A Zoological Park in New Zealand

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The University of Iowa Expedition to the South Seas participated in by six persons from that institution between May 14 and September 4, 1922, was undertaken largely for the purpose of making biological and geological collections and field observations. More than 17,000 miles were traversed of which something over 12,000 were by water.

Of the total elapsed time—approximately 112 days—forty-five were spent in travel, after leaving the American continent, for the purpose of arriving at and returning from our objectives, Viti Levu of the Fiji Islands, where four weeks were spent, and the Dominion of New Zealand, where about five weeks were occupied in work and travel.

Naturally, the opportunities offered the participants of such a trip are many and varied. One very happy combination of circumstances for me resulted in a visit, in company with Mr. Harold Hamilton of the Dominion Museum staff at Wellington, to the well appointed zoological park of that city. Wellington, with its more than 90,000 inhabitants, is situated near the southernmost extremity of North Island, New Zealand, in latitude 41° South. It is the capital and seat of the Dominion Government. The immediate region just back from the city is very hilly and therefore the principal business district is distributed along the crooked water front for a considerable distance.

A twenty-five minute ride on the tram-car through Newton brings one to the zoological park, a preserve of seventy and one-half acres where the natural conditions have been modified as little as is consistent with the safe keeping of the many forms of animal life contained therein. Trees, flowers and miscellaneous vegetation, streams and ponds and other natural topographic features, even the hills themselves, are utilized to the greatest degree in working out the arrangement and construction of dens, paddocks and other details connected with the proper housing of the animals.

Ponds have been constructed for the aquatic birds and mammals, hilly fields have been enclosed for the Himalayan goats, Indian
swamp buffalo and other ungulates, cages have been built along the banks for lions, tigers and other carnivores; the ever attractive monkey and bird houses are set in the open near the entrance to the park and away from the trees where the sun may reach them.

The park is maintained partly through taxation and partly through fees which are collected at the gate on certain days; on other days admission to the park is free. Numerous helpers are employed and a curator, skilled in the handling and care of mammals, birds and reptiles is in constant attendance.

Naturally enough, many Australian species of birds and marsupials are on exhibition. One of the finest appearing and liveliest members of the lot, a dingo or wild dog, was offered me by Mr. Langdridge, the keeper, if I would pay its transportation to America. Unfortunately, I was obliged to refuse the proffered gift.

One of the most interesting features of the park is a series of eighteen terraria and aquaria which have been built into one side of a hill, walled completely over with brick and fitted with glass fronts so that the occupants may be viewed by the frequent visitors at this popular resort. Here are exhibited many kinds of fish and some turtles and lizards. Among the latter are two living tuataras. These animals form a link between the ancient saurians and modern reptiles and are the only species in the order. They are indigenous to New Zealand where the few remaining individuals occupy a number of rocky islets near the main land. The tuatara now receives government protection and it is unlawful to take a specimen without special permission from the Minister of Internal Affairs.

A large cage is given over to the parrots and their allies among which are several species of cockatoos; one individual has the habit of greeting approaching visitors with its guttural "Hello." In the cage also are examples of the remarkable New Zealand kea or mountain parrot which, under natural conditions, has departed from an insect and fruit diet and has acquired the depraved habit of feeding upon the kidney fat of living sheep. It boldly attacks sheep and lambs with its sharp, curved beak and strong claws, often injuring or even killing the animals and on this account the bird is much despised by the sheep owners. The species is still found in some numbers in the more remote mountainous districts of South Island where a bounty is now placed upon its head and its numbers have been materially reduced.

Another large enclosure is given over to the kiwi or apteryx
which has been aptly described as "the most unbird-like of living feathered creatures." This peculiar, flightless, nocturnal bird is fairly closely related to the gigantic moas which once inhabited New Zealand but which became extinct some four hundred or five hundred years ago. The apteryx itself is now much reduced in numbers and is found only in certain isolated regions of the Dominion. It is encouraging to know that it has bred in captivity in the Wellington park.

Examples of the morepork, the native owl, and of the pukeko, which is allied to the extinct Notornis, are also to be found in the park as well as other singular and unusual birds some of which have become much reduced in numbers.

Altogether, an exceedingly interesting assemblage of animals is contained in this reserve and Wellington is to be congratulated in its efforts to uphold and foster an interest in the animal life of the Dominion. Such effort along lines of conservation and education is to be commended most heartily and many cities in our own country could profit by this healthy example in the distant south seas.

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