

Beautiful Singapore's zoos and other animal and plant facilities

Peter Dickinson*

Thursday 1st June 2006

This morning I made my way directly to the Singapore Zoo. I went to the offices to meet up with Dr. Chris Furley. I have known Chris for 25 or so years but not met up for ten or so. We had a chat over coffee and then again briefly at lunch; the rest of the time I wandered through Singapore zoo. <http://www.zoo.com.sg/>

I have never had anyone say anything negative about this collection. They are not wrong either. This is the most beautiful zoo I have ever visited. I put it in my joint number one spot with Sharjah Zoo which I like for a variety of different reasons which make a direct comparison impossible.

The first enclosure I got to was the Small-clawed otters which were sharing the pen with Binturongs. At first appearance it was just a nice, neat, active friendly little enclosure with some tasteful planting and a waterfall. This was just the tip of the iceberg though. This was almost the complete enclosure. Round the back was underwater filtered viewing in a sheltered alcove. The signs were all colourful, factual, interesting mind bites. Each signboard related to the animals in a different field like conservation, family, anatomy or range and habitat. They included that all so important map. There were fourteen signs all in all for this one set up. None were obtrusive. Brilliant I thought.

A little further on there were the Greater Flamingoes. Okay, not the best enclosure in the world, but a nice and attractive one none the less. Unlike practically everywhere else in Asia I have visited here they were not being used as pink ornaments. Here the flight distance and number necessary had been taken into consideration.

The Flamingo area is set behind one of the Gibbon islands. There are lots of primate islands. All of them are very good to excellent. I like that overgrown jungly sort of home and most, but not all are like that. Probably the very best enclosure in the whole zoo for me was that for the Hamadryas Baboons. It was active, interesting and the animals were on the go at all times. So well designed too, with viewing and vista points with the full complement of attractive and effective educational signs. I could have spent all day at this one enclosure.

This enclosure was complemented by the presence of the overlooking Ibex and several brilliant mini enclosures for Mongoose, Hyrax, and Black-backed Jackal. Incidentally there are several groups of free ranging exotic primates within the grounds. It was in the tree here that I saw a large group of Saki monkeys.

Singapore zoo may not have the biggest of enclosures but they are well managed. There were some, like the White Rhinos, and the Cheetahs which were a touch too small. Others like the Sun Bears and the Guanacos were outdated, but the zoo recognises these problems and are addressing them at a rate that would embarrass other collections. It will be exciting to see what they come up with. I must admit I have never liked the idea of Polar Bears in a tropical setting.

I suppose I could have moaned on about it without even seeing the set up. It works though at least it does in Singapore. Short of actually building a giant fridge that they have done everything to make the animals comfortable and the animals have shown their gratitude by breeding here. It is an attractive enclosure in its own right but it has a deep, filtered, cool and shaded pool. The outside has cooling mist blowing all the time and there is air conditioned accommodation inside. The public side is very good too. Covered and cool, with enough signage to make sure every visitor who can read goes away just that little bit wiser. I passed through the polar bears several times during the day and did not see any stereotypic behaviour. I am sure it does occur, this being a classic polar bear problem, but it must be less here.

The gardens throughout the zoo are wonderful. In spite of covering an immense area and acting as visual barriers they are a real credit to all involved. Lots of the trees and plants are labelled which makes a visit a botanic journey as well as a zoological one. One feature I was particularly struck with was the Tropical Crops Garden where so many familiar and unfamiliar fruits and veg were 'on the stem' so to speak. The information that went with them was interesting too. Lots of it. I found it fun and fascinating to match up fruit to plant, in some cases with great surprise. I also learnt that Queen Victoria had been a big fan of Mangosteens.

Singapore Zoo really does go all out for visitor comfort. The roads and paths are all in good repair. After a while I was actually looking for hazards and didn't find any. There are plenty of kiosks and drink dispensers and more than enough benches or sheltered seating areas. Some of these are air conditioned, just in case you were getting too hot. Then there is a road train to get round on with plenty of stop off/pickup points.

There are presentations and feeding sessions taking place throughout the day. Plenty to keep people occupied and happy. I attended part of one of the animal shows. I didn't see it all but what I did see was, for me, very enjoyable. Set in a sloping theatre with a clear perspex fronted pool being the stage. The water within was crystal clear.

