



*Creating the Nation's first BioPark*

National Zoological Park · Smithsonian Institution · Washington, D.C. 20008

Letter from the Desk of David Challinor  
July 24, 1989

This memorandum is the first of a series of short reports to the Zoo's Advisory Council members about interesting events at the Zoo. I plan to distribute these notes monthly.

A recent exciting event at the Zoo was the birth of seven Black-footed ferrets. These rare animals live in prairie dog colonies and only one wild population was known to exist. Last year the ferrets were decimated by a virus disease, and to avoid a real threat of extinction, all survivors were trapped and potential breeding pairs were distributed to selected facilities for propagation.

The decision to disperse the animals (to avoid spread of infection) seems sound and the Zoo's successful breeding, along with the work of the Wisconsin Fish and Game Department and other collaborators, gives great promise that the captive-bred ferret population will soon be large enough to allow re-introductions to prairie dog colonies.

A successful on-going re-introduction program is that of the Golden lion tamarin to Brazil's Atlantic coastal forest. Habitat loss had reduced the wild population to a hundred or so animals. Ben Beck, a primatologist from the Zoo, is now in Brazil scouting possible new release sites for our fifth release in October of another ten or fifteen tamarins that have been in training this summer. So far 67 tamarins have been put back in this forest, and each year their survival improves as we refine knowledge of tamarin behavior. This October, for example, we plan to recapture some of the captive-born animals that have been living in the wild for at least a year. These animals will be housed with the newcomers for a week prior to release, so that new pair bonds may be made between experienced captive-born tamarins and the neophyte new arrivals. Such a strategy, if it works, will not only insure genetic variability, but should also improve survival in the wild.

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the education and recreation of the people."

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Brazil is featured elsewhere at the Zoo as we complete what we hope to be the final redesign of the Amazon aquatic exhibit. We reduced the space allocated to large exhibit pools, which in turn cut the size of the filtration system and thereby not only saved a great many dollars, but also improved the exhibit design and visitor flow. This revision should achieve our goal of a truly exciting and innovative exhibit that can be built within budget.

I will keep you posted on the progress of this and other new exhibits as well as what we are accomplishing here in the health, breeding and re-introduction to the wild of our animals.

I trust that you will have a good summer.