

Menagerie Manor

GERALD DURRELL

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With warmest wishes,
Gerald Durrell

Gerald Durrell was born in India in 1925. His family settled on Corfu when he was a boy and he spent his time studying its wildlife. He relates these experiences in the trilogy beginning with *My Family and Other Animals*, and continuing with *Birds, Beasts and Relatives* and *The Garden of the Gods*. He writes with wry humour and great perception about both the humans and the animals he meets.

On leaving Corfu, Durrell returned to England to work at Whipsnade Park as a student keeper. His adventures there are told with characteristic energy in *Beasts in My Belfry*. A few years later, he began organizing his own animal-collecting expeditions. The first, to the Cameroons, was followed by expeditions to Paraguay, Argentina and Sierra Leone. He recounts these experiences in a number of books including *The Drunken Forest*. He also visited many countries while shooting various television series. In 1959 Durrell realized a lifelong dream when he set up the Jersey Zoological Park, followed a few years later by the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust, renamed the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust in 1999.

Whether in a factual account of an expedition or a work of non-fiction, Durrell's style is exuberant, passionate and acutely observed. Gerald Durrell died in 1995.

*For Hope and Jimmie
in memory of
overdrafts, tranquilizers,
and revolving creditors*

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FOREWORD

by Philippa Forrester

When I was little, I visited the Jersey Zoo that Gerald Durrell had founded and I wandered around with round eyes fully aware, even then, of the philosophy which had inspired it. Primates were free to throw themselves from tree to tree on their own islands, while rare tortoise after rare tortoise was displayed as if as captivating as Colobus! The passion for the animals, their lives, their interests and their conservation was clear, and I came away clutching a copy of *My Family and Other Animals*, embossed with a special stamp to show where I had bought it.

For me, that treat was more than a trip to the zoo; it was a pilgrimage to my greatest hero. Gerald Durrell represented everything I wanted to be: a conservationist, clear thinking and dedicated, brave enough to follow a dream; a writer, able to whisk me to foreign lands and then abandon me in fits of giggles; above all, a man with a grand passion.

Only as I grew up and read more about him did I realize that these great qualities come with their own problems, for things in the grown-up world are not quite as clear as they are through the saucer-eyes of the young. My respect grew.

After my childhood trip I wrote to the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust to suggest that if Gerald were to autograph some of his works, they could sell them in the shop for a higher price. I received a wonderful letter in reply but now I have grown up, I know that making more money for conservation is not quite so simple.

Gerald Durrell changed the face of conservation on this planet, and my respect for my childhood hero, although he is no longer with us, continues to grow as I do.

EXPLANATION

Dear Sir,

We should like to draw your attention to the fact that your account with us is now overdrawn...

Most children at the tender age of six or so are generally full of the most impractical schemes for becoming policemen, firemen, or engine-drivers when they grow up, but when I was that age I could not be bothered with such mundane ambitions; I knew exactly what I was going to do: I was going to have my own zoo. At the time this did not seem to me (and still does not seem so) a very unreasonable or outrageous ambition. My friends and relatives — who had long thought that I was 'mental', owing to the fact that I evinced no interest in anything that did not have fur, feathers, scales, or chiton — accepted this as just another manifestation of my weak state of mind. They felt that if they ignored my oft-repeated remarks about owning my own zoo I would eventually grow out of it. As the years passed, however, to the consternation of my friends and relatives, my resolve grew greater and greater, and eventually, after going on a number of expeditions to bring back animals for other zoos, I felt the time was ripe to acquire my own.

From my last trip to West Africa I had brought back a considerable collection of animals, which were ensconced in my sister's suburban garden in Bournemouth. They were there, I assured her, only temporarily, because I was completely convinced that any intelligent council, having a ready-made zoo planted on its doorstep, would do everything in its power to help one by providing a place to keep it. After eighteen months of struggle, I was not so sure of the go-ahead attitude of local councils, and my sister was convinced that her back garden would go on forever looking like a scene out of one of the more flamboyant Tarzan pictures. At last, bogged down by the constipated mentality of local government and frightened off by the apparently endless rules and regulations under which every free man in Great Britain has to suffer, I decided to investigate the possibility of starting my zoo in the Channel Islands. I was given an introduction to one Major Fraser, who, I was assured, was a broad-minded, kindly soul, and would show me round the Island of Jersey and point out suitable sites.

My wife Jacquie and I flew to Jersey, where we were met by Hugh Fraser. He drove us to his family home, probably one of the most beautiful manor houses on the island. Here was a huge walled garden dreaming in the thin sunlight; a great granite wall, thickly planted with waterfalls of rock plants; fifteenth-century arches, tidy lawns, and flower-beds brimming over with colour. All the walls, buildings, and outhouses were of beautiful Jersey granite, which contains all the subtle colourings of a heap of autumn leaves, and they glowed in the sunshine and seduced me into making what was probably the silliest remark of the century. Turning to Jacquie, I said, "What a marvellous place for a zoo."

If Hugh Fraser, as my host, had promptly fainted on the spot, I could scarcely have blamed him; in those lovely surroundings the thought of implanting the average person's idea of a zoo (masses of grey cement and steel bars) was almost high treason. To my astonishment, Hugh did not faint but merely cocked an inquiring eyebrow at me and asked whether I really meant what I said. Slightly embarrassed, I replied that I had meant it but added hastily that I realized it was impossible. Hugh said he did not think it was as impossible as all that. He went on to explain that the house and grounds were too big for him to keep up as a private individual, and so he wanted to move into a smaller place in England. Would I care to consider renting the property for the purpose of establishing my zoo? I could not conceive a more attractive setting for my purpose, and by the time lunch was over the bargain had been sealed and I was the new 'Lord' of the manor of Les Augres in the Parish of Trinity.

The alarm and despondency displayed by all who knew me when I announced this can be imagined. The only one who seemed relieved by the news was my sister, who pointed out

that, although she thought the whole thing was a hare-brained scheme, at least it would rid her back garden of some two hundred assorted denizens of the jungle, which were at that time putting a great strain on her relationship with the neighbours.

To complicate things even more, I did not want a simple, straightforward zoo, with the ordinary run of animals; the idea behind my zoo was to aid in the preservation of animal life. All over the world various species are being exterminated or cut down to remnants of their former numbers by the spread of civilization. Many of the larger species are of commercial or touristic value, and, as such, are receiving the most attention. Yet, scattered about all over the world are a host of fascinating small mammals, birds, and reptiles, and scant attention is being paid to their preservation, as they are neither edible nor wearable, and are of little interest to the tourist who demands lions and rhinos. A great number of these are island faunas, and as such their habitat is small. The slightest interference with this will cause them to vanish forever; the casual introduction of rats, say, or pigs could destroy one of these island species within a year. One has only to remember the sad fate of the dodo to realize this.

The obvious answer to this problem is to see that the creature is adequately protected in the wild state so that it does not become extinct, but this is often easier said than done. However, while we are pressing for this protection, there is another precaution that can be taken, and that is to build up breeding stocks of these creatures under controlled conditions in parks or zoos, so that, should the worst happen and the species become extinct in the wild state, you have, at least, not lost it forever. Moreover, you have a breeding stock from which you can glean the surplus animals and reintroduce them into their original homes at some future date. This, it has always seemed to me, should be the main function of any zoo, but it is only recently that the majority of zoos have woken up to this fact and tried to do anything about it. I wanted this to be the main function of mine. However, like all altruistic ideas, it was going to cost money. It was, therefore, obvious that the zoo would have to be run on purely commercial lines to begin with, until it was self-supporting. Then one could start on the real work: building up breeding stocks of rare creatures.

So this is the story of our trials and tribulations in taking the first step towards a goal which I think is of great importance.

1
MENAGERIE MANOR

Dear Mr Durrell,

I am eighteen years old strong in wind and limb having read your books can I have a job in your zoo...

It is one thing to visit a zoo as an ordinary member of the public but quite another to own one and live in the middle of it; this at times can be a mixed blessing. It certainly enables you to rush out at any hour of the day or night to observe your charges, but it also means that you are on duty twenty-four hours a day, and you find that a cosy little dinner party disintegrates because some animal has broken its leg, or because the heaters in the reptile house have failed, or for any of a dozen reasons. Winter, of course, is your slack period, and sometimes days on end pass without a single visitor in the grounds and you begin to feel that the zoo is really your own private one. The pleasantness of this sensation is more than slightly marred by the alarm with which you view the mounting of your bills and compare them to the lack of gate-money. But in the season the days are so full and the visitors so numerous that you hardly seem to notice the passing of time, and you forget your overdraft.

