

History of Schönbrunn ZOO (Vienna Zoological Garden)

Gaby Schwammer*

Right in the heart of Vienna: the world's oldest zoo - well-known as Schönbrunn Zoo - is situated. The zoo is 17 ha large, situated in the park of Schönbrunn and open all year daily from 9:00 a.m. Its admirable baroque buildings present a unique setting, housing wonderful animals from all continents.

Collections of living exotic or wild animals were held in ancient times and up through the centuries all around the world. More than 500 years ago, elk and bears were kept in the city moats surrounding Vienna. In 1542, one of these moats served as the first true "menagerie", the name given to such collections of animals since the mid-16th century.

Menageries: early zoos

A game park already existed on the Schönbrunn premises as early as 1570, although it was plundered and devastated time and time again. Each time the stock of red deer and pheasants was replaced. Franz Stephan von Lothringen (Francis Stephan of Lorraine), the husband of Empress Maria Theresia, was responsible for creating today's Schönbrunn Menagerie. He considered the then existing grounds for game keeping to be too small for a more extensive collection of animals. This is why the Imperial Gardener, Mr. Adrian van Steckhoven, was entrusted with supervising over the newly planned menagerie. Jean Nicolas Jadot de Ville-Issey from Lunéville designed this project.

After a construction time of one year, Franz Stephan von Lothringen presented his menagerie on 31 July 1752, during a grand opening.

The hub of this new project was a pavilion (erected in 1759) around which 13 tracts were arranged in a circle. Each animal enclosure was separated from the adjoining one by 3m-high walls and by lanes of trees. Baroque fences and pillars adorned the front toward the center, and stables and food stores were arranged in the back. Even to this day the pavilion represents the historical centerpiece of the Schönbrunn Zoological Garden. Inside the building itself, which served as a Breakfast Pavilion for the Imperial couple, the visitor can still see 12 medallions painted in oil, recording 30 different kinds of animals, that lived in the Zoological Garden between 1752-1759. The painting on the ceiling is by Mr. Josef Ignaz Mildorfer and shows episodes of Ovid's Metamorphoses.

In 1755 a four-year-long expedition was undertaken to the West Indies. On this occasion a great number of interesting birds were caught and numerous kinds of plants were collected for the Schönbrunn Menagerie.

Emperor Joseph II also dearly loved the Schönbrunn Menagerie; he organized extensive expeditions to the New World and Africa, thus creating a rich collection of animal species. During the time of joint regency of Joseph II (and his mother, Empress Maria Theresia), admission was free of charge to the public (1779).

In 1828, during the reign of Emperor Franz II (a monarch also entranced by the natural sciences) the first giraffe came to Vienna. This event even influenced fashion and society life. Clothing, jewelry, and many articles of daily use bearing the trade-mark "à la Giraffe" were in great demand. Even a play called "The Giraffe in Vienna" or "Everything à la Giraffe" by Adolf Bäuerle was performed in Leopoldstadt Theater.

Neither Emperor Francis II nor Emperor Francis Joseph during the first decades of his reign showed much interest in further enlarging Schönbrunn Zoo. This attitude changed in the final third of the 19th century - a change closely connected with the personality of Alois Kraus. This gentleman - employed in government services for 65 years - successfully contributed to the expansion and re-organization of the Zoological Garden. During this period the stock of animals in Schönbrunn was further increased to yield a representative as well as systematic collection (in 1914 a total of about 3,500 animals from 712 species). To the best of his ability he

made sure that the animals received enough space, light and open air; all animal enclosures were successively renovated and hot air heating was installed. Major and minor building programs were carried out continually and large aviaries for the birds of prey were built.

During that time the zoo inhabitants included Sumatran rhinos, musk oxen, kiwis, keas and proboscis monkeys. Successful breeding results were obtained with deer, cattle and other ruminant as well as with large carnivore and many kinds of birds. In 1906 the birth of the elephant Mädi - one of the first elephant births in captivity - made headlines all over the world. Alois Kraus succeeded in changing an Imperial animal show into a zoological garden of general scientific interest.

