



www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk

WILD TALK

2017



TRIPLE TROUBLE!



**Kali, Sita and Sonika
with their proud mum**

The Park's pair of rare Asiatic Lions, Rana and Kanha, have made history with their very first litter. Their cubs are the first Lion triplets to be born at the Park since it opened in 1970...

The new parents are both five years old. Rana arrived at the Park on Valentine's Day 2013 from a zoo in France. Kanha joined him one year later from Parken Zoo in Sweden. Both are part of the European Breeding Programme (EEP) and keepers hoped that they would one day produce a litter of their own.

The two formed an instant bond and in May 2016, after a gestation period of four months, Kanha gave birth to three cubs – Kali, Sita and Sonika. Lionesses rear their babies in seclusion and often reject them if they are

disturbed so keepers watched the births remotely on CCTV monitors.

For nearly two months, the triplets lived solely with their mother in the birthing pen. Rana remained in the neighbouring enclosure and was never too far from the cubs, often seen by keepers taking a great interest in his new family. Then the cubs were successfully introduced to their father in the main outdoor enclosure. Kanha and Rana are proving to be exceptional first-time parents and all three boisterous cubs, sexed as female, are healthy and developing well.

Asiatic Lions (*Panthera leo persica*) are one of the world's rarest big cat species. Wild population numbers have declined over the last century, almost to the point of extinction. Once found throughout much of South-West Asia, they are now only found in one isolated area – India's Gir Forest, which is one of the most important conservation areas in Asia.

DID YOU KNOW? Lions became extinct in Europe during the 1st century A.D.

PLAYFUL CUBS



One of the Park's big excitements in 2016 was the birth of three female cubs. Keeper Steve Miles writes about their early months...

Our three Asiatic Lion cubs are exploring a lot without mum, Kanha, now leaving her to rest and relax. Dad Rana gets involved in playtime, and is often seen sat with the cubs resting on the platform, whilst mum sits on the platform without a ramp, which the cubs cannot climb onto, meaning she gets a proper break from their antics.

They have been eating solid food since 2 months old, when they first started testing out mum's dinner. Their favourite appears to be rabbit, which they get very excited about and are often seen fighting over. We do lots of enrichment for the Lions which includes hiding their food around the enclosure, or in piles of leaves or straw.

We often use giraffe bedding as enrichment or herbs such as mint, lavender and rosemary to give them something to investigate. When a herb or a spray is put in the enclosure, on their straw or logs, you see them rolling around and loving it, like you see with domestic cats and cat nip.

LAID BACK LEMUR

As farmers say, if you have livestock, you have dead stock. We all have to accept the death of our animal friends and Curator Jamie Craig reminds us of a special favourite, who died in 2016...



Amongst the many animals we've had at the Park, Youssou a Crowned Sifaka Lemur was unique. His laid back, philosophical approach to life was in stark contrast to the antics and high energy of many of the other popular characters. No other individual seemed to connect with so many keepers, volunteers, vets, gardeners, shop staff and visitors.

From a personal point of view, my own work with Lemurs and Lemur conservation stems from him. He caught my imagination and subsequently caught the imagination of his keepers. All have a story – his much heralded arrival at the Park, a coup for us and with perfect timing due to the filming of the ITV documentary series Parklife; the time he broke his arm and spent his recovery period holding it aloft and out of harm's way; "adopting" Red Belly Lemur twins and acting as a baby sitter whilst the parents went about their business; his love-hate relationship with Bafana when the two lived together (it ended with a resounding hate unfortunately!); his exemplary behaviour as a patient during his increasing bouts of illness and, above all, his enduring friendship with "Ma" the Ring Tailed Lemur.

Without Youssou, there would be no Sifaka Conservation Project, no Park conservation charity and we would certainly not be one of the foremost Lemur collections in Europe. But above all of this, in a strange way, I considered him a friend and a lasting presence at the Park. It is easy to become hardened to the loss of animals during the course of a long career but in his case, I will make an exception. For me, and all that knew him, the Park will not feel the same without him.

Goodbye mate – I am sure you are somewhere looking down, with a mouthful of acacia and an expression of endless patience, waiting to have your tail scratched...



A TINY SUCCESS

WE BREED OUR FIRST VIETNAMESE MOSSY FROGS

One of the
parent Mossy
Frogs on a
keeper's finger

**Meet the ultimate
camouflage artist – a brand
new species to the Park,
the Vietnamese Mossy Frog
(*Theloderma corticale*)**

In scientific terms, these remarkable amphibians are a relatively recent discovery. Their first recorded sighting was in 1903. Originating from the steep mountain slopes of Northern Vietnam, due to their remote location, they have been out of reach for scientists and researchers for decades and very little is known about this species in the wild. They are listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.