The average zoo day begins just before dawn; the sky will be almost imperceptibly tinged with yellow when you are awakened by the birdsong. At first, still half asleep, you wonder whether you are in Jersey or back in the tropics, for you can hear a robin chanting up the sun, and, accompanying it, the rich, fruity, slightly hoarse cries of the touracos. Then a blackbird flutes joyfully, and as the last of his song dies the white-headed jay thrush bursts into an excited, liquid babble. As the sky lightens, this confused and cosmopolitan orchestra gathers momentum, a thrush vies with the loud, imperious shouts of the seriemas, and the witches' cackle from the covey of magpies contrasts with the honking of geese and the delicate, plaintive notes of the diamond doves. Even if you survive this musical onslaught and can drift into a doze again you are suddenly and rudely awakened by something that resembles the strange, deep vibrating noise that a telegraph pole makes in a high wind. This acts upon you with the same disruptive effect of an alarm clock, for it is the warning that Trumpy has appeared, and if you have been foolish enough to leave your window wide open you have to take immediate defensive action. Trumpy is a grey-winged trumpeter, known to his more intimate ornithologist friends as *Psophia crepitans*. His function in the zoo is threefold — combined guide, settler-in, and village idiot. He looks, to be frank, like a badly made chicken, clad in sombre plumage as depressing as Victorian mourning: dark feathers over most of his body and what appears to be a shot-silk cravat at his throat. The whole ensemble is enlivened by a pair of ash-grey wings. He has dark, liquid eyes and a high, domed forehead arguing a brainpower which he does not possess.

Trumpy, for some reason best known to himself, is firmly convinced that his first duty of each day should be to fly into one's bedroom and acquaint one with what has been going on in the zoo during the night. His motives are not entirely altruistic, for he hopes to have his head scratched. If you are too deeply asleep, or too lazy, to leap out of bed at his greeting cry, he hops from the window-sill onto the dressing-table, decorates it extravagantly, wags his tail vigorously in approval of his action, and then hops onto the bed and proceeds to walk up and down, thrumming like a distraught 'cello until he is assured that he has your full attention. Before he can produce any more interesting designs on the furniture or carpet, you are forced to crawl out of bed, stalk and catch him (a task fraught with difficulty, since he is so agile and you are so somnambulistic), push him out onto the window-ledge, and close the window so that he cannot force his way in again. Trumpy now having awakened you, you wonder sleepily whether it is worth going back to bed, or whether you should get up. Then from beneath the window comes a series of five or six shrill cries for help, apparently delivered by a very inferior soprano in the process of having her throat cut. Looking out into the courtyard,

on the velvet-green lawns by the lavender hedge, you can see an earnest group of peahens searching the dewy grass, while around them their husband pirouettes, his burnished tail raised like a fantastic, quivering fountain in the sunlight. Presently he will lower his tail, throw back his head, and deafen the morning with his nerve-shattering cries. At eight o'clock the staff arrive, and you hear them shout greetings to each other, amid the clank of buckets and the swish of brushes, which all but drown the birdsong. You slip on your clothes and go out into the cool, fresh morning to see if all is right with the zoo.

In the long, two-storied granite house — once a large cider-press and now converted for monkeys and other mammals — everything is bustle and activity. The gorillas have just been let out of their cage while it is being cleaned, and they gallop about the floor with the exuberance of children just out of school, endeavouring to pull down the notices, wrench the electric heaters from their sockets, or break the fluorescent lights. Stephan, broom in hand, stands guard over the apes, watching with a stern eye, to prevent them from doing more damage than is absolutely necessary. Inside the gorillas' cage Mike, rotund and perpetually smiling, and Jeremy, with his Duke of Wellington nose and his barley-sugar-coloured hair, are busy, sweeping up the mess that the gorillas' tenancy of the previous day entailed and scattering fresh white sawdust in snowdrifts over the floor. Everything, they assure you, is all right; nothing has developed any malignant symptoms during the night.

All the animals, excited and eager at the start of a new day, bustle about their cages and shout "Good morning" to you. Etam, the black Celebes ape, looking like a satanic imp, clings to the wire, baring his teeth at you in greeting and making shrill, chuckling noises. The woolly-coated, orange-eyed mongoose lemurs bound from branch to branch, wagging their long thick tails like dogs, and calling to each other in a series of loud and astonishingly pig-like grunts. Further down, sitting on his hind legs, his prehensile tail wrapped round a branch, and surveying his quarters with the air of someone who has just received the freedom of the city, is Binty, the binturong, who suggests a badly made hearthrug, to one end of which has been attached a curiously Oriental-like head with long ear-tufts and circular, protuberant, and somewhat vacant eyes. The next-door cage appears to be empty, but if you run your finger along the wire a troupe of diminutive marmosets come tumbling out of their box of straw, twittering and trilling like canaries. The largest of these is Whiskers, the emperor tamarin, whose sweeping snow-white Colonel Blimp moustache quivers majestically as he gives you greeting by opening wide his mouth and vibrating his tongue rapidly up and down.

Upstairs, the parrots and parakeets salute you with a cacophony of sound: harsh screams, squeakings resembling unoiled hinges, and cries that vary from "I'm a very fine bird" of Suku, the grey parrot, to the more personal "*Hijo de puta*" squawked by Blanco, the Tucuman Amazon. Further along, the genets, beautifully blotched in dark chocolate on their golden pelts, move like quicksilver through the branches in their cage. They are so long and lithe and sensuous that they seem more like snakes than mammals. Next door, Queenie, the tree ocelot, her paws demurely folded, gazes at you with great amber eyes, gently twitching the end of her tail. A host of quick-footed, bright-eyed, inquisitive-faced mongooses patter busily about their cages, working up an appetite. The hairy armadillo lies supine on its back, paws and nose twitching and its pink and wrinkled stomach heaving as it dreams sweet dreams of vast plates of food. You reflect, as you look at it, that it is about time it went on a diet again, otherwise it will have difficulty in walking, and you make a bet with yourself as to how many visitors that day would come to tell you that the armadillo was on its back and apparently dying; the record to date has been fifteen visitors in one day.

Outside, the clank of a bucket, the burst of whistling heralds the approach of Shep, curly-haired and with a most disarming grin. His real name is John Mallet, but his friends called him Shepton Mallet — the name of a town near Bath — which, in turn, degenerated into Shep. You walk up the broad main drive with him, past the long twelve-foot-high granite wall ablaze with the flowering rock plants, and down to the sunken water-meadow, where the swans and ducks swim eagerly to welcome him as he empties out the bucket of food at the

edge of the water. Having ascertained from Shep that none of his bird charges have sickened or died or laid eggs during the night, you continue on your tour.

The bird house is aburst with song and movement. Birds of every shape and colour squabble, eat, flutter, and sing, so that the whole thing resembles a market or a fairground alight with bright colours. Here a toucan cocks a knowing eye at you and clatters his huge beak with a sound like a rattle; here a black-faced love-bird, looking as though he had just come from a minstrel show, waddles across to his water dish and proceeds to bathe himself with such vigour that all the other occupants of the cage receive the benefit of his bathwater; a pair of tiny, fragile diamond doves are dancing what appears to be a minuet together, turning round and round, bowing and changing places, calling in their soft, ringing voices some sort of endearments.

You pass slowly down the house to the big cage at the end where the touracos now live. The male, Peety, I hand reared while in West Africa. He peers at you from one of the higher perches and then, if you call to him, he will fly down in a graceful swoop, land on the perch nearest to you, and start to peck eagerly at your fingers. Then he will throw back his head, his throat swelling, and give his loud, husky cry: "Caroo... Caroo... Caroo...coo...coo...coo..." Touracos are really among the most beautiful of birds. Peety's tail and wings are a deep metallic blue, while his breast, head, and neck are a rich green, the feathering so fine and shining that it looks like spun glass. When he flies, you can see the undersides of his wings, which flash a glorious magenta red. This red is caused by a substance in the feathers called turacin, and it is possible to wash it out of the feathers. If you place a touraco's wing feather in a glass of plain water, presently you will find the water tinged with pink, as though a few crystals of permanganate of potash had been dissolved in it. Having dutifully listened to Peety and his wife sing a duet together, you now make your way out of the bird house.