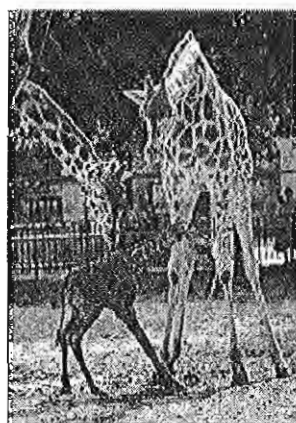
Lack of food during the First World War decimated the stock of animals down to 900 specimens. After the collapse of the Monarchy, the Republic of Austria assumed responsibility for the Zoological Garden.

In 1921 Schönbrunn Zoo was to have been closed down. It was saved by the enthusiasm of the citizens of Vienna and a city-wide fund-raising campaign.

Upon the retirement of A. Kraus in 1924, Prof. Dr. Otto Antonius, a zoologist, was appointed as Scientific Director of the Zoological Garden; in 1925 he was entrusted with its overall management. Under his directorship a big aviary for birds of prey was built along with the enclosures for the Polar and Brown Bears near the so-called Wolf Cash Register Entrance; cages for the Big Cats and other animals were enlarged.

From curiosities to a true zoo

In 1926, during the Annual Conference of "European Zoo Directors", the designation "Schönbrunn Zoological Garden" ("Tiergarten Schönbrunn") was introduced. A new era was to begin. The director began to concentrate on putting together a representative stock of animals, for which he was able to make use of income from successful sales. His breeding achievements with hippos were spectacular and allowed expensive exchanges: tigers, leopards and



Baby giraffe, born 23 May 2002 at Schönbrunn Zoo!
Photos by Elisabeth Rathbauer, Tiergarten Schönbrunn

* Head of Zoo Education Department, Schönbrunn Zoo, Maxingstrasse 13 b, A-1130 Vienna, Austria. Written for Encyclopedia of the World's Zoos, C. Bell (Editor), Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Chicago, 2000 pp.

pumas, grizzly bears, wild horses, several kinds of zebra, rare wild cattle, etc. Hindered by the permanent economic crisis, he was unable to realize many of his building concepts.

The Second World War was a catastrophe for the zoo. After bombing raids on 19th and 21st of February 1945 the Zoological Garden was a site of devastation and destruction. The entire northwestern corner of the area was one heap of ruins. The victims were 2 rhinos, 1 elephant, all waterfowl and reptiles, along with all song-birds and birds of prey. The stock of animals was reduced to 400! Feed and heating were nearly impossible to obtain.

Immediately after the war, Dr. Julius Brachteka was appointed as director and his iron will was directed toward reconstruction. He endeavoured to restore a good and healthy stock of animals, but was also known for researching the history of Schönbrunn.

The foremost task after 1945 was to restore the premises in the historical section of the Zoological Garden. Three years later, bigger projects were tackled. Because of the growing stock of animals, generously dimensioned ancillary buildings were required. Apart from store rooms and a forage kitchen, a big shed for storing hay and deep-freeze facilities were built to centralize the distribution of food; facilities to produce live food were also established. In addition a quarantine station, a room for veterinary practice, along with garages, workshops and a lounge for personnel were built. As Schönbrunn has the opportunity to harvest high quality hay from its own rented pastures, the urgent need for storage room was met by the new economic building.

In October 1959 the aquarium and terrarium, including a crocodile hall, were opened. The Head Keeper, Mr. K. Schopper, played a key role in planning these houses; his experience guaranteed that the requirements of the marine and freshwater animals and reptiles were met. The construction for this new aquarium began in 1954. A so-called "Vivarium" had already existed in Vienna in 1888. Later on Paul Kammerer for many years succeeded in breeding many species of marine animals and Mediterranean Lacertidae there. After the aquarium and terrarium department, in the wading bird house had been destroyed in 1945, the fish and reptiles were installed in the monkey house.

Under the management of Prof. Dr. Walter Fiedler a major construction programme was completed in the so-called "New Zoological Garden Area": enclosures were built for deer, moose, mouflon, barberry sheep, American bison, European bison, houses for wading birds and small animals, as well as a bear enclosure. A modern building for seals and penguins enables the visitor to watch these animals swimming under the water.