Their camouflage has been described as one of the best in the amphibian world. Rough, bumpy skin, combined with complex green and black colouring, makes them almost indistinguishable from a lump of moss or lichen, enabling these tiny Frogs to blend in perfectly with their surroundings and avoid detection by predators. When frightened, they curl into a ball and remain motionless, mimicking death to avoid further harm.

Our Reptile Keepers are thrilled with the first breeding of this species. Successful hand-rearing of any amphibian to adulthood is difficult, as the metamorphosing stages can be very challenging.

In the wild, this species breeds by larval development in rock cavities containing water and also in tree holes. It takes approximately one year for a tadpole to become a fully developed adult. Researchers have discovered that Mossy Frog tadpoles can exist in water for months without developing, but they metamorphose into froglets within days when the water dries up.

Frogs have appeared in legend and folklore in many cultures throughout history. Chinese legends involving Frogs date back 2,000 years. Special temples were built for Frogs, in which live Frogs were encouraged to stay with offerings of food and water. When the amphibians wandered away from their appointed homes, they would be brought back to the temple accompanied by drums and music. In ancient Egypt, carvings and religious statues were made in the image of Frogs. Archaeologists have also discovered embalmed Frogs in some Egyptian burial sites.



NEW TOAD HALL

James Reynolds, Head Reptile Keeper at the Park, highlights our new Amphibian House for 2017...

Amphibians such as Frogs and Toads are an important indicator of the health of ecosystems around the world. They have seen dinosaurs come and go, but today half of all species are facing extinction, through climate change, pollution, habitat loss and disease. The Reptile Team thought that this was something we needed to tell the visitors about as this topic does not always get into the news.

In 2017 we are going to convert the former house for the Naked Mole Rats into a purpose built amphibian house located in the bottom of the Walled Garden to help contribute to their survival through breeding programmes and research. This will help visitors to learn more about these amazing creatures and also learn what

difficulties they are facing in the UK and around the world. Visitors will also be able to see the inner workings of the house and better understand what we do behind the scenes when looking after these sometimes cryptic animals.

This will be a great building block for the Park to help many species of amphibian take that next step towards survival.



Poison Arrow Frog

THE PARK'S INVOLVEMENT IN GORILLA CONSERVATION

Head of Mammals, Hayley Mullaney, finds time in her work to organise fund-raising for conservation and also to check up on how the Park's Conservation Trust spends its money...

The Cotswold Wildlife Park may not have great apes, but like all animals, we love and respect them and don't want to see them decline in the natural world. The Park's Conservation Trust now donates an annual amount of \$5,000 to a very worthwhile Mountain Gorilla Conservation Project out in Uganda, Africa. I and another keeper were fortunate enough to get the



Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka

opportunity to attend a fundraising event in London and hear first-hand about the project and the benefits the work is having in the area where the Mountain Gorillas inhabit.

Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka is the lady behind the magnificent work and she presented a very enthusiastic and fascinating talk into her work in Uganda. She set up the project named 'Conservation Through Public Health' and she has been working to improve local communities' health in order to help improve the health of the Mountain Gorillas living in the nearby National Parks.

Many diseases and illnesses can be passed from humans to primates and vice versa and so poverty and lack of education have meant that for many years the spread of disease has caused numbers of Gorillas to decline, as well as other issues such as poaching and habitat destruction. Dr Gladys set up the project to improve public health and conserve Uganda's wildlife and so far her work has been proving very successful. For more information please check out the website www.ctph.org.

DO RHINOS LAY EGGS?



Educating the next generation about the natural world has always been a vital aim of the Park, ever since it was founded in 1970. Zoology graduate and the Park's Education Co-ordinator since 2014, Nicolette Craig gives an insight into her key role here....

The life of a Zoo Education Co-ordinator can be an interesting one. I have lost count of the number of times where I have had to bite the inside of my mouth to stop laughing at some of the things that children come out with during their education sessions.

Fortunately, I love that part of my job and for me it is the most important part: teaching children that a Rhino horn isn't made out of wood, stone or metal but actually keratin just like our hair and fingernails; that Rhinos aren't dinosaurs and therefore don't lay eggs; that a Giraffe has exactly the same number of neck bones as we do; that bats go to the toilet by hanging the 'right way up' and that for a lot of mammals the way you tell the difference between males and females is exactly the same way as you do for people(!). The look of wonder that you get from the children (and quite often the adults too!) is something that you can't recreate anywhere else and I love the fact that we can add so much to a school's learning.