Dodging the exuberant welcome of the chimpanzees, who prove their interest in your well-being by hurling bits of fruit — and other less desirable substances — with unerring accuracy through the wire of their cage, you walk to the reptile house. Here in a pleasant temperature of eighty degrees the reptiles doze. Snakes regard you calmly with lidless eyes, frogs gulp as though just about to succumb to a bout of sobs, and lizards lie draped over rocks and tree trunks, exquisitely languid and sure of themselves. In the cage which contains the Fernand's skinks that I had caught in the Cameroons, you can dig your hands into the damp, warm soil at the bottom and haul them out of their subterranean burrow, writhing and biting indignantly. They had recently shed their skins, and so they look as though they have been newly varnished. You admire their red, yellow, and white markings on the glossy black background, and then let them slide through your fingers and watch as they burrow like bulldozers into the earth. John Hartley appears, tall and lanky, bearing two trays of chopped fruit and vegetables for the giant tortoises. The previous night had been a good feeding one, he tells you. The boa constrictors had had two guinea-pigs each, while the big reticulated python had engulfed a very large rabbit, and lies there bloated and lethargic to prove it. The horned toads, looking more than ever like bizarre pottery figures, had stuffed themselves on baby chickens, and the smaller snakes were busily digesting white rats or mice, according to their size.

Round the back of the house are some more of the monkey collection that have just been let out into their outdoor cages: Frisky, the mandrill, massive and multi-coloured as a technicoloured sunset, picks over a huge pile of fruit and vegetables, grunting and gurgling to himself; further along, Tarquin, the cherry-crowned mangabey, with his grey fur, mahogany-coloured skullcap, and white eyelids, goes carefully through the fur of his wife, while she lies on the floor of the cage as though dead. Periodically he finds a delectable fragment of salt in her fur and pops it into his mouth. One is reminded of the small boy who had witnessed this operation with fascinated eyes and had then shouted, "Hi, Mum, come and see this monkey eating the other one."

Up in their paddock the tapirs, Claudius and Claudette, portly, Roman-nosed, and benign, play with Willie, the black and white cat, who guards the aviaries nearby from the rats. Willie lies on his back and pats gently at the whiffling, rubbery noses of the tapirs as they sniff and nuzzle him. Eventually tiring of the game, he rises and starts to move off, whereupon one of the tapirs reaches forward and tenderly engulfs Willie's tail in its mouth and pulls him back, so that he continues the game. In the walled garden the lions, butter-fat and angry-eyed, lie in the sun, while near them the cheetahs are languidly asprawl amid the buttercups, merging with the flowers so perfectly that they become almost invisible.

At ten o'clock the gates open and the first coachloads of people arrive. As they come flooding into the grounds, everyone has to be on alert, not, as you may think, to ensure that the animals do not hurt the people, but to ensure that the people do not hurt the animals. If an animal is asleep, they want to throw stones at it or prod it with sticks to make it move. We have found visitors endeavouring to give the chimpanzees lighted cigarettes and razor-blades; monkeys have been given lipsticks which, of course, they thought was some exotic fruit and devoured accordingly, only to develop acute colic. One pleasant individual (whom we did not catch, unfortunately) pushed a long cellophane packet full of aspirins into the chinchilla cage. For some obscure reason one chinchilla decided that this was the food it had been waiting for all its life, and ate most of it before we came on the scene; it died the next day. The uncivilized behaviour of some human beings in a zoo has to be seen to be believed.

Now, there might be any one of fifty jobs to do. Perhaps you go to the workshop where Les, with his bruiser's face and bright eyes, is busy on some repair work or other. Les is one of those people who are God's gift to a zoo, for no job defeats him and his integrity is incredible. He is like a one-man building firm, for he can do anything from welding to dovetailing, from cementing to electrical maintenance. You discuss with him the new line of cages you are planning, their size and shape, and whether they should have swing-doors, or whether sliding doors would be more convenient.

Having thrashed out this problem, you remember that one of the giant tortoises has to have an injection. On your way to deliver this, you pass an excited crowd of north-country people round the mandrill cage, watching Frisky as he stalks up and down, grunting to himself, presenting now his vivid, savagely beautiful face, and now his multi-coloured rear to their eyes. "Ee," says one woman, "you can't tell front from back!"

Lunch-time comes, and so far the day has progressed smoothly. As you sit down to eat, you wonder if there will be a crisis during the afternoon: will the ladies' lavatories overflow, or, worse still, will it start to rain and thus put off all the people who are intending to visit the zoo? Lunch over, you see that the sky is, to your relief, still a sparkling blue. You decide to go down and look at the penguin pond, for which you have certain ideas of improvement.

You scuttle surreptitiously out of the house, but not surreptitiously enough, for both your wife and your secretary catch you in rapid succession and remind you that two reviews and an article are a week overdue and that your agent is baying like a bloodhound for the manuscript you promised him eighteen months previously. Assuring them, quite untruthfully, that you will be back very shortly, you make your way down to the penguins.

On the way you meet Stephan grinning to himself. He tells you that he was in one of the lions' dens, cleaning it out, when, glancing over his shoulder, he was surprised to see a visitor standing there, using the place as a lavatory.

"What are you doing?" inquired Stephan.

"Well, this is the gents', isn't it?" said the man peevishly.

"No, it isn't. It's the lions' den," replied Stephan.

Never had an exit been so rapidly performed from a public convenience, he tells me.

Having worked out a complicated but very beautiful plan for the penguin pool, you then have to work out an equally complicated and beautiful plan for getting the scheme passed by Catha, the administrative secretary, who holds the zoo's purse-strings in a grip so

firm it requires as much ingenuity to prise money out of it as it would to extract a coin from a Scotsman's pibroch. You march to the office, hoping to find her in a sunny, reckless mood, instead of which she is glowering over an enormous pile of ledgers. Before you can start extolling the virtues of your penguin-pond idea, she fixes you with a gimlet-green eye and in a voice like a honey-covered razor-blade informs you that your last brilliant idea came to approximately twice what you had estimated. You express bewilderment at this and gaze suspiciously at the ledger, implying, without saying so, that her addition must be wrong. She obligingly does the sum in front of you, so that there will be no argument. Feeling that this moment is not perhaps the best one to broach the subject of the penguin pond, you back hastily out of the office and go back into the zoo.

You are spending a pleasant ten minutes making love to the woolly monkeys through the wire of their cage when suddenly your secretary materializes at your elbow in the most unnerving fashion, and before you can think up a suitable excuse she has reminded you once more about the reviews, the article, and the book, and has dragged you disconsolately back to your office.

As you sit there racking your brains to think of something tactful to say about a particularly revolting book that has been sent to you for review, a constant procession of people appears to distract your attention.

Catha comes in with the minutes of the last meeting, closely followed by Les, who wants to know what mesh of wire to put on the new cage. He is followed by Shep, who wants to know if the meal-worms have arrived, as he is running short, and then Jeremy appears to tell you that the dingoes have just had eleven pups. I defy any writer to write a good review when his mind is occupied with the problem of what to do with eleven dingo pups.

Eventually, you manage to finish the review and slip once more into the zoo. It is getting towards evening now and the crowds are thinning out, drifting away up to the main drive to the car park, to wait for their buses or coaches. The slanting rays of the sun floodlight the cage in which the crowned pigeons live: giant powder-blue birds with scarlet eyes and a quivering crest of feathers as fine as maidenhair fern. In the warmth of the setting sun they are displaying to each other, raising their maroon-coloured wings over their backs, like tombstone angels, bowing and pirouetting to one another and then uttering their strange booming cries. The chimpanzees are starting to scream peevishly, because it is nearing the time for their evening milk, but they pause in their hysterical duet to utter greetings to you as you pass.

Up in the small mammal house the night creatures are starting to come to life, creatures that all day have been nothing but gently snoring bundles of fur. Bushbabies, with their enormous, perpetually horrified eyes, creep out of their straw beds and start to bound about their cages, as silent as thistle-down, occasionally stopping by a plate to stuff a handful of writhing meal-worms into their mouths; pottos, looking like miniature teddy bears, prowl about the branches of their cage, wearing guilty, furtive expressions, as though they were a convention of cat-burglars; the hairy armadillo, you are relieved to see, has roused itself out of its stupor and is now the right way up, puttering to and fro like a clockwork toy.

Downstairs, with growls of satisfaction, the gorillas are receiving their milk. Nandy likes to drink hers lying on her stomach, sipping it daintily from a stainless-steel dish. N'Pongo has no use for this feminine nonsense and takes his straight from the bottle, holding it carefully in his great black hands. He likes to drink his milk sitting up on the perch, staring at the end of the bottle with intense concentration. Jeremy has to stand guard, for when N'Pongo has drained the last dregs he will simply open his hands and let the bottle drop, to shatter on the cement floor. All around, the monkeys are gloating over their evening ration of bread and milk, uttering muffled cries of delight as they stuff their mouths and the milk runs down their chins.