The first 'presentation' was a Crab-eating Macaque which swam to the bottom of the pool to collect grapes from the bottom. A little later a large Reticulated Python was placed in the pool and allowed to swim along the length of the tank. What made it all the better was the enthusiasm and interesting accompanying educational and sometimes humorous commentary.

The visitor cannot escape being educated here and the trick is they don't know it's happening. It may be as simple as a plant label or as entertaining as a coconut husking competition. (Actually this was watched with such rapt attention by the Orangutans that it was enriching for them

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too). And what about those all too important toilets? Brilliant and beautiful. In fact Singapore zoo has won awards for its toilets !

Certainly in my top five of Loo's of the world. The Manatee enclosure may not be geographically correct, including, as it does, Californian Sealions and Jackass Penguins, but it works. It is beautiful to look at. Water is so important when exhibiting creatures such as these. Anything less than a polished crystalline clarity in more than three quarters of the enclosures and appeal has gone. Here it is almost drinkable. The Penguins are indoors with sub-aqua access to the main pool. Entry is restricted to the others by the size of the connecting bars. This was another enclosure I could have spent a lot of time as if only to observe the fascinating manatees.

I liked the 'Australian Outback' (designed by Steve Irwin) enclosure. Smaller than some but very good. I wondered, outside of Australia who first came up with the idea of a walk-through Kangaroo/Emu type exhibit. Certainly Cleethorpes Zoo and Marineland had one back in the 1960s. Was there one earlier somewhere else?

The Proboscis Monkey set up was another beautiful enclosure. It was though very beautiful to look at and the animals a thrill to watch. This was an active enclosure, naturally enriched by believable habitat imitation. I liked the 'Fragile Forest'. It was yet another pleasure to visit. Big, thickly planted but exciting. In here are birds, mammals, reptiles and butterflies too.

I don't like White Tigers. True enough, they are beautiful and might be of affable temperament. No, its the fact that they are of no conservation value whatsoever that I don't like. They take up valuable space within a zoo that could be utilised for species that really need attention. Yet I am aware they are popular 'freaks' in any collection and amongst the most popular in Singapore Zoo. If there was just the white tigers and a sign it truly would be a waste of time but it isn't. The maximum is made of the visitors presence by drawing attention to the plight of tigers everywhere, of the trade in tiger parts and of conservation in general. A beautifully made and hard hitting video is constantly being played in the viewing area. This deals not only with tigers but with snow leopards, turtles, sharks and more. There is horrific footage of living sharks having their fins cut off before they are thrown mutilated back to a lingering death in the sea. The commentary is in Chinese, who, after all, are the main consumers. This video in this exhibit will make a difference — you cannot be human and have a heart without it having some effect. Oh, and yes the tiger exhibit is very attractive too. The clear water in the pool again makes all the difference. There are seventeen or so signs here too, all very cleverly done.

Another good example of the arrangements here would be the Malayan Tapir enclosure. The pen itself is not huge nor remarkable but is more than adequate and pleasant to look at. Viewed, under cover, at one point there are three signs. One is an activity game of 'Help the tapir find its cousins' (FUN), then there is 'Hide and Seek' which includes a clever little "can you see it visual" (FUN). Then we have a mind bite in 'Talking Scent' before lastly 'Whistles and clicks' with

push button sound (FUN). Moving from this viewing point around the enclosure we meet the adoption sign. All the adoption signs here are attractive. They draw the eye without being garish. I think tasteful is the best description. Close by, where the pen is viewed over a garden moat is the species sign. Attractive and collectable in its own right giving all the relevant detail and two nice drawings of adult and baby tapirs. Sadly there is no distribution map on this one (but they are Malayan Tapirs and this is Singapore). Moving on a little further there is covered viewing next to the pool. Three more signs here.

One deals with folklore (FUN), the other two are about coat, lips, nose and conservation. The viewing point has a row of tapir snares hanging up. So there you go. One enclosure, beautifully done.

Barbirusa. Again a smallish but adequate enclosure. Viewing over a moat and covered viewing area with eight interesting signs, a Barbirusa skull (important - worth a thousand words) and a TV running a behavioural video loop. Great, all tastefully done.

