



RHINOCEROS

animals as far as appearance goes is in the coats, he said. Zoo animals have a much better, thicker, coat altogether. They don't suffer from aetiolation—that is, loss of colour of skin, hair and eyes to which wild animals are very much subjected. In the zoos the animals are able to have the maximum of sunshine and especially is this so with sick animals. In the wild a sick animal crawls away into a cave, where it stays perhaps for weeks. It emerges a very pale and miserable animal. A wild lion has scarcely any mane at all, for the constant battle with thorns and undergrowth tears the hair out, and no animal can live its span in the wild without having its coat badly mauled or torn by some snarling foe, at least once in its life.

An interesting comparison between the coats of wild and captive animals can be seen in any museum, where most of the animals are taken from wild life, we were told. The coats of these animals cannot compare with those of their brothers in the zoo. In spite of this, the zoos are constantly receiving letters from visitors complaining of the state of the animals — the hairless patches on the bison, for instance, or the lumps on the camel's knees. The answer to such complaints is simple enough. Bison always moult in a strange fashion, losing their hair in curious patches, like a bad case of the moth. The lumps on the camel's knees are not sores, but merely cushions provided by Nature for kneeling pads. As far as these characteristics go, animals in captivity are no different from those in the wild state, though there are natural differences as a result of differences in climate. Animals transported from cold climates to temperate regions have not the need to change their coats or colours, but this is purely a climatic reason and not a result of captivity. In captivity deer still shed their antlers. The Wellington Zoo has two or three hundred sets stored away in a shed. The process is just the same. The flesh at the base of the antler becomes irritated and the deer rubs its head up against the buildings till the antlers fall off.

Mating and Breeding

Captivity makes no difference to mating and breeding. Tigers especially are most prolific, and they mate all the time. Last year in Wellington there were 12 tiger cubs to the two tigresses. This year the fallow deer bred twice—in the wild it occurs only once in a year. Out of the 19 monkeys, only one is a female, and she is the prize of the biggest and strongest. She manages to produce one baby a year. Polar bears are about the only animals that don't



COCKER SPANIEL

breed well in captivity, we were informed. There is only one case of a polar bear being raised in the temperate zones. In wild life the mother hibernates for the winter and the baby is born during this time. The mother has no responsibility, for the baby just curls up beside her and drinks its way through the winter. When spring comes, the baby is big enough to manage fairly well for itself. In captivity, the mother polar bear still wants to have no responsibilities, and if she goes so far as to have a baby, she very soon lets it die. But if the baby didn't die of neglect, its unnatural father would probably see that it died some other way. Polar bears are in no way model parents.

In the matter of mating and breeding, too, we were told, letters of complaint came from mealy-minded visitors who object. If these complaints were heeded, zoo animals would be deprived still further of their natural instincts and ways of life, and the zoos themselves would become depleted.

Don't Cough Over Animals

There is a darker side to zoo life, however. Animals have no immunity to the host of human diseases, and a coughing public very soon spreads infection through the ranks of the zoo animals. Monkeys in particular are most susceptible to pneumonia and tuberculosis. It is not that they are particularly delicate, but they are unable to build up an immunity. The rarer types of monkey are very difficult to display in captivity. They are generally kept in glass-fronted cages, which is a venture too expensive for many zoos. Some zoos have tried erecting notices entreating the public not to cough over the animals. The San Diego Zoo has gone so far as to inaugurate a weekly medical examination of their keepers, to ensure that no infection is introduced in that way. But in spite of all precautions, animals still catch diseases. The Wellington Zoo, with its 1500 birds and animals, however, can boast one of the lowest death-rates in the world: 3½ per cent, compared with the average of 17½ per cent.

But as an offset to diseases, zoo animals are always well fed. They carry the right amount of flesh. For wild animals the food question is a matter of chance. If they starve they die, and there is no one to complain on their behalf. You might say, even if they do die they're free to die where they like, and this lack of freedom is the great stumbling block. But a warm, well-fed, comfortable animal in a zoo has a long lead on a scraggy, fear-ridden, empty-bellied creature of the wild.

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