Walking up towards the main gate you hear the loud ringing cries of the sarus cranes: tall, elegant grey birds with heads and necks the colour of faded red velvet. They are

performing their graceful courting dance in the last rays of the sun, against a background of blue and mauve hydrangea. One of them picks up a twig or a tuft of grass, and then, with wings held high, twirls and leaps with it, tossing it into the air and prancing on its long slender legs, while the other watches it and bows as if in approval. The owls are now showing signs of animation. Woody, the Woodford's owl, clicks his beak reprovably at you as you peer into his cage, and over his immense eyes he lowers blue lids with sweeping eyelashes that would be the envy of any film star. The white-faced scops owls that have spent all day pretending to be grey decaying tree stumps now open large golden eyes and peer at you indignantly.

Shadows are creeping over the flower-beds and the rockery. The peacock, as exhausted as an actor at the end of a long run, passes slowly towards the walled garden, dragging his burnished tail behind him and leading his vacant-eyed harem towards their roosting place. Sitting on top of the granite cross that surmounts the great arch leading into the courtyard is our resident robin. He has a nest in a crevice of the wall, half-hidden under a waterfall of blue-flowered rock plants. So, as his wife warms her four eggs, he sits on top of the cross and sings his heart out, gazing rapturously at the western sky, where the setting sun has woven a sunset of gold and green and blue.

As the light fades, the robin eventually ceases to sing and flies off to roost in the mimosa tree. All the day noises have now ceased and there is a short period of quiet before the night cries take over. It is started inevitably by the owls — beak-clicking and a noise like tearing calico from the white-faced scops owls, a long tremulous and surprised hoot from the Woodford's owl, and a harsh, jeering scream from the Canadian horned owls. Once the owls have started, they are generally followed by the Andean fox, who sits forlornly in the centre of his cage, throws back his head, and yaps shrilly at the stars. This sets off the dingoes in the next cage, who utter a series of gentle melodious howls so weird and so mournful they make you want to burst into tears. Not to be outdone, the lions take up the song — deep, rasping, full-throated roars tailing off into a satisfied gurgle that sounds unpleasantly as though the lions have just found a hole in the wire.

In the reptile house, snakes that have been lethargic all day now slide round their cages, bright-eyed, eager, their tongues flicking as they explore every nook and cranny for food. The geckos, with enormous golden eyes, hang upside-down on the roof of their cage, or else with infinite caution stalk a dishful of writhing meal-worms. The tiny yellow and black corroboree frogs (striped like bulls'-eyes and the size of a cigarette butt) periodically burst into song; thin, reedy piping that has a metallic quality about it, as if someone were tapping a stone with a tiny hammer. Then they relapse into silence and gaze mournfully at the ever-circling crowd of fruit flies that live in their cage and form part of their diet.

Outside, the lions, the dingoes, and the fox are quiet; the owls keep up their questioning cries. There is a sudden chorus of hysterical screams from the chimpanzees' bedroom, and you know that they are quarrelling over who should have the straw.

In the mammal house the gorillas are now asleep, lying side by side on their shelf, pillowing their heads on their arms. They screw up their eyes in your flashlight beam and utter faint growls, indignant that you should disturb them. Next door, the orang-utans, locked passionately in each other's arms, snore so loudly that it seems as though the very floor vibrates. In all the cages there is deep, relaxed breathing from sleeping monkeys, and the only sound apart from this is the steady patter of claws as the nine-banded armadillo, who always seems to suffer from insomnia, trots about his cage, making and remaking his bed, carefully gathering all the straw into one corner, smoothing it down, lying on it to test its comfort, then deciding that the corner is not suitable for a bedroom, removing all the bedding to the opposite end of the cage, and starting all over again.

Upstairs, the flying squirrels gaze at you with enormous liquid eyes, squatting fatly on their haunches, while stuffing food into their mouths with their delicate little hands. Most of the parrots are asleep, but Suku, the African grey, is incurably inquisitive, and as you pass

never fails to pull his head out from under his wing to see what you are doing. As you make your departure, he shuffles his feathers — a whispering, silken noise -and then in a deep, rather bronchial voice says, "Good night, Suku" to himself in tones of great affection.

As you lie in bed, watching through the window the moon disentangling itself from the tree silhouettes, you hear the dingoes starting again their plaintive, flute-like chorus, and then the lions cough into action. Soon it will be dawn and the chorus of birds will take over and make the cold air of the morning ring with song.

A PORCUPINE IN THE PARISH

Dear Mr Durrell,

I would like to join one of your expeditions. Here are my qualifications and faults: 36 years old, single, good health, a sport, understand children and animals, except snakes; devoted, reliable, excellent; young in character. My hobbies are playing the flute, photography, and writing stories. My nerves are not too steady; am disagreeable if anybody insults my country or my religion (Catholic). In the event of my accompanying you, it would be everything paid — on the other hand if you are a snob and you don't mean what you write, I regret to say I do not wish to know you. Hoping to hear from you soon...

I soon found, to my relief, that Jersey appeared to have taken us to its heart. The kindness that has been shown to us during the five years of our existence is tremendous, both from officials and from the islanders themselves. After all, when living on an island eight miles by twelve you may be pardoned for having certain qualms when someone wants to start a zoo and import a lot of apparently dangerous animals. You have vivid mental pictures of an escaped tiger stalking your pedigree herd of Jersey cows, of flocks of huge, savage deer browsing happily through your fields of daffodils, and gigantic eagles and vultures swooping down on your defenceless chickens. I have no doubt that a lot of people thought this, especially our nearest neighbours to the manor, but nevertheless they welcomed us without displaying any symptoms of unease.

In a zoo of five or six hundred animals the variety and quantity of food they consume are staggering. It is one thing that must not be stinted if they are to be kept healthy and happy; and, above all, the food must be not only plentiful but good. Cleanliness and good food go a very long way to cutting down disease. A creature that is well-fed and kept in clean surroundings has, in my opinion, an eighty per cent better chance of escaping disease, or if it contracts a disease, of recovering. Unfortunately, a great many people (including, I am afraid, some zoos) still suffer from the extraordinary delusion that anything edible but not fit for human consumption is ideal for animals. When you consider that most animals in the wild state — unless they are natural carrion feeders — always eat the freshest of food, such as fresh fruit and freshly killed meat — it is scarcely to be wondered at when they sicken and die if fed on a diet that is 'not fit for human consumption'. Of course, in all zoos a lot of such food *is* fed, but in most cases there is nothing at all wrong with it. For example, a grocer opens a crate of bananas and finds that many of the fruit have black specks or blotches on the skin. There is nothing wrong with the fruit, but his customers demand yellow bananas, and will not buy discoloured ones. If a zoo did not buy it, the fruit would be wasted. Sometimes the grocer has fruit or vegetables which have reached that point of ripeness where after another twenty-four hours in the shop the whole lot will have to be thrown away. In that case they are sold to a zoo that can use them up rapidly.

Some time ago a grocer telephoned us, inquiring whether we would like some peaches. He explained that his deepfreeze had gone wrong and that it contained some South African peaches which had gone black just round the seed. There was absolutely nothing wrong with them, he assured us, but they were unsaleable. We said we would be delighted to have them, thinking that a couple of crates of peaches would be a treat for some of the animals. A few hours later, a huge lorry rolled into the grounds, stacked high with boxes. There must have been up to thirty or forty, and the financial loss this represented to the grocer must have been staggering. They were some of the largest and most succulent peaches I have ever seen; we tipped cratefuls of them into the cages, and the animals had a field day. Within half an hour all the monkeys were dripping peach juice and could hardly move; several members of the staff, too, were surreptitiously wiping juice off their chins. There was, as I say, nothing wrong with the peaches: they were just unsaleable. But it might happen that

someone else, in the most kindly way, would bring us a whole lorry load of completely rotten and mildewed peaches, and be hurt and puzzled when we refused them on the grounds that they were unfit for animal consumption. One of the biggest killers in a zoo is that rather nebulous thing called enteritis, an infection of the stomach. This in itself can cause an animal's death, but even if it is only a mild attack it can weaken the creature and thus open the door to pneumonia or some other deadly complaint. Bad fruit can cause enteritis quicker than most things; thus care must be taken over the quality fed to the animals.

