



Cotswold Wildlife Park Newsletter 2023

WILD TALK

Welcome TO THE PARK

Our pair of Pallas's Cats have produced their first litter at the Park

Wild Talk is our annual newsletter featuring articles written by the staff here at the Park providing first-hand accounts of births, new animals and exciting Park developments

Designed and edited by Bethan Peacock, Education and Conservation Officer

www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk



Written by
Issy Wright

Bird keeper

It was so exciting to have flamingo chicks for the first time in 6 years at the Park

FLAMINGO CHICKS

We have had flamingos at the Park from the day we first opened in 1970 and they have been a much-loved and familiar sight to our visitors over the years. Our current flock of just over 50 birds includes some of these original birds, with our oldest now 54 years old!

Although seen in many different zoos they are notoriously difficult to breed, requiring specific group sizes and gender ratios. After 6 years of no flamingo chicks being born at the Park, earlier in 2022 we brought in some new additions to the flock in the hope that this might encourage our group to start breeding again.

The plan worked and not long after the new additions arrived we made the exciting discovery that an egg had been laid! Due to the cold weather and the exposed nature of the lake area where our group live, we decided to take the eggs and hand-rear the chicks to ensure the best chance of survival.

This would now mean a much busier day for the flamingo keeper! The average day starts by creating a formula for the chicks, consisting of raw chicken eggs, filleted fish, flamingo pellet and some supplements. This would all be blended and then sieved



WALKIES
A young flamingo chick stretching it's legs whilst sticking close to a keeper

(twice!) before feeding to the chicks through a syringe. The chicks needed feeding roughly every 2 hours in the beginning, the first feed being at 7am, and the last at 8pm. As they grew, we gradually reduced these feeds to 5 times a day, then 3 times and eventually the chicks

were weaned and could eat pellet (adult food) all by themselves. The birds also needed exercising before each feed after the first week of age, so we took our little flock for daily walks. The birds are very characterful, and very friendly towards their keepers. They reach

adult size after about four months, and once the younger birds catch up, the group will be introduced to our adult flock.



FEEDING TIME
One of the flamingo chicks having some formula through a syringe

CHICK DIARIES

It's crucial that accurate records are kept for each of the chicks, so that keepers can keep track of weight gains and changes in behaviour and also use this information to compare to other chicks. We can then also use this information to help inform hand-rearing protocols for future flamingo chicks as well as for other species if they are needed.

Feed 1 Time: 7:30am Brooder temp: 33 Weight: 216g Intake: 22ml	Feed 2 Time: 10:00am Brooder temp: 24 Weight: 226g Intake: 25ml	Feed 3 Time: 12:00pm Brooder temp: 25 Weight: 236g Intake: 26ml
Feed 4 Time: 2:00pm Brooder temp: 29 Weight: 242g Intake: 25ml	Feed 5 Time: 4:30pm Brooder temp: 30 Weight: 254g Intake: 24ml	Feed 6 Time: 7:00pm Brooder temp: 28 Weight: 258g Intake: 24ml
Daily Observations Keen, feed well: Yes Active/Vocal: Yes Faeces passed: Yes		Developmental notes 6% weight increase from yesterday Total intake for day: 146ml



WHITE STORK UPDATE



Written by
Jamie Craig

Curator and General
Manager

The Park has been involved in the White Stork project since 2016. We are now in our 6th year, releasing 20 to 30 young birds per year on the Knepp Estate



We received our first batch of birds in late 2016, this enabled us to set up a breeding group of fifty storks and to send enough birds to our project partners to establish small resident groups with them. All these birds were imported from Warsaw Zoo in Poland. They are rehabilitated injured birds from the wild that unfortunately could not be released due to disabilities that would have affected their chances of survival in the wild. All these imported birds were quarantined here at the Park on arrival to ensure that all were free of any potential diseases and were healthy (despite their minor disabilities) and could be moved to our large, netted exhibit here at the Park and to the other project enclosures. Two further imports bolstered numbers and we could now wait for our birds to settle and mature before the serious business of breeding could begin.