It goes on and on. So many of the enclosures are treated in an equally clever way. I could go round each and every one and probably find something to praise.

I have never visited Singapore Zoo before today and I was suitably impressed. Just as important as the 'seen' in any zoo is the 'unseen'. Things like species management, research, breeding programmes, enrichment and *in situ* conservation. I was able to learn from speaking to Chris of advances made in those areas.

Friday 2nd June 2006

Once I had pulled myself together I made my way out to Jurong Bird Park <http://www.birdpark.com.sg/> Not being familiar with the system I thought I would hail a taxi. It was not easy. In fact it was impossible so I decided to tackle the LRT/MRT system. It was so easy and efficient. Far less complicated than the tube in London, and a 1000% cleaner. One of the cleverest things for me, because I have never seen it before (or heard of it for that matter) was that the clear windows of the LRT instantly 'frosted' up when we came close to a block of flats. This was to prevent people looking into bedrooms. Clever! I have no idea how it works. Another bonus was the TV on the local bus showing "you've been framed" type films. There was a bit of disruption at the entrance of the park whilst work was taking place on the new 'Okavango Exhibit'. After seeing the park I would love to have the opportunity to get back and see it when completed.

The first building I entered was the 'World of Darkness'. I was disappointed with this. Nothing wrong with it really I suppose but it did not gel with me. I thought it looked too much like a museum exhibit than a series of enclosures containing living animals. Too unreal. Sorry but that's S\$1.3 million that could have been better spent.

From then on in almost everything ranged from extremely good to fantastic. The aviaries in many cases could not have been bettered. Crowned Pigeons! Where else would you find three huge aviaries especially for the three subspecies of this striking bird? And yet it was worth it. At least I think so.

The huge divided aviary viewable on two levels and devoted to Birds of Paradise was too. Kingfishers, Woodpeckers, Wonderful.

I have in past weeks been viewing the magnificent Hornbills in far from satisfactory accommodation. Not here though. Aviaries approachable from two sides. The front some 25-30 feet high and the back 10 or so. More than adequate to keep the birds happy. It works too. On the day of my visit, five of the seventeen species and subspecies were nesting.

The 'Lory Loft'! What can I say? Spectacular would do it an injustice. Wonderful, memorable. Not only is this a very big aviary it is put together so well. It is a truly great experience. Young and old were thrilled to be out amongst the 1000 or so Lories and Lorikeets of 10 species. To be able to feed them too...this completed the magic of the visit. The arial walkways, the trees below. I loved the fact that the frogs/toads below were having a very noisy love-in in the marsh. Their amorous calls nearly drowned out the birds. True magic. Yet the spell failed. Entering the aviary there was a sign explaining why Lories should not be kept as pets. And yet everything that happened within the cages was enough to convince that these delightful little birds would be the ideal. So cute, so entertaining. There was virtually no educational input at all. The average zoo visitor would enter that aviary and come out none the wiser. Such a pity, a missed opportunity. Yet, in spite of my criticism this is one of my favourite exhibits of all time.

The same educational opportunity was missed at the Flamingos. Another wonderful exhibit. I mean where else (apart from the wild) can you see a thousand plus Flamingos in one place? Yet, apart from directional signs there was nothing to say what they were. I thought I must have missed the signage and made two complete circuits. Nothing. There was information at Flamingos held elsewhere but that's not the point.

The bird of prey aviaries were some of the best I have seen anywhere. I liked the height and the upper service doors and the practical design. I was surprised by the mesh which I thought was very hard and ungiving, but then I never saw a wounded bird, and if the birds are steady there is no worry there.

The Waterfall Aviary contains the 'Jurong falls' which at 30m are the tallest man-made waterfall in the world. Very impressive they are too. The aviary they are in also claims to be the largest walk through free flight aviary. So who is right. I don't know. I suppose it goes back to what I was saying the other week at KL. Do you measure these enclosures in volume or square feet? This was great though. Very big, very high and jungly. I loved it. Obviously a big hole somewhere though because I saw two Glossy starlings and a Lady Ross's Touraco in the grounds outside. One of the Glossies was apparent boss of a bunch of local mynahs.