As soon as the people of Jersey knew what our requirements were in the matter of food, they rallied round in the most extraordinarily generous way. Take the question of calves, for instance. In Jersey most of the bull calves are slaughtered at birth, and until we arrived they were simply buried, for they were too small to be marketable. We discovered this quite by accident, when a farmer telephoned us and asked rather doubtfully, if a dead calf was any use to us. We said we would be delighted to have it, and when he brought it round he asked us if we would like any more. It was then that we found out there was this wonderful source of fresh meat: meat which — from the animal point of view — could not have been more natural, for not only was it freshly killed (sometimes still warm), but it also included the hearts, livers, and other internal organs which were so good for them. Gradually, the news spread among the farmers; before long — at certain times of the year — we were receiving as many as sixteen calves a day, and farmers were travelling from one end of the island to the other, delivering them to us. Others, not to be outdone, offered us tomatoes and apples, and would bring whole lorry loads round, or let us go to collect as many as we would take away. One man telephoned to say he had a 'few' sunflowers, the heads of which were now ripe — would we like them? As usual we said yes, and he turned up in a small open truck piled high with gigantic sunflower heads, so that the whole thing looked like a sun chariot. The heads were not fully ripe, which meant that the kernel of each seed was soft and milky; we simply cut up the heads as if they were plum cakes and put big slices in with such creatures as the squirrels, mongooses, and birds. They all went crazy over the soft seeds and simply gorged themselves.

But these are all the more normal types of food. In a zoo you can use many very unusual items of diet, and in acquiring these we were again helped by the local people. There was one elderly lady who used to ride up to the zoo once or twice a week on an antediluvian bicycle and spend the afternoon talking to the animals. Whenever she saw me she would back me into a corner and for half an hour or so tell me what tricks her favourite animals had been up to that day. She was, I discovered, a lavatory attendant in St Helier. One day I happened to meet her when I had been out collecting some acorns for the squirrels. She watched entranced while the squirrels sat up on their hind legs, twirling the acorns round and round in their paws as they chewed them. She then told me that she knew of a great many churchyards in which fine oak trees grew, and vowed that she would herself bring some acorns for the squirrels at the end of the week. Sure enough, she appeared on the next Sunday pedalling strenuously up to the zoo on her ancient bicycle, the front basket of which was filled to the brim with plump acorns, and there was another large carrier bagful strapped — somewhat insecurely — to the back of her vehicle. Thereafter, she used to bring us a supply of acorns every week, until the squirrels became quite blasé about them and even started to store them in their beds.

Another item for which we are always grateful is what could be loosely called 'live food', that is to say, earwigs, woodlice, grasshoppers, moths, and snails. Here a great many people come to our rescue, and they turn up at the zoo with jam-jars full of woodlice and other creatures, and biscuit-tins full of snails, of which they are, of course, only too glad to see the last. The earwigs, woodlice, and so on are fed to the smaller reptiles, the amphibians, and some of the birds. The snails we feed to the larger lizards, who scrunch them up with avidity, eating shell and all as a rule.

In order to pad out the collection of animals that I had brought back from West Africa and South America, we had, of course, to acquire from different sources several other

creatures. The most amusing of these was, undoubtedly, the bird I mentioned before, Trumpy, the trumpeter. Not only had he appointed himself the zoo's clown but also the zoo's settler-in. As soon as we got a new creature, Trumpy managed to hear of it, and would come bouncing along, cackling to himself, to settle it in. He would then spend twenty-four hours standing by the cage (or preferably in it, if he could) until he thought that the new arrival was firmly established, whereupon he would bounce back to his special beat in the mammal house. Sometimes Trumpy's settling efforts were on the risky side, but he seemed to be too dim-witted to realize the danger. When Juan and Jauntier, the white-collared peccaries, were first released into their paddock, Trumpy was there to settle them in. The pigs did not seem to mind in the slightest, so Trumpy did his twenty-four hour stint and departed. But later on, when Juan and Juanita had just had their first litter, and had brought them out into the paddock for the first time, Trumpy flew gaily over the fence to settle in the babies. Now, Juan and Juanita had not minded this for themselves, but they thought that Trumpy's efforts on behalf of their piglets held some hidden menace. They converged on Trumpy (who was standing on one leg and eyeing the piglets benignly), their fur bristling, their tusks clattering like castanets. Trumpy woke out of his trance with a start, and only a skilful bit of dodging and a wild leap saved him. It was the last time he attempted to go into the peccary paddock. When we dammed up the little stream in the sunken water-meadow and constructed a small lake for the black-necked and coscoroba swans I had brought back from South America, Trumpy was there to supervise the work, and when the swans were eventually released he insisted, in spite of all our entreaties, in standing up to his ankles in water for twenty-four hours to settle them in. It did not appear to have any effect on the swans, but Trumpy enjoyed it.

Another new acquisition was the fine young male mandrill, Frisky. With his blue and red behind, and his blue and red nose, Frisky was a fine sight. If you went near his cage he would peer at you with his bright, amber-coloured eyes, lift his eyebrows up and down as if in astonishment, and then, uttering throaty little grunts, turn round and present his backside to you, peering over his shoulder to see what effect his sunset rear was achieving. Frisky was, of course, exceedingly inquisitive, like all members of his family, and one bright spring day this was his undoing. We were having the tops of the monkey cages repainted in a pleasant shade of mushroom, and Frisky had been watching this operation with keen interest. He was obviously under the impression that the paint pot contained some delicious substance, probably like milk, which would repay investigation. He had not had a chance to find out, however, for the painter, in the most selfish and boorish manner, had kept the paint pot close beside him. But patience is always rewarded, and after a few hours Frisky had his chance. The painter left the pot unguarded while he went to fetch something, and Frisky seized the opportunity. He pushed his arm through the wire, grabbed the edge of the pot, and pulled. The next moment he was spluttering and choking under a waterfall of mushroom-coloured paint, and almost instantly, he discovered, he had turned into a mushroom-coloured mandrill. There was really not much that we could do, for you cannot take a half-grown mandrill out of its cage and wash it as though it were a poodle. However, when the paint had dried as hard as armour on his fur, he looked so miserable that we decided to put him into the cage next door, which contained a female baboon and two female drills, in the hope that they would clean him. When Frisky was let in with them, they viewed him with alarm, and it was some time before they plucked up enough courage to approach him. When they did, however, and found out what was the matter with him, they gathered round enthusiastically and set about the task of giving Frisky a wash and brush-up. The trouble was that the paint had dried so hard on the fur that the three females had to use a great deal of force, and so, although at the end of two days they had removed all the paint, they had also removed a vast amount of Frisky's fur with it. Now, instead of a mushroom-coloured mandrill, we had a partially bald and slightly shamefaced-looking one.

Another newcomer was our lion, who went under the time-honoured name of Leo. He was one of the famous Dublin Zoo lions, and was probably about the fiftieth generation born in captivity. On his arrival he was only about the size of a small dog, and so he was housed in a cage in the mammal house, but he grew at such a pace that it was soon imperative that we find him more spacious quarters. We had just finished construction on a large cage for the chimpanzees, and decided we would put Leo in that until we could get around to building him a cage of his own. So Leo was transferred, and settled down very happily. I was glad to see, when his mane started to develop, that he was going to be a blond lion, for in my experience the lions with blond manes, as opposed to dark ones, have always nice, if slightly imbecile, characters. This theory has been amply born out by Leo's behaviour. He had in his cage a large log as a plaything, and a big black rubber bucket in which he received his water ration. This bucket fascinated him, and after he had drunk his fill he would upset the remains of the water and then pat the bucket with his great paws, making it roll round the cage so that he could stalk it and pounce on it. One day I was in the grounds when a lady stopped me to inquire whether we had acquired Leo from a circus. Slightly puzzled, I said, "No," and asked her why she should think so. "Because," she replied, "he was doing such clever tricks." I discovered that he had, by some extraordinary means, managed to wedge the rubber bucket on his head, and was walking round and round the cage proudly, wearing it like a hat.

In his second year Leo decided, after mature reflection, that it was a lion's duty to roar. He was not awfully sure how to go about it, so he would retire to quiet corners of his cage and practice softly to himself, for he was rather shy of this new accomplishment and would stop immediately and pretend it had nothing to do with him if you came in view. When he was satisfied that the timbre was right and his breath control perfect, he treated us to his first concert. It was a wonderful moonlight night when he started, and we were all delighted that Leo was, at last, a proper lion. A lion roaring sounds just like someone sawing wood on a gigantic, echoing barrel. The first coughs or rasps are quick and fairly close together, and you can imagine the saw biting into the wood; then the coughs slow down and become more drawn out and suddenly stop, and you instinctively wait to hear the thud of the sawnoff piece hitting the ground. The trouble was that Leo was so proud of his accomplishment that he could not wait until nightfall to give us the benefit of his vocal chords. He started roaring earlier and earlier each evening, and would keep it up solidly all night, with five-minute intervals for meditation between each roar. Sometimes, when he was in particularly good voice, you could imagine that he was sitting on the end of your bed, serenading you. We all began to be somewhat jaded. We found that if we opened the bedroom window and shouted, "Leo, *shut up*," this had the effect of silencing him for half an hour, but at the end of that time he would decide that you had not really meant it and would start all over again. It was a very trying time for all concerned. Now Leo has learned to roar with a certain amount of discretion, but even so there are nights — especially at full moon — when the only thing to do is to put the pillow over your head and curse the day you ever decided you wanted a zoo.

