
Howletts and Port Lympne Zoo Parks, UK, Summer 1990 - Summer 1991

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The major event of the year was the opening of the new Gorilla Pavilion at Port Lympne. The growing numbers at Howletts and the impending problem of surplus males made it obvious that an on-site bachelor house was essential for the colony's future well-being. We decided to build the pavilion at Port Lympne for strategic as well as tactical reasons it seemed important to split the colony to lessen the effects of an epidemic and to liven up public interest in Port Lympne, where attendance has always lagged behind Howletts. The site chosen for the structure was in the woodland south of the mansion; because the ash canopy rises to a height of about 100 feet, we decided to erect a belvedere to enable the gorillas to get a better view of their surroundings, which include the Channel and its shipping and, on a clear day, Cape Gris Nez and the coast of France. The original budget was £250,000, but the final cost came to £663, 722.58. The exterior of the oval building is faced with the local dressed ragstone, and the interior with high-quality tiling throughout. The pavilion is carefully designed to house seven to nine silverbacks and black-backed males. The outside enclosure can be split into three runs, and the inside into two play areas; there are eight feeding and sleeping dens of considerable size. Keith Lloyd, the head of the primate section at Port Lympne, has stretched his imagination to the limit in order to provide contraptions and apparatus to stimulate the gorillas -hammocks, rope balls, assault ladders, swings, suspended platforms and logs, all of which fit in with the metal appliances built into the original structure, such as Swedish bars, armwalks and suspended nesting structures.

As the actual need for a bachelor house is still a few years away, we decided to move our senior silverback, Djoum, and his small family there for the time being. The transfer, on 11th March 1991, went without a hitch, and Djoum, with his amazing intelligence, knew immediately that as far as accommodation was concerned he had 'traded upwards'. The whole group, with the addition a few weeks later of a young female from Apeldoorn, have benefited from their new accommodation, and the building (the design of which was largely the work of John Aspinall and Peter Halliday, head of the Howletts gorilla section) can be pronounced a definite success.

PRIMATES

The breeding highlight of the year was the birth at Howletts on 12th August 1991 of a male banded langur (*Presbytis melalophos*); as far as we know, this is the first captive breeding of this species anywhere in the world. He was a strong, well-developed infant, and mother and son were smoothly reintegrated with the adult male and the other two females. Within the first week his mother would entrust him to his 'aunts', and by his second week he was regularly seen exploring by himself with at least one of the females in attendance. His colouring, white with a dark stripe down the back, is a contrast with that of the orange-brown adults.

Also at Howletts, a total of four infants are being reared in our two groups of Javan brown langurs (*Trachypithecus a. auratus*). This subspecies occurs throughout eastern Java, and despite its name the coat colour is more commonly black; golden-brown individuals, like most of the ones at Howletts, are found only in the north-east in mixed groups. The infants are always apricot- coloured, irrespective of their ultimate adult coat. Tragedy struck the douc langurs with the death of

three females within six months. Happily an orphaned male infant has been accepted into the surviving group, - which includes our original female, Chantille, and her second infant. Meanwhile the three-year-old Howletts-born male has become a valued member of the world-famous douc colony at Cologne Zoo.

As reported in detail in I.Z.N. 233 (pp. 28-30), a female siamang infant was successfully fostered by her grandmother, after her mother in another group rejected her at four days old. This unique event gives us great satisfaction as we watch the infant develop normally in a family group with her elder foster brother and sister -hand-rearing, however caring, would have been a very poor substitute. Each of our pairs of moloch gibbons produced a healthy infant, one of them delivered by caesarian section at the Barton Veterinary Hospital in Canterbury. These births are particularly welcome as the species is extremely rare in captivity (our pairs represent perhaps half the world's total captive breeding population). We have also imported a male bred at Munich Zoo who will partner our three-year-old Howletts- born female when she is nearer maturity and has gained further experience with infants in her natal group.

All three youngsters in the black- and-white colobus family group at Port Lympne have developed well. Faye, now 16 years old, gave birth for the fourth time on August 20th; her eldest daughter, Kivu, is playing an active role in helping to care for the baby. The other pair produced a female infant, born by caesarian section, which was hand-reared after attempts to reintroduce her to her mother had failed, but tragically died some months later from a sudden and devastating viral infection. Our six-year-old De Brazza female, Cabinda, produced her second baby in July, and unlike last time is proving an excellent mother. Other births include a capuchin last November (unfortunately another male), a saki in February, and a Goeldi's monkey in July, all doing well. Bilbo, the adolescent male diana monkey, was sent to Tygerberg Zoo Park in South Africa last November to pair with their solitary female, and the Goeldi's male born in 1988 has gone to Coombe Martin Wildlife Park in Devon to join an unrelated female.

Recently, Port Lympne primate staff have devoted a great deal of thought and effort to making life better for the animals within their enclosures - 'environmental enrichment', in the current jargon. This is not just a matter of, say, putting in a few logs and branches, but creating climbing structures which utilise the full dimensions of the enclosures. In addition to the fixed wooden and metal fittings, rope of various thicknesses is a prominent feature of such toys and cage furniture as cargo nets, rope ladders and the approximately-named 'monkey's fist (basically a ball made from interlaced rope). Many decorative but practical nautical knots are also used. These constructions can be fixed anywhere within the cages to form aerial bridges, walkways and vertically hanging swinging ropes. Large plastic barrels can be cut into a myriad of forms and hung up or left unattached for individuals to play with and get into. For example, when a barrel with an opening in the front was hung from the roof of the siamang enclosure, our then solitary male, Mitch, spent much of his time looking up at the world from within it. We have found that cargo nets make high-level nest sites for the chimpanzees and gorillas which, when filled with straw, provide a wonderfully springy bed; even Djoum, our 450-pound gorilla, has been seen using one of them. Similar nets in the colobus enclosures, stretched tight, not only provide these arboreal monkeys with springboards but also serve as high-level feeding areas when the daily leaf feed is given by threading branches through the mesh-work.

At Howletts, the year was one of mixed fortunes for the gorillas. Four infants were born, two of whom survived; and four of our existing infants fell ill, of whom, again, two survived and two died. But as far as the colony's future is concerned, the losses are sustainable; the breeding sock remains intact, there was a net increase for the year of one gorilla, from 40 to 41, and the sex ratio improved from 16.24 to 15.26.

One death among the primates should not go unrecorded. Dheddi, the black-capped capuchin, was John Aspinall's first exotic wild animal, rescued from a pet shop in 1955. When he died on 15th February 1991 he was the oldest animal at Howletts or Port Lympne - probably in his fortieth year. He was the founding dynast, along with his first wife, Shadow, of a whole flourishing colony of capuchin monkeys; he must have about sixty or seventy descendants alive today, and his progeny have been sent all over the world.

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