There was so much I liked here, Parrot Paradise, South East Asian Birds, the Pelican exhibit and so much more where I thought the collection most lacking was education. There were so many missed opportunities either in sign design or placement or simply because the signs were not there anyhow. It wasn't as if this was an unfamiliar concept

because there were areas where it was excellent.

I liked the Riverine Exhibit. "The first zoological institution in the world to employ cutting-edge recycling technology for water conservation". The water was certainly crystal clear. It made me think though. What is the more environmentally friendly? Filtration, Recycling or Renewing. I suppose it depends on availability and other factors. I like signs like that, ones that make one ponder.

I watched part of one of the bird shows. I thought the presentation was good and the show itself was clever and entertaining. Sadly though there was yet again an omission of education. As it stood it was a circus act rather than an educational opportunity. It is not as if things needed changing that much except for the spiel which needed to change to teach and amuse rather than just amuse. The Fuji Hawk centre was one of the best I have seen and I have visited a lot of falconry centres. Built to traditional design the mews were quite beautiful to look at. There were plenty of signs, a nice little flying ground and an interesting mini museum of falconry.

I was interested to read about their 'be a falconer programme' which allows the public to fly a harrier, feed a condor, have a photo taken with a bird and take a peek behind the scenes. Duration? 30 minutes. Cost? Seventy Singapore Dollars! Plus entrance fee of course.

Another inside Penguin pool with a Puffin annexe. An attractive exhibit that seems to be working well. No problem with educational information here. There was everything you wanted to know and then some. The signs were nice clear and factual but were not friendly. It needed to be re thought into colourful mind bites. I spent ten minutes (okay I know that's nothing) watching the visitors and did not see a single one read a sign.

Leaving the bird park I walked across the car park to the 'Jurong Reptile and Crocodile Paradise'. As I climbed the loose tiled steps and walked down the dark dusty hallway to the entrance I knew I was in for a completely different experience. Seven dollars to get in. I doubt it was worth an eighth of that. The first enclosure I came to contained several large (not huge) Reticulated Pythons. This pen was too small, shitty and dirty. That really set the picture for the rest of the collection. Everywhere was dirty and rundown. One third of the collection was closed and the grounds were untidy. The only building which seemed to be getting any attention was that for the 'Reptile Show'. This appeared to be a typical crocodile show-cum-teasing set up. That said I never saw any show and there were only two other people in the park anyway. No, I thought the whole place was a mess. If I was the owner I would close out of embarrassment. The only bit that I thought was remotely interesting was 'Iguana Kingdom'. This was a walk through pen containing fourteen or so large Green Iguanas. Even so I reckon it could have been set up so much better. Conditions must have been good though because I saw baby Iguanas running about in the park outside of the 'Kingdom'.

Chris returned from the zoo late and said "right, we are going out to dinner in ten minutes." It turned out to be an interesting evening of humorous zoo and wildlife stories. Our dinner

companions were Andy P from San Diego Zoo, his Golden Monkey expert wife Chia and the lovely Charlene Yeong of Singapore Zoo. The food was different and very tasty. It was not a late night as for some inexplicable reason this and other surrounding restaurant wanted to close at 10 p.m. Just as well really as Andy and Chia had to get up at five to catch a plane.

Tuesday 6th June 2006

I went out to the zoo with Chris again this morning. It was nice to go around early before the visitors turned up. One of the best two times of the day for a zoo visit. It also gave me time to re-visit enclosures for a second impression. Perhaps I would be critical this time? No, though, I was still happy with what I saw.

I had half arranged to meet up with Kumar P, curator of the Night Safari at nine. Kumar is another of these people with whom I have 'known' for a few years and yet never met. He was a pleasure to meet and talk with and realise we are on the same wavelength. Kumar drove me down to the Mandai Orchid Garden which was my next port of call. I like orchids and have kept one or two practically all my adult life. Like my cats I was very sorry to see them go when I hit the road. Orchids in the wild have always held a special fascination and seeking them out gives a special sort of pleasure. Here in the orchid garden I got a surprise. There were orchids taller than me, orchids growing on canes like sweet peas and orchids planted in lawns like tulips. Beautiful striking colours and, when close, the bizarre martian like shapes. Sadly though this type of presentation was not for me. Too manicured, too artificial and too many hybrids. I know that it will appeal to most and I enjoyed my visit, but, not my kind of thing.