We also obtained in our first year two South African penguins, called Dilly and Dally. I hasten to add that they were not christened by us, but arrived with these revolting names stencilled on their crate. We had prepared a pool for them in the shade of some trees bordering the main drive, and here they seemed quite content. Trumpy, of course, spent twenty-four hours in their pen with them, and seemed faintly disgruntled that the pool was too deep for him to join Dilly and Dally in it. After settling them in, he took a great fancy to the penguins and paid them a visit every morning, when he would stand outside the wire making his curious booming cry, while Dilly and Dally would point their beaks skywards and bray to the heavens, like a couple of demented donkeys.

I am not quite sure when the rift in this happy friendship appeared, or for what reason, but one morning we saw Trumpy fly over into the penguin enclosure and proceed to beat up Dilly and Dally in the most ferocious manner. He flew at them, wings out, feathers bristling, pecking and scratching, until the two penguins (who were twice his size) were forced to take

refuge in the pool. Trumpy stood on the edge of the pond and cackled triumphantly at them. We chased Trumpy out of the enclosure and scolded him, whereupon he shuffled his feathers carelessly and stalked off nonchalantly. After that we had to watch him, for he took advantage of every opportunity to fly over the wire and attack poor Dilly and Dally, who, at the sight of him, would flop hysterically into the water. One morning he did this once too often. He must have flown over very early, before anyone was about, intent on giving the penguins a bashing, but they had grown tired of these constant assaults, and rounded on him. One of them, with a lucky peck, must have caught him off balance and knocked him into the pool, from which — with his water-logged feathers — he could not climb out. This was the penguins' triumph, and as Trumpy floundered helplessly they circled round, pecking at him viciously with their razor-sharp beaks. When he was found, he was still floating in the pond, bleeding profusely from a number of pecks, and with just enough strength to keep his head above water. We rushed him into the house, dried him, and anointed his wounds, but he was a very sick and exhausted bird, and black depression settled on the zoo, for we all thought he would die. The next day there was no change, and I felt it was touch and go. As I was sipping my early morning tea on the third day, I suddenly heard, to my amazement, a familiar thrumming cry. I slipped out of bed and looked out the window. There, by the lavender hedge in the courtyard, was Trumpy, a slightly battered and tattered trumpeter who limped a little, but still with the same regal air of being the owner of the property. I saluted him out of the window, and he cocked a bright eye at me. Then he shuffled his torn feathering to adjust it to his liking, gave his loud, cackling laugh, and stalked off towards his beat in the mammal house.

Another new arrival that caused us a certain amount of trouble, one way or another, was Delilah, a large female African crested porcupine. She arrived up at the airport in a crate that looked suitable for a couple of rhinoceroses. Why she had been shipped like this became obvious when we peered into the crate, for even in that short air journey she had succeeded in nearly demolishing one side with her great yellow teeth. When she saw us looking into the crate, she uttered a series of such fearsome roars and gurks that one would have been pardoned for thinking it contained a pride of starving lions. She stamped her feet petulantly on the floor of the crate, and rattled and clattered her long black and white quills like a crackle of musketry. It was quite obvious that Delilah was going to be a personality to be reckoned with.

On our return to the zoo we had to chivy her out of her rapidly disintegrating crate and into a temporary cage, while her permanent home was under construction. During this process she endeared herself to at least one member of the staff by backing sharply into his legs. The experience of having several hundred extremely sharp porcupine quills stabbed into your shins is not exactly exhilarating. By the time Delilah was installed in her temporary home there were several more casualties, and the ground was littered with quills, for Delilah, like all porcupines, shed her quills with gay abandon at the slightest provocation.

The old fable of a porcupine being able to shoot its quills out like arrows is quite untrue. The quills, some of them fourteen inches long, are planted very loosely in the skin of the back, and when the animal is harried by an enemy it backs rapidly into the adversary (for all the quills point backwards), jabs the quills into him as deeply as possible, and then rushes forward. This action drives the quills into the enemy and pulls them loose from the porcupine's skin, so the enemy is left looking like a weird sort of pincushion. This action is performed so rapidly that in the heat of battle, as it were, you are quite apt to get the impression that the porcupine *has* shot its adversary full of quills. This delightful action Delilah used to indulge in with great frequency, and therefore at feeding and cleaning times you had to be prepared to drop everything and leap high and wide at a moment's notice.

Porcupines are, of course, rodents, and the giant crested species — since it spreads from Africa into parts of Europe — has the distinction of being the largest European rodent, bigger even than the beaver. It is also the largest of the porcupines, for, although there are

many different species scattered about the world, none of them comes anywhere near the size of the crested one. In North and South America the porcupines are, to a large extent, arboreal, and the South American kind even have prehensile tails to assist them in climbing. The other porcupines found in Africa and Asia are fairly small, terrestrial species which generally have fairly long tails ending in a bunch of soft spines like the head of a brush, and this they rattle vigorously in moments of stress. Without doubt the great crested porcupine, as well as being the biggest, is the most impressive and handsome member of the family.

It was not long before we had Delilah's new home ready, and then came the great day on which we had to transport her to it from one end of the zoo to the other. We had learned from bitter experience that trying to chivy Delilah into a crate was worse than useless. She simply put up all her spines, gurked at us fiercely, and backed into everything in sight, parting with great handfuls of quills with a generosity I have rarely seen equalled. The mere sight of a crate would send her off into an orgy of foot-stamping and quill-rattling. We had learned that there was only one way to cope with her: to let her out of the cage and then have two people, armed with brooms, urge her along gently. Delilah would stride out like one of the more muscular and prickly female Soviet athletes, and as long as you kept her on a fairly even course by light taps from the brushes you could keep her going for any distance.

This was the method we decided to employ to transfer her to her new quarters, and to begin with all went well. She started off at a great lick down the main drive, Jeremy and I panting behind with our brushes. We successfully made her round the corner into the courtyard, but once she got there a suspicion entered her head that she might be doing exactly what we wanted her to do. Feeling that the honour of the rodents was at stake, Delilah proceeded to run round and round the courtyard as though it were a circus ring, with Jeremy and me in hot pursuit. Then, when she had got us going at a good pace, she would suddenly stop and go into reverse, so that we would have to leap out of the way and use our brushes as protection. After a few minutes of this, there appeared to be more quills sticking in the woodwork of the brushes than there were in Delilah. Eventually, however, she tired of this game, and allowed us to guide her down to her new cage without any further ado.

She lived very happily in her new quarters for about three months before the wanderlust seized her. It was a crisp winter's evening when Delilah decided there might be something in the outside world that her cage lacked, and so she got to work with her great curved yellow teeth, ripped a large hole in the thick interlink wire, squeezed her portly form through it, and trotted off into the night. It happened that on that particular evening I had gone out to dinner, so the full honours of the Battle of the Porcupine go to Shep.

At about midnight my mother was awakened by a car which had driven into the courtyard beneath her bedroom window and was tooting its horn vigorously. Mother, leaning out of the window, saw that it was one of our nearest neighbours from the farm over the hill. He informed Mother that there was a large and, to judge by the noises it was making, ferocious creature stamping about in his yard, and would we like to do something about it. Mother, who always has a tendency to fear the worst, was convinced that it was Leo who had escaped, and she fled to the cottage to wake Shep. He decided from the description that it must be Delilah, and pausing only for a broom, he leapt into the zoo van and drove up to the farm. There, sure enough, was Delilah, stamping about in the moonlight, gurking to herself and rattling her quills. Shep explained to the farmer that the only way to get Delilah back to the zoo was to brush her, as it were, with the broom along the half-mile or so of road. The farmer, though obviously thinking the whole procedure rather eccentric, said that if Shep would undertake that part of it he would undertake to drive the zoo van back again.

