

# ZOO Liberec – Adventure and Knowledge

In 2009, the oldest Zoological garden of the former Czechoslovakia celebrated its ninetieth anniversary. Located at the foothills of the Jizera Mountains in the Northern most part of the Czech Republic, the ZOO accommodates approximately 170 animal species accounting in total over 1000 individuals.



The Liberec ZOO is the only place in Europe, where you can see a white form of the Bengal Tiger (*Panthera Tigris*) or the huge Golden Takin (*Budorcas Taxicolor Bedfordi*). Also extremely unique is one of the most complex collections of birds of prey in the Old Continent, which includes among others the Bearded Vulture, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, the Steller's Sea Eagle, as well as Chimango Caracara and Yellow Headed Caracara.

The ZOO boasts the largest breeding group of the critically endangered Somali Wild Ass (*Equus Africanus Somaliensis*) in the Czech Republic; they are also the only ZOO in this country that keeps Himalayan Blue Sheep (*Pseudois Nayaur*) in addition to the large and well established group of ever popular chimpanzees (*Pan Troglodytes*). Among the favourite animals of the visitors are especially Red Pandas and big cats such as the Snow Leopard and the North Chinese Leopard, lions, cheetahs, Carpathian Lynx, Indian Elephants, Rothschild's Giraffes, Chapman's and Burchell's Zebras, South American Sea Lions, and a variety of tropical fauna.

**Are white tigers really rare?**

The first two white tigers were purchased by the ZOO in 1994 – two siblings, Columbo and Isabella, delivered to Liberec from Eskilstuna, Sweden. In 2002, after waiting for five long years, the ZOO managed to acquire a male – Sitar, from Madrid, who was not related to the siblings. He later fathered triplets with Isabella – Achilles, Artemis and Aphrodite. Since then, there were two more male white tigers in the ZOO, Tibet (who died in 2007) and from 2006 Paris, who has been so far unsuccessful in trying to produce an offspring.

Therefore we brought a year old female tiger Surya Bára from Bratislava ZOO in 2009, as an addition to the breed. Upon her and Paris, who is three years her senior, now rests the greatest hope of continuation of the white tiger breeding program. White tigers, weighing up to 150 kg, are incredibly attractive among big cats, not only from the visitors' point of view, but also from a marketing perspective.

However, in purely breeding terms, they are not a rarity, they are in fact animals with a genetic defect that causes a lack of fur pigment (simply, that's why they are white, not orange). We must also rebut another myth: white tigers are not albinos. Their blue eyes, pink nose and pink paw pads are a clear evidence of that. Presence of these top predators in the Liberec ZOO significantly financially contributes to the upkeep of the truly rare animals, such as Markhor, East Caucasian Tur and the Somali Wild Ass that is on the brink of extinction, which are unfortunately sometimes overlooked by the visitors.



### **Unique ecological fusion**

With the turn of the millennium, the Liberec ZOO opened its other dimensions to experts as well as to

the general public and immediately found itself among the top, most modern facilities of this kind in the country. The Centre of Ecological Education DIVIZNA (Verbascum) and the Centre for Animals in Need ARCHA (Ark) have both become integral parts of the ZOO. DIVIZNA provides comprehensive services in the field of ecological education for teachers, pupils, students and the general public (educational programs, seminars, excursions, art workshops, etc.). ARCHA, which incorporates a shelter for dogs and cats together with a station for handicapped animals, takes care of injured animals from both the wild and domestic environment. The Liberec ZOO thus represents a unique fusion, one of its kind in the Czech Republic, because through caring for rare and endangered animals, offering its educational programs, and organising numerous special events they successfully completed the full circle of nature conservation.

### **Traces of the ZOO around the world**

You can come across the name 'ZOO Liberec' all around the world, because for years it has been supporting five international projects in situ in Africa, Asia, and Southern Europe, where it directly and indirectly contributes through its breeding, scientific and humanitarian activities towards environmental protection.

Together with the Basel ZOO we cooperate in monitoring the last big herd of the Somali Wild Ass in the Sub-Saharan Eritrea, we support a scientific research project examining the lives of chimpanzees on the Rubondo Island of Lake Victoria, Tanzania, and we also participate in the rescue of endangered endemic species on the Philippine Islands of Negros and Panay. We are a long-term partner in the humanitarian project 'Help the Future' helping orphans and street children of the very poor Ouagadougou's capital Burkina Faso.

Already a traditional breeding success is the annual release of young Bearded Vultures (*Gypaetus Barbatus*) in the French-Italian Alps or on the Iberian Peninsula. Since 2001 we have returned a dozen young birds of this endangered bird of prey back to the wild.

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