Saturday 10th June 2006

This morning I made my way out to the Botanic Gardens. I made for my ticket and then whooosh! It started bucketing down, accompanied by knives of thunder and forks of lightening. I thought I would kill time by browsing in the book section of the gift shop. It was a most surprising place for, apart from the excellent books on botany that you would expect to find, it had the best natural history section I have seen outside of a major bookstore. It was certainly better than any zoo bookshop I have ever visited. So many unexpected volumes and many dozens of them. Books like Spiders of South East Asia, The Moths of Borneo, Reptiles of East Africa, Mammals of Madagascar, Great Apes & Humans, Amphibian Conservation, Fishes of Laos, The Birds of Burma, The Birds of Ecuador and I could go on for several more pages.

Eventually the rain subsided and I thought I had better get out for a look round before it got worse again. I made my way to the Orchid collection. Very impressive. I much preferred the way it was laid out here. The toilets here were beautiful making those in the zoo grubby by comparison. After the orchids I took the path through the rainforest. Again nice to have labelled trees amongst the crazy creepers and the big buttress roots. The tallest tree here is in the region of 47 metres. All the biggest trees have been fitted with lightening conductors which doesn't seem a bad idea in view of the number of electrical storms. I wondered if there would ever come a time when all the worlds trees over 30

metres are fitted with such a device. It doesn't need a really vivid imagination to believe it. You just need to read the papers.

I keep seeing posters for the "World's largest display of sand tiger sharks". This shows a picture of a large jaws type shark bursting through paper with jaws agape. I find it sad that aquariums continue to put emphasis on the ferociousness and then 'play it down' without, in some cases, actually playing it down at all.

I know that I keep going on about how clean Singapore is but can you imagine a country where the binmen (refuse collectors) call daily? They do here! It just couldn't happen in the UK. It is a strain to get them to do an extra pick up at any time. You can also safely drink the water from the taps and, what's more, it actually tastes nice. Not a hint of chlorine.

Sunday 11th June 2006

Having been advised not to go to Sentosa Island at a weekend I looked to the multiple of other choices. I have long harbored a wish to visit the Tiger Balm Gardens at Haw Par Villa. It was sunny and dry when I set out. Either Una or Doug had thoughtfully left a brolly for me by the door and I took it just in case. Very wise as it turned out because on the latter part of the bus journey to my destination it started to rain. I mean really rain, RAIN in capital letters. The roads quickly became rivers. Jumping off the bus I stayed at the sheltered stop and waited for an hour for the deluge to ease. It didn't, so I thought I would brave it anyhow. I waded up the hill with the water just short of my knees and coming down the slope with some force. On the flat above it was shallower. I was not alone, there were other people splashing about, though not many.

I believe that the Tiger Balm Gardens must be the strangest place that I have ever visited. It was like wandering around in an hallucinogenic dream without taking the chemical ride to arrive (a sort of Disney land with teeth). Much of what I saw made me smile and some made me laugh out loud. I was glad there were so few people about otherwise it could have been embarrassing. It was a very wet visit. The artificial waterfalls were running with real water, and the paths, and the roads and the steps and the statues. The only dry place was hell (10 Courts of Hell) and I lingered there a while. I suppose I should get used to the place. I know it is very much a matter of taste, but love it or hate it, this place should not be missed. It is just plain weird.

Monday 12th June 2006

I woke much later than usual. Almost nine. I was awake for much of the night though. Anyway, that's my excuse.

Today I planned to visit Sentosa Island <http://www.sentosa.com.sg/>, primarily to visit 'Underwater World' <http://www.underwaterworld.com.sg/> which people have spoken quite highly about. I got there much quicker than I anticipated by bus, MRT and cable car. My biggest surprise was the island. Much smaller than I imagined and much closer to Singapore too. Equally 'Underwater World' was quite small. It was though, very good. I suppose I would be prepared to give greater praise on it if my visit had not been spoilt by noisy ill mannered people. Most, but not all, were European. I would have loved to have gone round on my

own, in the quiet instead of being pushed, jostled, bumped and shouted into. Most unpleasant. This compact collection was well worth visiting. I thought the exhibits to be well maintained and presented. The signage was clear and interesting but, I thought, a bit lacking. I would have liked to have been able to identify some of the fish, sharks in particular but there was no way of doing so. There was a sign showing how to tell the sex of the sharks. This was both fun and interesting and it had several people occupied. I liked the crab exhibits and the space devoted to them, though people were banging on the unusual little display units and I couldn't help thinking that a less stressful set up would be kinder. The Giant Spider Crabs were most impressive. Leafy and Weedy Sea dragons! Wow.