So Shep set off, clad in his pyjamas, brushing a snorting, rattling Delilah down the narrow moonlit road. Shep met several cars full of late-night revellers, and all these screeched to a halt and watched in astonishment the sight of a man in pyjamas brushing along a plainly reluctant porcupine. Several of them, I am sure, must have hurried home to sign the pledge, for, after all, the last thing you expect to find wandering about a respectable parish is an

infuriated porcupine pursued by a highly embarrassed man in night attire. But at last Shep brought her safely back to the zoo and then, to her great indignation, locked her up in the coal cellar. For, as he explained, it had a cement floor and two-foot-thick granite walls, and if she could break out of that she deserved her freedom and as far as he was concerned she could have it.

Not long afterwards, Delilah caused trouble in quite another context. The zoo needs every form of publicity it can obtain, and, as television was clearly one of the best mediums, I tried to popularize the zoo by this means whenever possible. A television producer once said to me that if he could produce a programme without a television personality or professional actor he would be a happy man. I could see his point, but he did not know that there could be something infinitely more harrowing. He had never undertaken one with live wild animals, the difficulties of which make the strutting and fretting of television personalities fade into insignificance. When making a programme, animals either behave so badly that you are left a jittering mass of nerves in the end, or else they behave so well that they steal the show. Whichever way it is, you cannot win, and in my considered opinion anyone who undertakes to do such a job should be kindly and firmly conducted by his friends to the nearest mental home. If you let him do the programme, he will end there anyway, so you are merely anticipating.

One of the first programmes I did was devoted to the primates, or monkey family, of which the zoo boasted a rather fine collection. For the first time, live, on television, I could show the great British public a splendid array of creatures ranging from the tiny, large-eyed bushbabies, through the lorises, the Old and New World monkeys, to the gorilla and chimpanzee, with myself thrown in as an example of *Homo sapiens*. I had no qualms about this: the monkeys and apes were all extremely tame, the bushbabies would be confined in glass-fronted cases, and the lorises would be on upright branches, where they would simply curl up and sleep until awakened by me during the programme. At least, that is how it should have worked, but unfortunately I had not taken into consideration the effects of the journey, for the Island of Jersey is an hour's flying time from the city of Bristol, where the programme was to be recorded. By the time the animals had been crated, flown to Bristol, and unloaded in the dressing-room which had been put at their disposal, they were all in a highly neurotic state. So was I.

When the time for the first rehearsal approached, all the monkeys had to be removed from their travelling crates, have belts and leashes attached to them, and be tethered (one to each compartment) in a construction that resembled a miniature cow-stall. The monkeys, hitherto always tame, placid, and well-behaved, took one look at the cow stall and had what appeared to be a collective nervous breakdown. They screamed, they bit, they struggled; one broke his leash and disappeared behind some piled scenery, from which he was extracted — yelling loudly and covered with cobwebs -after about half an hour's concentrated effort. Already rehearsal was fifteen minutes overdue. At last we had them all in position and more or less quiet.

I apologized to the producer and said that we would be ready in next to no time, for all we had to do was to put the lorises on their respective tree trunks, and this — with such lethargic animals — would be the work of a moment. We opened the cage doors, expecting to have to chivy the sleepy lorises out onto their trees, but instead they stalked out like a couple of racehorses, their eyes blazing with indignation, uttering loud cat-like cries of disgust and warning. Before anyone could do anything sensible, they had rushed down their tree trunks and were roaring across the studio floor, their mouths open, their eyes wide. Technicians departed hurriedly in all directions, except a few of the bolder ones who, with rolled up newspapers as weapons endeavoured to prevent the determined lorises from getting among the scenery, as the monkey had done. After further considerable delay we managed to return the lorises to their travelling crates, and the props department was hurriedly summonsed to

attach to the bottom of each tree a cardboard cone that would prevent the creatures from getting a grip and so climbing down to the floor.

Rehearsals were now an hour overdue. At last we were underway, and by this time I was in such a state of nerves that the rehearsal was a shambles. I forgot my lines; I called most of the animals by the wrong names; the slightest sound made me jump out of my skin, for fear something had escaped, and to cap it all Lulu, the chimp, urinated copiously, loudly, and with considerable interest in her own achievement, all over my lap. We all retired to lunch with black circles under our eyes, raging headaches, and a grim sense of foreboding. The producer, with a ghastly smile, said she was sure it would be all right, and I, trying to eat what appeared to be fried sawdust, agreed. We went back to the studio to do the recording.

For some technical reason that defeats me, it is too expensive or too complicated to cut portions out of a television tape. So it is exactly like doing a live programme: if you make a mistake, it is permanent. This, of course, does not help to bolster your confidence in yourself; when you are co-starring with a number of irritated and uninhibited creatures like monkeys you start going grey round the temples before you even begin. The red light went on, and with shaking hands I took a deep breath, smiled a tremulous smile at the camera, as if I loved it like a brother, and commenced. To my surprise, the monkeys behaved perfectly. My confidence started to return. The bushbabies were wonderful, and I felt a faint ray of hope. We reached the lorises and they were magnificent. My voice lost its tremulo and, I hoped, took on a firm, manly, authoritative note. I was getting into my stride. Just as I was launching myself with enthusiasm into the protective postures of a potto — believe it or not — the studio manager came over and told me that there had been a breakdown in the recording and we should have to start all over again.

Of course, after an experience like this, one is mental to even try to do any more television. But I had agreed to do five more. They, I must admit, were not quite as trying as the monkey programme, but some of the highlights still live vividly in my memory, and occasionally I awake screaming in the night and have to be comforted by Jacquie. There was, for example, the programme I did on birds. The idea was to assemble as many different species as possible, and show how their beaks were adapted for their varying ways of life. Two of the birds were to be 'star' turns, because they did things on order. There was, for instance, Dingle the chough. This member of the crow family is rare in Great Britain now, and we are extremely lucky to have him. They are clad in funereal black feathering, but with scarlet feet and a long, curved scarlet beak. Dingle, who had been hand reared, was absurdly tame. The second 'star' was a cockatoo named — with incredible originality by its previous owner — Cocky. Now, this creature would, when requested, put up its amazing crest and shout loudly, a most impressive act. The other birds taking part in the programme did nothing at all; they were, very sensibly, content just to sit there and be themselves. So my only problems were Dingle and Cocky, and I had great faith in both of them.

The programme was to open with me standing there, Dingle perched on my wrist, while I talked about him. During rehearsals this worked perfectly, for if you scratch Dingle's head he goes into a trance-like state and remains quite still. However, when it came to the actual recording, Dingle decided that he had been scratched enough, and just as the red light went on he launched himself off my wrist and flew up into the rafters of the studio. It took us some time, with the aid of ladders and bribes in the shape of meal-worms, meat, and cheese (of which he is inordinately fond) to retrieve him, whereupon he behaved perfectly and sat so still on my wrist that he appeared to be stuffed. All went smoothly until we came to Cocky. Here I made the mistake of telling my audience what to expect, which is the one thing not to do with animals. So, while five million viewers gaped, expectantly waiting to see Cocky put up his crest and scream, I made desperate attempts to persuade him to do it. This went on for five soul-searing minutes, while Cocky sat on his perch as immobile as a museum specimen. In despair I moved on to the next bird, and as I did so Cocky erected his crest and screamed mockingly.

There was the occasion, also, of the programme devoted to reptiles. Here I felt I was on safer ground, for on the whole they are fairly lethargic creatures and easy to handle. The programme, however, was a chore for me, as I was just in the middle of a bout of influenza, and my presence in the studio was due entirely to the efforts of my doctor, who had pumped me full of the most revolting substances to keep me on my feet for the required time. If you are nervous anyway — which I always am — and your head is buzzing under the influence of various antibiotics, you tend to give a performance closely resembling an early silent film. During the first rehearsals all the technicians realized that I was feeling both lousy and strung-up, and so when it came to a break they each took turns backing me into a corner and trying to restore my morale, with little or no effect. We came to the second rehearsal and I was worse than before. Obviously something had to be done, and somebody was inspired enough to think of the answer. During my discourse on members of the tortoise family, I mentioned how the skeleton of the beast was, as it were, welded into the shell. In order to show this more clearly I had a very fine tortoiseshell and skeleton to demonstrate. The bottom half of the shell was hinged, like a door, and upon opening it all the mysteries and secrets of the tortoise's anatomy were revealed. Having done my little introduction on the tortoise family, I then opened the underside of the shell and, to my surprise, instead of just finding the skeleton therein, I found a piece of cardboard on which the words 'No Vacancies' had been printed. It was a few minutes before order was restored in the studio, but I felt much better, and the rest of the rehearsal went off without a hitch.