We are fairly unusual in that most of our talks happen out and about in the Park, so that we can get 'up close

and personal' with the animals. Of course this does mean that we are very open to witnessing some of the more... interesting aspects of wildlife! However, sometimes if the animals are sleeping or not co-operating then I supplement my talks with a bag of props. These range from a Giraffe neck bone, a complete openable Brazil nut pod, a cuddly toy that turns from a tadpole into a Frog and even a varnished Rhino poo! Anything that helps to awaken an interest and fascination in the natural world is fair game and if it fits in my bag I will carry it.

In the last year we have welcomed over 25,000 school children to the Park and given educational talks to nearly 8,000 of them. Those children have eaten 2,000 ice creams, bought 800 goody bags and taken nearly 11,000 train rides. Sounds crazy? Maybe, but I wouldn't change a thing.

If you would like to find out more about Education at the Wildlife Park, take a look at our website:

www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk/education
ring **01993 825720** or email
education@cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk



WILD STORKS

Bird Keeper Jade Stott talks about the Park's involvement with a White Stork captive breeding program...



**Curator
Jamie Craig
with one
of the new
arrivals**

White Storks were once breeding residents in Britain, however, habitat destruction and human persecution caused their extinction towards the end of the 15th century. The occasional White Stork is still spotted on UK soil, but these visits are normally just pit stops by disorientated birds on their annual migration between Africa and Eastern Europe.

In 2016 the Park received 64 White Stork adults from Poland who had various degrees of wing damage from collisions with power lines, leaving them vulnerable to predation in the wild, but nevertheless ideal for a captive breeding project. By including them in this pioneering program, their futures are safe in captivity.

When the Storks arrived they were housed in off-show facilities during the required 30-day quarantine period. Upon completion, they moved into their on-show paddock, which gives them the space and opportunity to pair up naturally for the impending breeding season. We wait with bated breath and hope that they are as productive as folklore would have us believe!

TRIBUTE TO THE COLONEL

Working with birds is always a bit of a rollercoaster of emotions. Louise Peat, our Animal Records Manager tells the story of one of the longest lived birds at the Park...

On 20th June 1988 a Black Stork chick made his final push for freedom out of his calcium encrusted womb, the first successfully parent reared Black Stork in the UK. The Park's Bird Team had worked hard to get to this point. The little fella not only thrived but grew into a handsome young man.



**Colonel,
our aged
Black Stork**

It took until 1995 to locate the perfect female to partner with our young male. In 2000 this young pair successfully parent reared their first chick, the Park's second such success. Over

the next few years fourteen offspring were successfully reared (both parent and hand-reared). They were transferred to collections in the UK, France, Sweden and Switzerland and at the time of writing there are nine successfully reared grandchildren who are themselves now getting close to breeding age.

In 2010 the male now known as the Colonel was 22 years of age, and with the death of the female the old man swapped job role. He was promoted to teacher and mentor to the young Black Storks. His gentle nature proved perfect for this role, socialising several young Black Storks, some of which had been hand-reared.

During the winter of 2015 the Colonel began to show signs of age, a stiffer gait and what can only be described as a slightly pained expression. His condition slowly deteriorated and on 30th August 2016 after a review of his medication showed that it was no longer relieving his symptoms, the decision was made to end his suffering. At 28 years old this remarkable character had finally succumbed to arthritis.

Over the years hundreds of thousands of visitors have admired him, an ambassador and propagator of his species. His good solid genes have added so much to the captive population of this beautiful and rare species. I salute your life, Colonel; it's been a privilege knowing you.



Gone are the days when John Heyworth, the Park's founder, would advertise for new staff by putting a "wanted" card in Burford Post Office. The Park's volunteer programme can be a way in, as trainee Keeper Jack Dakin describes...

DREAMS CAN COME TRUE!

Ever since I can remember I have always dreamt of a career as a Zookeeper, and it has finally come true! Through lots of hard work and determination I am now a full time Trainee Large Mammal Keeper.

I started at the Wildlife Park in July 2014 as a volunteer in "Madagascar", our walkthrough Lemur enclosure, coming in one day a week to monitor the enclosure and help the Keepers in any way possible. I did this for just over a year and then an opportunity came up to volunteer on the Bird section one day a week as well, which I snapped up straight away. I started helping on the Bird Section during a very busy breeding season, in which all the Bird Keepers were hand-rearing baby

birds, so my job was to assist in the daily cleaning and husbandry to give them more time for hand-rearing.