Someone told me they had bred these but I saw no evidence (not even a sign) of this. I would have been shouting it from the rooftops so perhaps they were not successful after all.

I thought the Giant Groupers were impressive and I don't believe I have ever seen as many sharks in one tank before. I definitely have not seen so many large sea turtles (Green and Hawksbill) in one place. Loved the Jellyfish too, they make a brilliant exhibit when done well. The Dugong was interesting to see too. Sad that is on its own. I would place it elsewhere, it is not a solitary species.

From here I took a bus over to the Sentosa Butterfly and insect garden. Bit of mixture this. A very good evolutionary beginning moving into a nice butterfly garden then into a very poor 'cave' exhibit (missing or no labels, missing or dead specimens) before moving into a really wonderful museum section. I thought Penang would be difficult to beat but they have here, hands down. Very nice, interesting learning experience. Some of the text a bit small and could do with jazzing up but I liked it anyhow. Buses are free on the island so you can whizz about from route to route to easily reach any point. I liked the road humps that had been placed to ensure vehicles slowed down for 'Monitor Lizard Crossing'. I didn't see any but it's nice to know they are there. There were also crossings for monkeys and peafowl but I didn't see them either. My last stop was the 'Dolphin Lagoon'. I arrive some twenty minutes before the show and found a nice shady spot with unobstructed view of the lagoon. Several people set up behind and to the sides of me. The show started and ten minutes into it a tribe arrived grabbing chairs, shouting, pushing and in spite of the loud mixture of polite and not so polite protests of those behind and around me they set up camp directly in front of us. I could not really grasp how people could be so self centered and uncaring of others. It really was not worth the hassle. I moved along to stand in the sun. Okay it hadn't rained so far but the brolly was a big help because it was burning hot. I was not impressed by the dolphin show at all. It was very circusy and at the same time amateurish and lacklustre. The educational content was very poor and the 'only place in the world' opportunity to pose with the dolphins was distinctly not unique. There was a board up announce the collections contributions to conservation. Good! But I hardly think that a blood sample and a couple of papers demonstrates an ongoing commitment. I did like the size of the pools in which the Indo-Pacific dolphins were held and I thought the dolphins themselves were wonderful. I never imagined that they could go as pink as they were. Quite amazing. I left before the end lest I was killed in the rude rush. The journey

back went quicker because I knew exactly where I was going.

Tuesday 13th June 2006

I was in a shopping centre today (Aaaagh) purchasing some oddments I needed. It was quite crowded and there was some sort of entertainment for children taking place. The couple on stage said, in squeaky voices "Oh, I do believe it is going to rain. What shall we do children? I think we should sing a song, 'Rain, rain'" And as I walked along every person in the building of every colour and nationality started to mouth or say "go away, come again...." It was very odd, but made me and everyone smile.

In the evening I made my way out to the zoo again. This time to visit the Night Safari. Unlike Taiping where the Night Safari is the cleverly lit daytime zoo the Singapore offering is a separate entity (poorly imitated by Chiang Mai). I am told that as a stand alone Singapore Night Safari receives more visitors and makes a greater profit than its daytime sister across the road. It was certainly busy when I visited but then so was the zoo, and I would say the zoo was busier.

I wonder about this increased visitor numbers. When I think about it around seven out of ten of my non zoo friends have visited the Night Safari when visiting Singapore but did not visit the zoo. Why? I believe it is as simple as a name. Most British people (and probably others) still have this mistaken belief that a 'Safari Park' is better than a 'Zoo'. When we, on the inside, know that this is not necessarily true. So if Singapore had started out by calling this place a 'Night-time Zoo' it would never have got nearly as many foreign (British) visitors as it did/has. It is undoubtedly a zoo in reality and goes against the commonly believed misconception of Safari equaling more available space and therefore "freedom" and Zoos being prisons through a misperceived lack of space.