Delilah cropped up in a programme which I did on adaptation. I thought she would be a very good example of the way an animal protects itself, and certainly she showed this off to advantage. When we came to put her into the crate, she charged wildly in all directions, backing into us and the woodwork, and leaving spines imbedded in the sides of the crate and in the end of the brushes. She gurked and roared and rattled her quills throughout the trip to Bristol, and the studio hands, who unloaded her on arrival there, were for some considerable time under the impression that I had brought a full-grown leopard with me. Then we had to transfer Delilah from her travelling box and into the special studio cage that had been built for her. By the time we achieved this, Delilah had stuck so many quills into so much of the studio scenery that I began to wonder whether she would be completely bald for her debut on television. During the actual transmission she behaved perfectly, to my amazement, doing all the things that I wanted: she gurked fearsomely, stamped her feet, and rattled her quills like castanets, as though she were a born television star. By the end of the show I was feeling quite friendly towards her and beginning to think that I may well have misjudged her. Then came the moment of inducing her out of the studio cage back into her travelling crate. It took eight of us three-quarters of an hour. One stage hand received a sharp stab in the calf of his leg, two pieces of scenery were irretrievably damaged, and the entire set was pierced so full of porcupine quills it looked as though we had been fighting off an Indian attack. I was thankful to get a by then quill-less Delilah back to the zoo and into her own cage again.

I suppose the terrible things that occur tend to live in one's memory more vividly than the pleasant happenings, and so I look back on the television shows I have done with animals rather in a way that one remembers a series of accidents. There is, however, one incident on which I look back with extreme pleasure, and that was the occasion when the BBC wanted our young gorilla N'Pongo to take part in a programme. They even went to the unprecedented length of chartering a small plane to fly us over to Bristol. They also sent a cameraman to cover the trip with his camera — a timid individual who confessed to me that he did not like flying, as it made him sick. We took off in brilliant sunshine, and almost immediately dived into black clouds filled to capacity with air-pockets. N'Pongo, sitting back in his seat like a seasoned traveller, thoroughly enjoyed everything. He accepted six lumps of barley-sugar to counteract the popping in his ears, peered with interest and excitement out of the window, and when the air-pockets began, he fetched out the sick-bag and put it on his head. The poor photographer had become progressively greener while attempting to film N'Pongo's antics,

but when he put the bag on his head this reminder acted in a devastating way; the photographer dived for his own receptacle and treated it in the way for which it was designed.

THE COLD-BLOODED COHORT

Dear Mr Durrell,

At a garden fete the other day a lizard was found in the ice-cream container...

I know that it is a confession of acute and depraved eccentricity, but nevertheless I must admit that I am fond of reptiles. They are not, I grant you, overburdened with intelligence. You do not get the same reaction from them that you would from a mammal, or even a bird, but still I like them. They are bizarre, colourful, and in many cases graceful, so what more could you want?

Now, the majority of people will confess to you (as though it were something quite unique) that they have an 'instinctive' loathing for snakes, and with much eye-rolling and grimacing they will give you many reasons for their fear, ranging from the sublime ('It's instinctive') to the ridiculous ('They're all sort of slimy'). I have been, at one time or another, bored by so many snake-complex admissions that as soon as the subject of reptiles crops up in conversation with anyone I want to run away and hide. Ask the average person his views on snakes and he will, within the space of ten minutes, talk more nonsense than a brace of politicians.

To begin with, it is not 'natural' for human beings to fear snakes. You might just as well say that they are naturally afraid of being run over by a bus. Most people, however, are convinced they are born with a built-in anti-snake feeling. This can be quite simply disproved by handing a harmless snake to a child who is too young to have had its head filled with a lot of nonsense about these creatures; the child will hold the reptile and play with it quite happily and without a trace of fear. I remember once putting this point to a woman who had been gurgling on about her snake phobia for what seemed like years. She was most indignant. "I've never been taught to fear snakes, I've always been like that," she said haughtily, and then added in triumph, "and my mother was like that, too." Faced with such logic, what could one reply?

People's fears of snakes seem to be based on a series of misconceptions. The most common one is the conviction that all these creatures are poisonous. In actual fact, the non-poisonous ones outnumber the poisonous ones by about ten to one. Another popular idea is that these reptiles are slimy to touch, whereas snakes are dry and cold, and feel no different from a pair of snakeskin shoes or a crocodile-skin handbag. Yet people will insist that they cannot touch a snake because of its sliminess, and think nothing of handling a wet cake of soap.

Our reptile house is fairly small, but we have a pretty good cross-section of reptiles and amphibia on show. I derive a lot of innocent amusement out of going in there when it is crowded and listening to the general public airing its ignorance with an assurance that is breathtaking. For instance, the snake's tongue: this is purely a scent organ with which the creature smells, hence the way it is flicked rapidly in and out of the mouth; it is also used as a feeler, in the same way that a cat uses its whiskers. The snake experts, however, who visit the reptile house know better. "Cor, Em," someone will shout excitedly, "come and look at this snake's sting... Coo, wouldn't like to be stung by *that!*" And Em will hurry over and peer horrified at the innocent grass snake, and then give a delicious shudder. All reptiles can, of course, spend long periods completely immobile, when even their breathing is difficult to detect, unless you look closely. The classic remark was delivered by a man who, having peered into several cages in which the reptiles lay unmoving, turned to his wife with an air of one who has been swindled, and hissed, "They're *stuffed*, Milly."

A snake moving along the ground or through the branches of a tree is one of the most graceful sights in the world, and when you consider that the creature is walking with its ribs the whole thing becomes even more remarkable. If you watch a moving snake carefully, you

can sometimes see the ribs moving beneath the skin as the snake draws itself along. The creature's unblinking stare (another thing to which people object) is due not to the fact that the snake is trying to hypnotize you, but simply to its having no eyelids. The eye is covered with a fine, transparent scale, like a watch-glass. This is very clearly noticed when a snake sheds its skin, which they all do periodically. The skin comes loose around the lips, and then, by rubbing itself against rocks or branches, the snake gradually peels it off. If you examine this shed skin, you can see that the eye scales have been shed as well.

All snakes are adapted for feeding in the same way, but their methods of obtaining their food vary. The non-poisonous ones and the constrictors (such as the pythons) grab their prey with their mouths, and then try to throw two or three coils of their body round the victim as rapidly as possible, thus holding and crushing at the same time. The poisonous ones, on the other hand, bite and then wait for the poison to take effect, which is generally very soon. Once the prey has undergone its last convulsions, it can be eaten. The poison fangs, of course, are in the upper jaw, and usually near the front of the mouth. When not in use, they fold back against the gum, like the blade of a penknife; as the snake opens its mouth to strike, they drop down into position. The fangs are hollow, like a hypodermic needle, or else they have a deep groove running down the back. The poison sac, to which they are connected, lies above the gum. As the snake bites, the poison is forced out and trickles down the groove or hollow in the fang and so into the wound. However, whatever the method of attack, once the prey is dead, the swallowing process is the same in all snakes. The lower jaw is jointed to the upper one in such a way that it can be dislocated at will, and, of course, the skin of the mouth, throat, and body is extremely elastic, so the snake can swallow a creature considerably larger than its own head. Once the food is in the stomach, the slow process of digestion starts. Any portions of the animal that are impossible to assimilate, such as hair, are regurgitated in the form of pellets at a later date. On one occasion a large python was killed, and in its stomach were found four round balls of hair, the size of tennis balls and very hard. On being cut open, each one was found to contain the hoof of a wild pig. These sharp hooves could have damaged the lining of the python's stomach, and so each one had been carefully covered with a thick, smooth layer of hair.

In the majority of zoos nowadays dead creatures are fed to the snakes. This is not because it is better for the snakes, or that they prefer it, but simply because of misplaced kindness on the part of the general public, who imagine that a white rat or a rabbit suffers terribly when put into a cage with a snake. That this is nonsense I have proved to my complete satisfaction, for I have seen, in a Continental zoo, a rabbit perched on the back of a python (obviously not hungry), cleaning its whiskers with tremendous sang-froid. The director of the zoo told me that when white rats were given to the snakes, it was imperative that they should be removed if they were not eaten straight away; otherwise they proceeded to gnaw holes in the snake's body.

While snakes are passive and rather expressionless beasts, lizards can display considerable intelligence and character. One such reptile we had was a mastigure, which I christened Dandy, owing to his great partiality for dandelion flowers. One must, I think, face the fact that mastigures are not the most attractive of lizards, and Dandy was a particularly unattractive member of his species. Nevertheless, his eager personality made him a likeable creature. He had a blunt, rounded head; a fat, flattened body; and a heavy tail covered with short, sharp spikes. His neck was rather long and thin, and this made him look as though he had been put together out of bits of two totally