Schönbrunn Zoo: educational experience and adventure

The greatest change in the management structure of the Schönbrunn Zoological Garden since its inception took place in 1992, when the limited company was transformed into an independent enterprise. Organisation, administration, personnel matters and animal care were reformed.

This new form of organization, under the direction of Dr. Helmut Pechlaner, has enabled Schönbrunn Zoo to respond to the many challenges facing modern zoos in an innovative, prompt and flexible manner. Menageries were originally designed for people by people. Today, zoos with historical architectural elements are protected as historical monuments. Their popularity with the public is all the greater when the average visitor can clearly recognize that the animals are healthy and happy in such historical settings.

The master plan of the Schönbrunn Zoo is based on the concept of keeping animals in social groups. This translates into more space and conditions that better reflect the natural environment. The visitor has the opportunity to view the animals at close range and in a natural setting. Beyond the focus on visitors and the animals, a great effort has been made to preserve the historical buildings and to unobtrusively set new facilities into the architecturally unique setting of the historical zoo.

The historical facilities surrounding the "breakfast pavilion" at the

center of the zoo, along with the many new buildings added over the decades up until the 20th century, make Schönbrunn Zoo a unique and distinctive attraction.

In 1997, Schönbrunn Zoo, the oldest of its kind in the world, received a major award. After a more than one-year-long evaluation, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee enthusiastically recognized "the careful preservation of the Baroque grounds, coupled with the optimal care for the animals". It then declared the castle and park at Schönbrunn to be "World Heritage Sites" and included them in the UNESCO list of "cultural world heritage sites".

New constructions and alterations were financed by the owner, the Republic of Austria, and donations from sponsors and friends:

1992	Monkey house
1994	Tyrolian Farm House, Enclosure for Big Cats
1995	Renovation of the farm and storage buildings, Heating systems, enclosure for Barbary Apes - Barbary Sheep, outer enclosures for the old monkey house, Wolf enclosure, Children's playground
1996	Completion of the Elephant Park, Renovation of the Orangutan enclosure
1997	Opening of the Tyrolean Garden restaurant The elephant house is remodeled into the Mandrill Forest Lynx enclosure
1998	Renovation and re-opening of the Songbird Aviary Remodeling and renovation of the large aviary Nutria enclosure. The forest nature trail is completed
1999	Birdhouse
2000	Aquarium
2001	Hippo Enclosure
2002	Koala House Enclosure for Spectacled Bears and Rainforest House

Besides caring for and presenting animals that are threatened with extinction in their native countries, Schönbrunn Zoo has an intensive commitment to numerous international breeding projects. Controlled breeding programs in the framework of international cooperation is an important step forward in securing the survival of such endangered species. The zoo not only informs the public about the animals, it also provides information about the threats they face in the wild and joins the fight to preserve natural habitats.

In this sense, Schönbrunn Zoo sees itself as a unique place of learning and as an advocate of the animals and their ecosystems. Step by step, Schönbrunn Zoological Garden has endeavoured to implement the aims of modern zoos, namely "recreation, education, research, and protection of nature". The public's old love for their zoo has been rekindled through an intensive information campaign; more than 1.3 million visitors per year provide living proof that we are headed in the right direction.

Bridge to the future

The Schönbrunn Zoo, above all, serves educational, cultural, and scientific purposes, as well as nature conservation and species protection. This oldest zoo in the world has changed from a site of mere animal collections and entertainment to a center of true encounters with nature, serving both the animals and the public. Visitors not only see, hear, and smell living animals, they also can observe their behaviour within social groups. In addition, the adventure world of the zoo provides a useful leisure-time activity by offering programmes tailored to the various groups of visitors.

Based on its historical past, Schönbrunn Zoo is unique among the world's zoos. This aspect underlies all future plans: beyond the task of a modern zoo to provide an optimal setting for its animals, Schönbrunn also bears a responsibility for integrating and preserving a unique cultural heritage.