Very cleverly the Night Safari forecourt opens an hour or so earlier so everybody has chance of a meal and a show...or photo taking with some of the animals. Pseudo traditional dancers and fire eaters are not my cup of tea but the visitors were lapping it up. The food was good though and I enjoyed that. I took one and a half tram rides round the safari trail and a walk. I thought it was very good. Imitated many times but never equaled, Singaporeans are definitely the experts at this. Very professional. The escorted bus/tram tours were excellent. The pace of the vehicles altered to fit in with whatever was seen. The girls who gave the spiel as we drove round spoke far better English than I do, well, better accented anyway, and only the odd slip into Singlish to give the game away. I thought the information given out was interesting, and for the most part factual though I did note two 'slips' where it was incorrect. Very enjoyable though and I would have been happy just to have listened to one girl all night. Using my 'Palm Civet' gauge to assess the (and any Asian) collection then this tops anything I have seen. This was Palm Civet heaven. Big cage, lots of branches. I could not see that it needed any improvements. Though maybe that is the whole point here "I could not see"! I am sure the 'night' in night safari hides a multitude of sins, particularly if not open to daytime scrutiny. I don't know about Singapore though because I didn't go round in the day. At night it was a beautiful and enjoyable experience. I only

spotted electric fences a few times. The divisions were hidden and made things more 'real'. Sorry, I still don't like diurnal birds of prey presented at night. I believe it is unnecessary and potentially cruel, no matter how subtle the lighting. And the lighting is good here, they have got it off to a tee. The Fishing cat exhibit was wonderful. I have seen these beautiful little animals held in a multitude of boring, un-enriched, or unsuitable enclosures. Until now my favourite for this species was that at Drayton Manor Park in the Midlands of England. Singapore beats that by a head.

There was a 'creatures of the night' show taking place at intervals but with one thing or another I didn't get to see this. Perhaps when I pass through Singapore in mid July.

I thought the night safari was very good indeed. It was a newish experience for me, and an enjoyable one. Some

years ago someone said to me that the Night Safari alternated animals throughout the night. I saw no evidence of this, nor any necessity as far as I could make out. No, it is just clever management. There is evidence of a bit of visual trickery in the zoo though i.e. at the otters and pygmy hippos which have double sets of animals in apparently single enclosures.

Wednesday 14th June 2006

I was sad to be leaving Doug and Una who have gone out of their way to make me feel as part of the family. I am definitely going to Miss. Una's cooking and in particular her egg and bacon sandwiches. These are somethings I dream about on the road. Not forgetting Harley, I will miss his affable, life's a bed, company too.

The Amazing Peter Dickinson

Peter Dickinson had been a zookeeper in UK all his adult life and may return to zookeeping. Currently he is travelling around the world, just imbibing the culture and seeing zoos. He spent a couple of weeks in India seeing zoos and cultural sights. His comments on the zoos are honest and forthright but not without sympathy for the difficulties of zoo personnel.

Peter is connected with zoos in another way however and it is huge. He is the person who founded and, even today when he is travelling, manages one of the most extensive web works for zoos in the world. His email list serve, the ZooNews Digest has over 800 subscribers, and his Zoo Biology egroup is also extremely popular. For many zoo personnel these resources are their only means of contact with other zoo personnel in the world.

ZooNews Digest accepts news items in addition to the press clippings it displays and announcements, requests, etc. of a more general nature. Zoo Biology egroup is for very specific questions about the management of zoos, animals, veterinary questions, how to obtain zoo products, etc. Zoo Biology egroup is interactive ... it is a list serve. ZooNews Digest is more of an e-newsletter.

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See Zoo News Digest and Peter's Travel Journal by writing to Peter at peter@elvinhow.prestel.co.uk

Peter's journal is currently going along with ZooNews Digest as a sort of part 2. In his journal he also covers who he meets, the sights he sees, and his impressions of the culture and ethos of the country. We have cut all those parts in the interests of space and have kept only the zoo visits. Peter is visiting South East Asia now. We are publishing his report of his visits in this issue. I personally feel very grateful to Peter for his enrichment of the communication which can be accessed by so many levels of zoo personnel in the world.

Sally Walker, Editor Emeritus