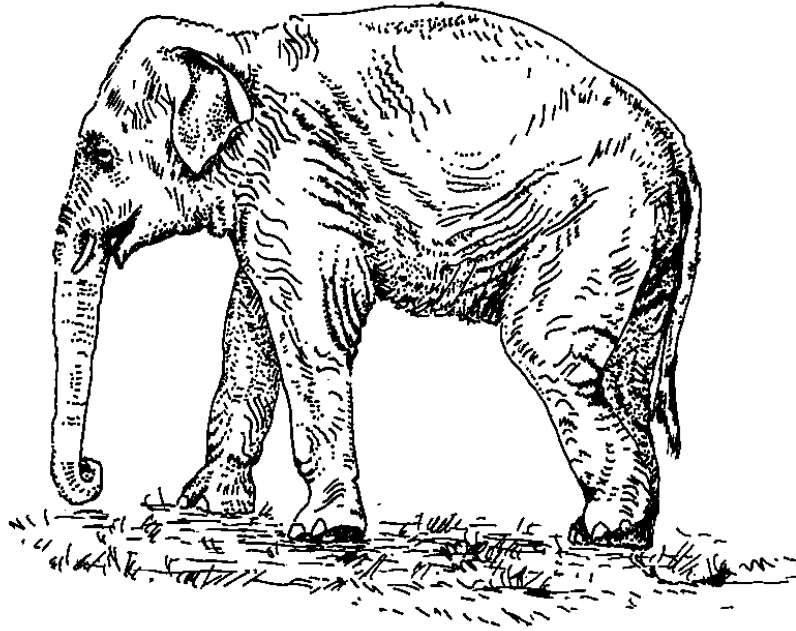


# HISTORY OF THE ADELAIDE ZOO



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ADELAIDE ZOO  
EDUCATION SERVICE

ZOO

The Royal Zoological Society of South Australia, originally called the South Australian Acclimatisation Society until a name change in 1883, was formed in 1878 and administers Adelaide Zoo and Monarto Zoo. The Royal prefix was added by King Edward in 1937. The main objective of the Society was to study the destruction of South Australia's ecology. The 6.5 hectares of the Adelaide Zoo was originally part of Botanic Park and was donated to the Society for the purpose of a Zoological Garden. This area has now increased to 8 hectares. Some of the original trees from this time are still standing in the Zoo and includes the Moreton Bay fig, found in the South East Asian rainforest exhibit and a Dragon Tree in the Flamingo exhibit.

The Adelaide Zoological Gardens opened on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1883 and is the second oldest Zoo in Australia, after Melbourne Zoo, which opened in 1862. It contained 37 mammals, 1 reptile and 36 bird species. In the first few years the Society relied heavily on wealthy benefactors giving large donations. Sir Thomas Elder was one of the first Board members and over his time on the committee

he gave thousands of pounds as well as numerous animals to the Adelaide Zoo.

Many buildings were erected in the first few years, some of which are still standing in the Zoo and are heritage listed. These include the Head Keeper's Cottage built in 1883, Front Entrance built in 1883, Rotunda built in 1884, Director's residence built in 1888 (now Minchin House) and the Elephant House built in 1901.

Changes to the Zoo over the decades have been influenced by many things including Government grants, droughts, storms, building material restrictions due to the two World Wars, outbreaks of infantile paralysis, strikes and coal shortages. The Zoo has always relied on gate takings, grants and donations to fund developments so any significant restrictions in these sources of money would be devastating to future development.

The summer of 1914-1915 was one of severe drought throughout the State and it had a serious effect on the gardens. No reservoir water was allowed to be used either for irrigation or for

filling ponds. The flamingos suffered most severely, as their pond had to remain empty. Five of the 12 died and several others fell very ill.

In 1925 a miniature train was installed in the Zoo and train rides began around the grounds. At this time the Zoo entered an era in which birds were to constitute an extremely important section of the collection and were to dominate the annual list of additions for many years.

In 1950 a pair of orang-utans arrived as a gift from the Government of Sarawak, Borneo. The male orang-utan was called George. George entertained visitors with his human-like antics and games with an old hessian bag and is still remembered today by many visitors. A statue of George was erected in the Zoo grounds in his memory after his death in 1976.

One of the major changes in the Zoo is the way animals are exhibited. In the 1930s the Zoo followed a world trend of housing animals in natural looking environments, but it was not until the 1960s that bars were removed and other types of barriers were used such as moats and windows. From this time exhibits have increasingly become animal orientated, with their needs being of major concern. The animals' social, behavioural and physical needs as well as the needs of the Zoo staff and the public are now taken into account when designing and building enclosures.

The animals in the Zoo have traditionally been exhibited in taxonomic groups, for example birds, cats, primates, reptiles and so forth. However, in the wild they are part of eco-systems, consisting of communities of animals from many of these groups interacting with their environment and each other.

Therefore the future of the Zoo is to show animals

in exhibits closely resembling their natural habitat. The South East Asian Rainforest and Australian walk-through aviary are examples of such exhibits.

The species of animals exhibited at the Adelaide Zoo have also changed over the years. When the Zoo opened in 1883, Sir Thomas Elder donated an Elephant and the species continued to be displayed in the Heritage listed Elephant House until 1991. Polar bears, rhinoceros, even English foxes have all been part of the Adelaide Zoo collection in the past.

However, conservation is now the major focus of Zoos South Australia and animals from Threatened Species are housed in larger, more naturalistic enclosures rather than having large numbers of non-threatened species animals in small, unsuitable enclosures. Current Zoo practice is to exhibit animals that can be managed healthily and can cope with the warm, dry Adelaide summers.

In 1966 the Royal Zoological Society decided to offer their facilities to the Education Department. The first Education Officer was appointed and lessons in the Zoo grounds began. In 1973 rooms in the Administration building were made available as a classroom until the current Education Building was moved to the site in 1978. The Education Service has grown to employ 5 full time staff members. It is now housed in the Westpac Envirodome, which was built within the skeleton of the old Great Ape block. About 55 000 student use the Education Service each year.

One of the major developments for the Society was the development of an open range zoo. A 1000-hectare block of land was leased by the Society in 1983 and used as a specialised breeding and holding facility. In 1993 Monarto Zoo opened to the public. It now has over 1000 animals on exhibit or in off-limit breeding programs and attracts over 100,000 visitors a year.

