carry a child, it must be dependably tame and thoroughly familiar with the parade course. These children ride at Whipsnade, the zoo's country estate 30 miles north of London. Two riderless elephants and a llama join the parade. The Bactrian camel bringing up the rear is one of a large herd bred on Whipsnade's 500 acres (page 782).

Mighty Mohan, with Patience Rare for a Rhino, Lets a Visitor Straddle His Armored Back. Keeper Rewards Him with Fresh Peas

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Kodachromes by National Geographic Photographers B. Anthony Stewart and David S. Boyer





Smart Orangutan Swabs His Den

Not to be outdone by the chimp (right) is Mr. Jiggs, a six-year-old orang capable of mopping his own quarters. What he really enjoys is walking hand in hand with visitors.

Baby Chimp Takes → a Sip of Medicine

For nearly a decade Mrs. Dorothy Pinto-Leite, a Fellow of the London Zoological Society, has taken care of the baby monkeys. She nurses the sick, helps newcomers get used to cage life, and teaches them zoo etiquette. Here she administers tonic to Fifi, a young chimpanzee from Nigeria.

Chimpanzees are generally regarded as the smartest of the apes. They can master simple arithmetic, apparently recognize photographs of themselves, and learn table manners, including use of cup and saucer, knife and fork.

Kodachromes by National Geographic
Photographers Volkmar Wentzel,
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