

February 8, 1967

To: Friends of the Atlanta (Georgia) Zoo
From: Donald R. Dietlein, National Zoological Park
Subject: Report on Visit to Atlanta Zoo on January 28, 1967

On January 28, 1967 the undersigned visited the Atlanta Zoo. During the morning we looked at the zoo as typical visitors; in the afternoon, we were escorted by the zoo foreman. Mr. Dilbeck showed us every courtesy and we were impressed by his loyalty to the zoo.

This report is divided into three parts: I. Physical Plant, II. Animal Collection, and III. Conclusion.

In years past, city zoos were established to exhibit a small collection of animals, in other words, a menagerie. These menageries had no educational values or economical basis for existing. Many cities realized the drawing power of animals and began to build up their zoos for tourist attractions. Other cities built up their zoos for educational programs, while the wealthier cities began to take interest in the conservation side of the zoo.

Today, there is a tendency to combine these values, and in reality, they complement each other to the advantage of the city. With this philosophy in mind, this report is written.

I. PHYSICAL PLANT

The three major buildings of the Atlanta Zoo are outstanding. All buildings were clean and well maintained. Some of the details need improving, such as placing swinging bars in the center of the primate

February 8, 1967

cages so that more of the cage space can be utilized by the animals.

The outside cages on the small cat line are extremely small and should be reworked for better runs. The bear dens are very unattractive but could be improved by landscaping and painting. The hoofed animal area needs a good landscape plan to provide shade and prevent erosion. The children's zoo animal spaces could be made more attractive.

The lack of outside cages attached to the buildings is very noticeable but since the buildings are already built, it is unnecessary to criticize this disadvantage.

The lack of informative signs is very disturbing, and the loss of educational value is obvious.

II. ANIMAL COLLECTION

Observations: There are definitely some animals that should be removed from display, i.e. tailless Jaguar and Black Leopard. Some animals should be off display until their health problems are solved, for example, the spotted leopard.

There seems to be a lack of purpose in the collection: heavy on lions, tigers, Pigtailed macaques, and chimpanzees; while absent are the typical zoo animals: hippos, giraffes, and birds.

Recommendations: Rework collection so there is an array of animals that represents the animal kingdom.

(1) Feline House. By removing all but one good breeding pair of lions and tigers, there would be room for a pair each of cheetahs, serval, Golden cats, hyenas, etc.

(2) Primate House. Place Gibbons in the present Pigtailed macaques' cage; obtain a legal orangutan; thus all representatives of the apes are present. Since the house is controlled environmentally, rare and unusual specimens could be displayed.

(3) Reptile House. Considering the house has never been open to the public, the collection can be considered impressive. As far as it could be determined, there are no tanks to display pure aquatic turtles, for example, Mata mata and the African Soft shell; turtles are very popular with the public.

We recommend that remodeling of the Reptile House be held in abeyance until a director is appointed so that a professional can govern its operation. To allow a lay curator carte blanche to reorganize and remodel a new building is foolish. Professional curators, such as Roger Conant of Philadelphia, Herndon Dowling of New York, or Earl Herald of San Francisco, would be pleased to survey the workings of the building and suggest ways and means to modify it at the least expense so it could be opened to the public.

(4) Hoofed Animal Exhibit. These could be reworked to display interesting species which would help conservation of threatened species. As it is now, the few donkeys, etc. is an extremely uninteresting exhibit.

(5) Children's Zoo. This was seen under winter conditions but it is obvious that a better collection of animals could be obtained, i.e. pigmy goats, llamas, and Fallow deer. Some of the wild babies that are born at the zoo (lions, tigers, monkeys, bears) could be incorporated

February 8, 1967

until they reach an age when it is no longer safe to keep them in a children's zoo. With a little thought, physically, this section could be improved for a closer association between the children and the animals.

(6) Since the zoo does not exhibit birds, a whole zoological division is missing. Even without a birdhouse, a good collection could be present: large birds mixed with the hoofed stock, parrots on outside stands, jays in the green houses with the alligators, and semi-tropical birds in small outdoor cages.

(7) Improvement is needed in the cooperation between the zoo and the educational system that controls the science room in the Primate House. Zoo staff members could conduct tours, give free lectures, and take animals to the local schools. There is an endless list of ways to promote more interest in the educational aspect of the zoo.

III. CONCLUSION

The zoo is lacking in imagination. An example of how animals could be worked into the present physical setup to make it more attractive is by adding macaws to the planted areas of the Primate House, and small finches would do very well in the waterfall areas of the Feline House.

One receives the impression of always being indoors. Relatively inexpensive outside cages could be built to house the common monkeys and small mammals. Landscape walks across from the bears could pass through an exhibit area.

Park and paddock fences could enclose an unused area for hoofed stock. With the advantage of the southern weather, outside plants and animals

February 8, 1967

could make the overall appearance of the zoo more delightful.

Even though the zoo is limited in total acreage, there are many improvements that could be made to give a feeling of largeness.

The Atlanta Zoo has a vast potential; with the correct guidance and backing of the society and city, the zoo could be a valuable asset to the community - both as a cultural and recreational center.

D. R. Dietlein

D. R. Dietlein

W. J. Armstrong

W. J. Armstrong

William A. Xanton

W. A. Xanton

National Zoological Park
Washington, D.C.