

Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo

N Rothfels (2002). Published by The John Hopkins University Press, 2715 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218-4363, USA. Obtainable in the UK/Europe from Plymbridge Distributors Ltd, Plymouth, UK. 268 pp. Hardback (ISBN 0 8018 6910 2). Price £26.00/\$34.95.

When I first saw the title of the book I tended to think “not another book on the birth of the modern zoo!” However, although it may purport to be, this book is not about the birth or even the evolution of zoos, or about the philosophy behind them: it is about Carl Hagenbeck and the role that he played in the history and evolution of the exhibition of animals (and indeed also of people). The author is an historian and takes the line of the zoo as a cultural institution that has shaped man’s ideas about animals. The book consists of four chapters, an introduction and a conclusion, each being heavily referenced; this referencing will be of interest to those who love researching the history of zoos. However the system used is numbered notes for each chapter; this makes it frustratingly difficult to find references quickly.

The theme of the book is summed up in the introduction: “by telling the story of Carl Hagenbeck and his unusual firm, and by recording as well the unnatural histories of the animals and people who became the exhibited objects at Hagenbeck’s, this book contributes to a growing body of studies examining the origins and development of the trade in exotic animals and peoples. At the same time it extends our understanding of the history of zoological gardens...”. The author also states that the book shows how Hagenbeck’s legacy lives on to this day and he hopes that the book “provides readers with the historical background that they need to grapple with the vexing issues that zoological gardens present to us today”.

It is interesting to consider how, and whether, the book fulfils its various aims. The first chapter is a romp through the history of zoos and the keeping of exotic wild animals. However, the author focuses on the relationship between the development of zoos from menageries to conservation centres and human cultural changes. He compares the Belvedere Menagerie of 18th century Vienna to the Regent’s Park Zoo of 19th century London, the premise being that Belvedere was a showplace of imperial power, and Regent’s Park — which was intended to advance scientific knowledge — actually became the playground of the bourgeoisie. Regent’s Park was a place to “celebrate the tasks of enlightened and bourgeois progress in the world”, whereas the imperial gardens had celebrated the power of the aristocracy. The author then introduces the central theme of the book: the emergence of Carl Hagenbeck and the creation of his zoo, not as a scientific collection, but as a theatre to entertain the public. The author tries, throughout the book, to show that zoos tended to promote a colonial outlook; this is not always convincing.

Then follows an interesting history of the great man. The second chapter focuses on Hagenbeck the animal catcher, with many fascinating tales of the catching, transportation and trade in wildlife in the latter part of the 19th century, much of it involving the killing of adult animals to facilitate the catching of young. The next chapter covers the exhibition not only of animals in shows but also of indigenous peoples, ranging from Laplanders to Sudanese. Interestingly, the people who appeared in the shows often became the subjects of research projects for the Berlin Anthropological Society.

Hagenbeck marketed his people shows by stating that they presented people as they really were; they were shown in theatrical sets intended to emulate their natural surroundings. The

fourth chapter of the book deals with the transition from exhibiting people in their 'natural surroundings' to doing the same with exotic non-human species. However, in the course of this transition, Hagenbeck went through the stage of running a travelling circus and indeed became famous as a trainer of wild animals. The author does spend some time debating how 'humane' the training methods were and the animal welfare implications surrounding this. The author suggests that Hagenbeck's routines gave more dignity to the animals than did those of previous trainers. Hagenbeck did not actually open his famous animal park in Stellingen-Hamburg until 1907. This park was justly famous in showing animals in more natural groupings and surroundings with hidden barriers.

Hagenbeck was an animal dealer, who ended up creating a zoo which, for its time, was innovative and had better animal husbandry and welfare than many (although this latter topic is not addressed by the author). The author also very much restricts himself to Hagenbeck; there are many other examples of people who started off as animal collectors and progressed to keeping good zoos (Gerald Durrell being a notable example). It is a pity that the author did not further develop this subject in his discussions on the evolution and founding of zoos.

Thus, the bulk of the book consists of an interesting review of Hagenbeck and his evolving business in people and animals. The book is a good read and provides an interesting historical perspective. However, to fulfil its goal of helping the reader to 'grapple with zoos today' the conclusion chapter really has to deal with this topic, or at least link the Hagenbeck story to the present. This it fails to do. Much is a discourse about man trying to humanise animals, especially apes, with much debate about the problems of 'showing captivity'. The author deduces that Hagenbeck's revolution was not the moated enclosures but his 'narrative of freedom'. Little space is given over to changes in the 20th century and little mention is made of the advances in veterinary science and animal husbandry which made many of these changes in approach possible. Mention is made of 'immersion exhibits' (ie exhibits where the visitor feels as though he is in the animal's environment), but the author does not seem to appreciate the link that these make with conservation education and research both in the zoo and in the wild. There is very little information on the genuine conservation work carried out by many zoos. The justifiable question as to the origin of the fish in many aquaria is asked, but the author could have troubled himself to get the answers to some of these questions, which could have been done without too much trouble.

In short, this is an interesting book; it tells the story of Hagenbeck, his peoples and animals from a slightly different perspective. It does not, however, tell us much about the relationship between zoos and the contemporary culture of the times or anything much at all about the birth of the modern zoo, or indeed what comprises the modern zoo. Nor does it say anything about our understanding of the actual, rather than the perceived, needs of wild animals in captivity.

Miranda F Stevenson

Bishops Waltham, UK

Minding Animals: Awareness, Emotions, and Heart

M Bekoff (2002). Published by Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK. 230 pp. Hardback (ISBN 0 195150775). Price £18.99.

This book made me feel at turns uncomfortable and mildly irritated. I suspect that Marc Bekoff would be pleased; he seems to write, if not quite to provoke, then certainly to make his readers think hard about their attitudes to animals.

Minding Animals is a highly personal view of our relationships with non-human animals. Bekoff explains the title by saying that "... 'minding animals' refers to caring for other animal