White Storks begin showing pairing and breeding behaviours in late winter, and it is at this time that the dedication of their keepers is vital. Enormous quantities of nesting material must be added constantly whilst the pairs build their huge nests. A careful selection of twigs, sticks and other favoured materials is needed. Each pair will show a preference and they are certainly not averse to stealing material from other pairs if it appeals to them more than the items they initially selected. Careful observation is needed to ensure all birds can complete their nests to their satisfaction. Egg laying is monitored, and we can then gauge approximate hatch dates from each clutch – usually 3-5 large white eggs.

After approximately 35 days, the chicks will hatch, and the keepers then assume the role of “fairy godmother” to the chicks and the adults. Although the adults will bring a good supply of food to the nest for the young, the keepers also

assist feed – visiting each nest daily with quantities of finely chopped feed items (usually fish and insects) to ensure that each chick's survival is optimised, and the workload of the parents with large clutches is not too exhausting. The young birds grow rapidly and by around 2 months of age the birds will fledge the nest and become independent.

Once all the young birds have left their nests, they are separated from the adults and given identifying rings, as well as having samples taken to determine sexes. After a two week settling period (and to ensure all birds are strong and healthy), they are transferred to the release pen at Knepp Estate in West Sussex. The release pen is set in a 6 acre enclosure that contains other sedentary storks as well as a resident free-flying population. Once at the pen, they are cared for by a member of the Park team and are able to see and hear the resident birds and become part of this new flock. Several of the new cohort are fitted with GPS satellite trackers, so they can be followed and monitored on their release.

So far, we have bred and transferred over one hundred young storks to Knepp for release into the wild. Many have successfully made the journey to Southern Europe and even into Northern Africa, following wild birds on their annual migration. Storks do not return to their nesting ground until they have matured at 4 years, so we are all waiting anxiously for the first Cotswold Storks to return to England and hopefully become a permanent breeding fixture in the landscape once again.



FROG SPAWN



Written by
Megan Howard

Reptile Keeper

It's the first time in the Park's history that we've managed to breed this species

As far as frogs go, the Mexican giant tree frog (*Agalychnis dacnicolor*) is relatively unusual. Whereas most prefer wet habitats, where their sensitive skin can be protected and kept damp, this species is adapted to survive prolonged dry periods. They are known to bask in the sunlight like reptiles and have an extra waxy coating to their skin that allows them to retain water. However, similarly to many other amphibians, they rely on seasonal changes to breed. The brief yet heavy rainy season of their native Mexican tropical forest habitat creates large pools on the forest floor, ideal for raising tadpoles. After researching methods of recreating these seasonal changes in captive conditions, we attempted to recreate them ourselves with our group at the Park.

After noting signs that the frogs were getting ready to breed – for example, the presence of dark “nuptial pads” on the males’ thumbs – we began our 2-week “rainy season”. The tank’s moss substrate was replaced with water a few cm deep and warmed to around 26°C. For the next 5 days we provided 5

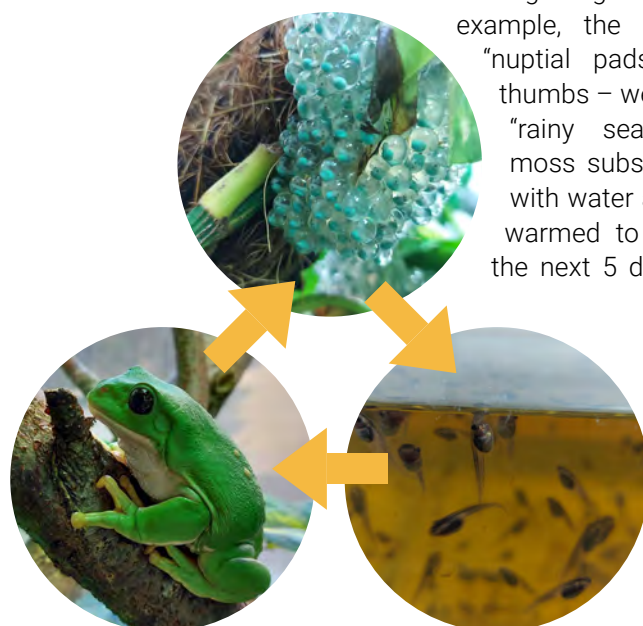
sessions of “heavy rain” (spraying water for 5 minutes through the top of the enclosure), and then every other day for the next 9 days. Within just 3 days the first clutch of frogspawn was laid! Clutch 2 came on day 5, and clutch 3 on day 11!

These frogs lay their eggs on leaves overhanging the pools of water, allowing tadpoles to hatch out and drop straight in. After only 24 hours we could see development in the eggs, and tadpoles began hatching after 7 days. One clutch of frogspawn can contain anything from 150-300 eggs, and tadpoles hatch from nearly all. The tadpoles are voracious, constantly hungry, and require multiple feeds of fish flake, bloodworm and crickets every day as they develop.

So far we have 31 fully metamorphosed froglets and still more to come! This is a great success for our team and a first for this species at the Park. Despite not being classed as endangered this species’ population is thought to be declining in the wild. Amphibians are the most endangered group of vertebrates on the planet, with 41% threatened with extinction. This success helps to further our understanding of the care and husbandry of amphibians in captivity, which is vital to their overall survival prospects.

LIFE CYCLE

Pictured are the key life stages from frog spawn, to tadpole to adult frog, this process is called metamorphosis



Articles below written by Bethan Peacock
Education and Conservation Officer

HOUSE MARTINS

Here at the Park we work hard not just to help conservation efforts for exotic species but also for our very own British wildlife. For years now we have had a group of House Martins come and visit us over the summer to build their nests and breed.

They build their nests along the side of the manor house where we also have a series of artificial nests for them to use. These nests give them an easy option to use but also encourage them to build their own. This is no easy task as each nest is made up of over 1,000 beak-fulls of mud! That’s over 2,000 trips back and forth to an area of damp mud. The presence of this mud is crucial for House Martins choosing their nest site and the whole build takes around 10 days.

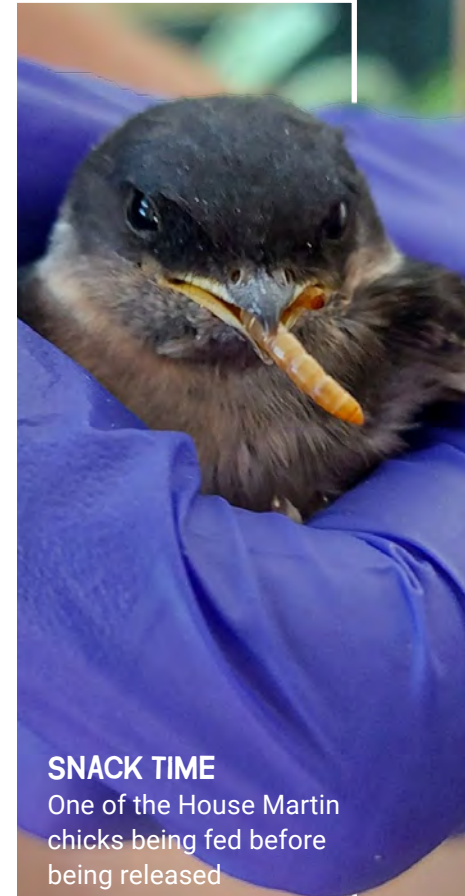
Studies suggest that these areas of mud need to be within 300m from the nesting sites but ideally within

150m. For the House Martins that choose to come and nest at the Park, they are treated to large amounts of mud just over 100m away from the Manor House, where our Rhinos enjoy their regular mud baths! This large area of accessible mud so close to ideal nesting sites means we have become very popular with this local bird.

In the very hot July of 2022, some of the chicks got too hot in their nests and fell to the courtyard below. Unfortunately, they were too young to be fully-fledged and so required a bit of extra help from the keepers to cool them down and keep them fed until they were strong enough to fly back up and re-join their families. All of us at the Park are already looking forward to welcoming our guests back next year.

SNACK TIME

One of the House Martin chicks being fed before being released



FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

In 2022 we were able to get back to hosting a variety of fundraising events across the Park. In May we celebrated World Binturong day and Lemur week with stalls set up by the animals’ enclosures with raffles to enter and toys, badges and wristbands to buy in aid of species-specific charities. In August we also had a stall to celebrate Rhino weekend! All of these events help us to raise awareness of the animals and the issues they face in the wild, as well as to fundraise for charities that work with these species. These are great opportunities for visitors to learn more about the different species as well as the individuals that we house here at the Park.

In September the staff did some fundraising of their own, when we all took part in a 7km fun run to support Impact Madagascar’s Ranger Team who were taking part in a half-marathon fundraising event, organised worldwide by the conservation charity Tusk Trust (www.tusk.org).

As well as fundraising events like these, we also support local schools and organisations by donating tickets for their own raffles and events. In 2022 we gave over **£30,000** worth of complimentary tickets to the Park for these good causes.



CARNIVORE KEEPER UPDATE



Written by
James Welch

Carnivore Keeper

It's a great time for the Carnivore Section with so many breeding successes and expansion

2022 has been an exciting year for the Carnivore Section here at the Park. Dobby and Himala, our pair of Binturong, have continued their breeding success with their fourth litter! Coconut, their first kit born in 2019 who moved to Dudley Zoo in 2021, has now produced her first kit, making them grandparents. Three more offspring have moved this year, Rambutan to Paradise Wildlife Park, Rosie to Beale Wildlife Park and Fig to Paignton Zoo, all awaiting their own breeding partners. The most recent litter born on 16th May 2022 consists of two girls, Bobbie and Billie and one boy, Baldrick, who is the smallest of the trio. Just like their older siblings they have been a joy to watch develop and are full of mischief!

Excitingly we have also seen the birth of a litter of Pallas's Cat



BINTURONG KITS
Binturong Kit, Baldrick, watched over by Mum, Himala

kittens. This is the first time that our pair Penelope and Tull have bred, and the first kittens seen at the Park since 2010. Pallas's Cats are strictly seasonal breeders, and the female is only receptive for 1-2 days a year, normally in January or February. We gave Penelope



NEW LION HOUSE
The new lion house under construction



KITTENS
The two kittens, Poppy and Peter, keeping a close eye on their keeper

as much privacy as we could, and waited apprehensively for any signs around the estimated due date. After not seeing her for a whole day, she then appeared looking thinner and with an increased appetite, so we were quietly confident that she had given birth. We waited for the next few weeks looking for anything out of the ordinary and after 5 weeks, small heads started to appear out of the entry of the nest box. A wonderful sight! Penelope has been a brilliant Mum and has been very protective over them. The two kittens Peter and Poppy are now larger than their mother and look lovely in their pristine winter coat!

2022 has also been a year for exciting developments too. Work started in April to give our pair of Asiatic Lions, Rana and Kanha, a brand-new indoor facility, more

than double the size of their current house. This is attached to our former cubbing den, located on the opposite side of our lion enclosure, nearer to the giraffes. Lions are known for being the only social cat species and the new facility offers them a large communal area on show to our visitors, which is the size of the whole of the current house just in one room!

We wanted this space to be as light and airy as possible with skylights to let in plenty of natural light which we are sure the lions will appreciate. They will also have a large platform in here and several fallen logs to climb and scratch on, all on a soft bark-chip floor. The size of this space gives the lions the opportunity to rest together but also separately as they do like their own personal space from time to time.

Behind this public area there are two private dens and a large space for keepers which can be used for veterinary procedures if needed. Further changes will be noticeable outside as well, as we modify our former cubbing enclosure and do some more landscaping work in the main exhibit. I personally cannot wait to see the Lions in their new house and we are all very eager to show our visitors the finished facility in 2023!



BABY BOOM



Written by
Charlotte Turner

Primate Keeper

It's been amazing to watch our primate families grow and here's hoping 2023 brings us the same success, if not better!

It's been a bumper year for babies on the Primate Section, we've celebrated not one, not two but TEN adorable new additions to the section!

Our conspiracy of Ring-Tailed Lemurs grew by two after Hira gave birth to twins in March. These were named Benjamin and Platinum by our visitors who won our lemur week competition. They have settled into the group well and enjoy playing with the adults and putting first-time Dad, Bernie, in his place!

The month of May saw two groups of critically endangered primates grow in numbers. First, our Cotton-Top Tamarin pair added to their brood with another set of twins. The twins are now independently moving around the exhibit but are still keen to steal food from Mum and Dad instead of finding their own. Secondly, we welcomed an incredibly valuable member to our Bamboo Lemur troop, Orsa. With less than thirty individuals in captivity, this little bundle of fluff is likely to be extremely important in

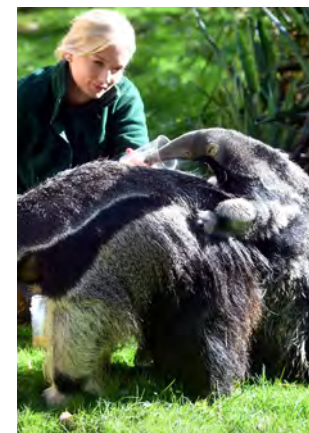
the breeding programme in years to come.

June was our most successful month with three species increasing in numbers. Our most mischievous pair were born first, Cleo and Anthony, twin Crowned Lemurs. They've proved to be our most challenging babies by deciding to explore the wider world outside of the Madagascar exhibit on several occasions, but always coming back and doing as Mum tells them! Just three days later, we said hello to our first Colobus baby in three years, and then a second ten days after that! One boy and one girl, both are doing extremely well and are already keen to nibble and play with anything they can get their little mouths and hands on.

Finally, to round off the month and the birthing season, our Coppery Titi family went from three to four! Our newest addition is delightfully cute and is still enjoying the easy life by being carried around by Dad and stealing his food.



ENRICHMENT



Written by
Jenni Maxwell

Senior Keeper and
Enrichment Co-ordinator

Providing the animals with enrichment at the Park is an important role for all of the keepers, so that we can provide enrichment for every single species the Park holds

Enrichment is the term used to describe a method of improving the well-being of the animals in our care. This can be implemented in a huge number of ways such as providing a naturalistic and stimulating enclosure, or housing animals in appropriate social groups.

We often use olfactory enrichment with our carnivores, pictured top right is Sarka the wolverine rolling around in some lavender clippings. Other examples include creating herb/spice trails around their enclosures or introducing another animal's shed fur or bedding into their enclosure.

Food is the most common form of enrichment used, as it can be presented in so many different ways such as frozen blocks, scattered around the enclosure or left in whole chunks. Pictured on the right you can see Matiz, the Red-Bellied Lemur, with a frozen juice block and George, the Giant Tortoise, with a pumpkin at Halloween.

Just as with pets, we also provide different toys to some of the animals that they can manipulate and interact with. On the right, you can see Edward, the Rhino Iguana, with a treat ball similar to one you would give to a dog!

Improving and changing the environment in the animal's enclosure is a great way to engage the animals, this could be changing the substrate in an enclosure or introducing new logs or leaf piles for them to rummage through. Pictured on the bottom right is one of our meerkats investigating the fresh bark added to his enclosure.



DREAMNIGHT AT THE ZOO

Written by **Lorah Wardle**

Education and Activities Assistant

Following a two-year interruption due to Covid restrictions, in June 2022 Cotswold Wildlife Park could proudly open its doors once again for a very special evening. 'Dreamnight at the Zoo' is an invitation-only event for chronically ill and disabled children, along with their families, providing them with an exclusive experience of the Wildlife Park after-hours.

Seventy-five families were welcomed from the Rainbow Trust charity (supporting families with a seriously ill child), Oxfordshire-based charities Helen & Douglas House (providing hospice care for terminally ill children and young adults) and ROSY (Respite Nursing for Oxfordshire's Sick Youngsters). We also welcomed families from the James Hopkins Trust (providing nursing respite care for Gloucestershire's life-limited and life-threatened young children), CALM (Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Movement) and WellChild (giving seriously ill children the best chance to thrive).

In addition to the unique chance to observe what the animals get up to once the Park is closed to visitors, the keepers and staff volunteered to make the evening one to remember for these very special guests. The event was filled with many amazing moments, including unforgettable animal encounters with the Lemurs, Giraffes and Penguins, planting with the Park's gardeners, fun games on the lawn and the chance to meet beautiful birds of prey from our friends at Cotswold Falconry Centre. Our guests were also able to take a delightful summer's evening ride around the Park on our narrow-gauge railway, with keepers and staff enjoying this opportunity too.

Cotswold Wildlife Park are honoured to be able to host the Dreamnight event each year and be able to provide families with this memorable experience. We hope to continue this annual tradition for as long as we can.