In January 2016 I was offered a part time temporary position on the Large Mammal section, which after 3 months turned into a full time trainee Keeper position. The main part of my job is mucking out as our animals produce a lot of poo, which someone has to clean up, but there is a lot more to this job than mucking out animals. I prepare food, visually health check all the animals every day, assist with record keeping, give talks and encounters to our visitors and much more! As Keepers we work in all weathers and we even have to work on Christmas Day, since the animals still have to be looked after!

WRIST BANDS TO RANGERS

August 2016 was Rhino Month at the Park, with a daily talk about the Rhinos. With donations and the sale of wrist bands, visitors raised over £1,000...

The Park is a big supporter of Tusk Trust, a charity that helps conservation projects all over Africa. The money the Park raised during Rhino month went towards the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy Project in Northern Kenya. The conservancy is a non-profit organisation that protects and manages an area of 251 Km² of grassland, acacia groves and wetlands on the foothills of Mount Kenya. The area is home to 70 mammal species and 350 bird species, including some of the planet's most endangered species, such as the Black Rhino and the Grevy's Zebra.

Since it was established in 1994 it has built up its Black Rhino and White Rhino population to over 120 Rhinos,

helping to bring back the Black Rhino from the brink of extinction in Kenya. This is largely down to daily monitoring and surveillance of Lewa's Rhino population with the help of a security force of 150 highly trained personnel, including armed rangers, surveillance teams, tracker dog handlers and night guards.

What makes the project successful is the partnership it has with local communities and schools ensuring that they see wildlife as an asset not a liability. It supports 9 primary schools and 2 secondary schools giving them the best resources to ensure a good education for their pupils and creating awareness of the importance of conservation and the environment. For more information visit the websites below.

www.tusk.org
www.lewa.org





ARID BEDS

Gardener Hillary Coke describes some of the more unusual plants that are thriving in the specially created bedding around the Meerkat enclosure in our Walled Garden...

Outside in the summer months the Arid Beds' collection of over fifty succulents and cacti has proved to be very popular with our visitors especially the children, who seem fascinated with the very spiky types. The Arid Beds include *Aeoniums*, *Agaves*, *Aloes*, *Cereus*, *Cleistocactus*, *Echeverias*, *Euphorbias*, *Opuntias* and many other unusual species.

In recent years the collection has expanded to include a large 'Wheel Cactus' *Opuntia robusta* which produces edible fruit and a 'Bilbery Cactus' *Myrtillocactus geometrizans* that has delicious purple berries. The 'Ponytail Palm' *Beaucarnia recurvata* which originates from Mexico, actually belongs to the Asparagus family and its unusual swollen stem base helps store water in its dry native environment. Another is 'Dragon Tree' *Dracaena draco* which originates from the Canary

Islands; it produces a red sap known as dragon's blood which is used for medicinal purposes.

The collection is thriving under a new specialised cultivation regime which has seen many of the specimens including the columnar *Cereus* cacti double in size. Several have produced spectacular white inflorescences (flowers) which in the wild would attract their pollinating moths and bats.

In mid-October the whole collection is lifted out and displayed in the glasshouse at the bottom of the Walled Garden to protect it from the winter cold and damp. The borders are then filled with an interesting mix of evergreens together with unusual spring bulbs such as *Crocus olivieri* and *Iris reticulata* 'Mars Landing'. The Cacti are re-potted during winter, fed a high phosphate slow release feed in the spring and then plunged (in their pots) back into the ground at the end of May.



A GREAT BRITISH WEDDING

The Park hosted its first wedding for over 30 years, and Gardener Mandy Palmer describes the preparations...



In early September 2016, a large marquee appeared on the lawn near the restaurant and that's when the questions started "Are they filming *Bake Off*?" What fun we could have had with our visitors if we had replied "yes, it's *Bake Off at the Park*". It wasn't "The Great British *Bake Off*" however, it was the wedding of the Park's founder John Heyworth's granddaughter Olivia Eckersley to Ben Townsend.



The marquee ready and waiting

The marquee was adorned with dozens of huge plants from the gardens department, which needed a forklift tractor to move them. The tables had vases of flowers which looked as though they had been picked from the gardens. However, most of the wows from the wedding guests came as they saw a Lion, sitting proudly watching the proceedings. Yes it was a real Lion, a much loved Lion, who had died of old age a few years ago. He was preserved and is now used as a teaching aid in our Education programme. I don't know what "The Great British *Bake Off*" team would have made of it, but we had a wonderful time making a great British wedding!



Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens, Bradwell Grove, Burford, Oxfordshire OX18 4JP

+44 (0) 1993 823 006 • enquiries@cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk • www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk



@CotsWildTweets



Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens