

Czech and Slovak Educators’ “Experience Tour” in the Netherlands

Tomas Hajnys, Zoo Educator from the Czech Republic’s Dvur Kralove Zoo

Eighteen Czech and Slovak zoo educators, including myself, participated in a four-day “experience training” course in four Dutch zoos – Rotterdam, Apenheul, Burger’s and Emmen. The event took place from 8 – 11 April, 2002, with educators from Bratislava, Brno, Decin, Dvur Kralove, Hodonin, Jihlava, Ohrada, Ostrava, Plzen, Praha, Usti nad Labem, Vyskov and Zlin.



Turtle Reproduction Exhibition at Rotterdam Zoo

We were invited by Chris Peters from Rotterdam Zoo and were especially interested in ‘zoo education strategy’ – teaching, guided tours, interpretation, staff presentations, the use of IT, holiday programmes, printed information, co-operation with ‘the media’ and so on.



*At Rotterdam Zoo with Chris Peters,
who made our trip possible*

Chris accompanied us on an excellent tour of Rotterdam’s ‘Oceanium’. It was a marvellous experience, in the shape of an adventurous journey from the Dutch coast to the North Sea, the deep Atlantic, the Caribbean Sea and on around the world. The public can ‘travel’ the route at leisure, taking in the experience at their own rate.

Chris also guided us through the Asia Trail he and his colleagues had designed. We saw the educational facilities, including some very fine models of birds’ nests, turtle shells and such, then joined a talk about animal reproduction given by zoo educator Loes Kettenis.

We discovered, too, how ‘behind the scenes’ facilities such as animal kitchens, stables, veterinary hospitals and aquarium filter systems can be valuable educational resources.

Ms. Constanze Melicharek was our guide through the very special primate park at Apenheul, with its grassy surrounds and ample space for the animals. We greatly admired both the indoor and outdoor orangutan enclosures, richly endowed with trees, as well as ‘Gorilla Island’. Zoo staff give talks during feeding sessions, while billboards along the new Amazon Rainforest Trail highlighted EAZA’s 2002 Atlantic Coastal Rainforest campaign.



*An Elephant Bird with eggs
at Apenheul Primate Park*

At Burger’s Bush, natural enclosures of desert and ocean allow visitors to ‘read’ from ‘open textbooks’, without having to rely on labels or signs, resulting in very deep first impressions. Here we enjoyed

biologist Tom Bien telling us the history of the zoo from its conception.

There is also a large chimpanzee group, used by students researching primate behaviour, the results of which are additionally useful to keepers and curators. Education has a prime role to play at Emmen Zoo, where Agaath Kooi arranged a highly rewarding, full-day schedule for us. A big hit were the naked molerats in their artificial burrow system. While the molerats live in communities reminiscent of some invertebrate societies, visiting children also have a system of tubes to crawl through, giving them a taste of the underground life. A theatre show about Lemon sharks was memorable as well.

We were impressed to see how quickly the new zoo across the motorway is being built: crossing a kilometre-long bridge brought us to the construction site of a penguin enclosure and a new entrance gate. Everyone on this trip found the experience very productive, as well as exciting and enjoyable. It provided a unique opportunity to share new ideas, and with zoos now reaching some 4.5 million people each year in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, tours such as this are very important in helping zoo educators achieve their goals ever more effectively. We would like to thank all those who went out of their way to help us, with a special appreciation to Chris Peters.



Lemon Shark Theatre at Emmen Zoo



Interactives in the Oceanium at Rotterdam Zoo