



Brussels Studies

La revue scientifique électronique pour les recherches sur Bruxelles / Het elektronisch wetenschappelijk tijdschrift voor onderzoek over Brussel / The e-journal for academic research on Brussels

Collection générale | 2014

The Brussels zoo: A mirror of 19th century modes of thought on the city, science and entertainment

Le Jardin zoologique de Bruxelles : miroir des modes de pensée du dix-neuvième siècle sur la ville, la science et les loisirs

De dierentuin van Brussel: spiegel van de negentiende-eeuwse modes of thought betreffende stad, wetenschap en vermaak

Wim Lambrechts

Translator: Philippe Briel



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/brussels/1223>

DOI: 10.4000/brussels.1223

ISSN: 2031-0293

Publisher

Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles

Electronic reference

Wim Lambrechts, « The Brussels zoo: A mirror of 19th century modes of thought on the city, science and entertainment », *Brussels Studies* [Online], General collection, no 77, Online since 02 June 2014, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/brussels/1223> ; DOI : 10.4000/brussels.1223



Licence CC BY

Number 77, June 2nd 2014. ISSN 2031-0293

Wim Lambrechts

The Brussels zoo: A mirror of 19th century modes of thought on the city, science and entertainment

Translation: Philippe Briel

In the 19th century, four zoological gardens were created in Belgium. The first was founded in Antwerp in 1843, followed by Ghent, Brussels (both in 1851) and Liège (1865). The Brussels zoo was conceived as a 'salon public', a public parlour offering nice walks, enlivened with an animal collection to ward off boredom and stimulate scientific interest. This article, more than a factual history based on archives, attempts to place the zoo in the spirit of the age and the modes of thought of the 19th century. The zoo profiled itself as a scientific institution in the city, engaging in (theoretical) classification and (practical) acclimatization. Its cultural activities, perhaps even more than its animals, made it a popular attraction for the middle classes.

Wim Lambrechts is a historian and master in sustainable development and human ecology. He is an independent researcher with the Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel (HUB), with a particular interest in the relations between sustainability, history, ecology, culture and education. He has authored several scientific articles on these topics, in a.o. the Journal of Cleaner Production (2013) and Ecological Indicators (2014). He is also the author of a book, Duurzaam Hoger Onderwijs. Appel voor verantwoord onderrichten, onderzoeken en ondernemen (LannooCampus, 2009). More information: www.sustainablehighereducation.com

Wim Lambrechts, +32(0)475 709 743, wim@lambrechts.org

Benjamin Wayens (Senior Editor), +32(0)2 211 78 22, bwayens@brusselsstudies.be

Introduction

1. In the 19th century, four zoological gardens were created in Belgium. The first was founded in Antwerp in 1843, followed by Ghent, Brussels (both in 1851) and Liège (1865). The missions of these zoos can be defined from the perspectives of their role in the city, their scientific function and their entertainment value for the visitors [Lambrechts, 2004]. Not all zoological gardens were successful. The Brussels zoo went out of business in 1878, the Ghent zoo closed in 1904 and Liège followed one year later. In the first half of the 20th century, three projects for a new Brussels zoo were envisaged. None of these were realized, owing to a lack of interest and capital.¹

2. This article, more than a factual history based on archives, attempts to place the Zoo in the spirit of the age and the modes of thought of the 19th century. The source materials examined, the guide-books of the various zoos, are atypical in historical research but nonetheless interesting, as they reflect the ideal image of the zoo and contain a treasure of information shedding light on the history of mentalities.

1. Methodology

3. Since the 19th century, zoos have been publishing booklets in order to inform their public. Just like travel guides, the guide-books contain specific information: "Guide-books are worthy of study in their own right, as a form of human activity; if few of them possess literary merits of high rank, many of them fulfil to a remarkable degree the purposes for which they exist. They have especial claims on archaeologists, historians, and antiquaries; they may provide information, sometimes as the most accessible, sometimes as the best, or even the only, sources, not merely for the history of monuments, but also for the social and economic life of the past, and occasionally for its modes of thought"

[De Beer, 1952]. In the case of the zoo guide-books, the word "occasionally" can be dropped from the description. Whereas travel guides evolved into booklets with concise enumerations, zoo guide-books were much more expansive and contained a wealth of information illustrating the modes of thought of their period.

4. The information in the guide-books can be divided into three main components [Åkerberg, 2001]. First, factual information, for example on the origins and history of the zoo. Then there is the more implicit information, not important to the author but still present in the text, through a particular use of words. Finally, they present implicit information of a normative nature. This information is not always true. Together, the three components reveal modes of thought.

5. The fact that the guide-books are not always truthful, can be considered as a negative factor, explaining why these sources are seldom used in historical research. But one can also consider it a positive characteristic, as the detailed information they present can reveal certain elements of a mentality. Guide-books are therefore not only valuable because of their factual information, but also as a source of their unintentional, underlying information.

6. In view of the nature of the sources, a hermeneutic method is used, based on three central questions: (1) How is the relation between the zoo and the city represented?; (2) Which scientific discourse (e.g. concerning zoology) is offered?; (3) Which entertainment elements come to the fore?

2. A zoo for Brussels

2.1. The Brussels zoo (1851-1878)

7. The plans for the creation of a zoo in Brussels date back to 1847, when a group of prosperous citizens advocated the foundation of a

¹ After the Second World War, new initiatives did provide Brussels with specific zoological collections, such as the Aquarium in the Avenue Louise, the Brussels Aquarium in Koekelberg, the Exotarium. The 1958 Brussels World's Fair also devoted attention to animal collections, represented by the Antwerp Zoo. As this article focuses on the Brussels zoo and the zoo projects of the first half of the 20th century, these post-war initiatives will not be discussed.

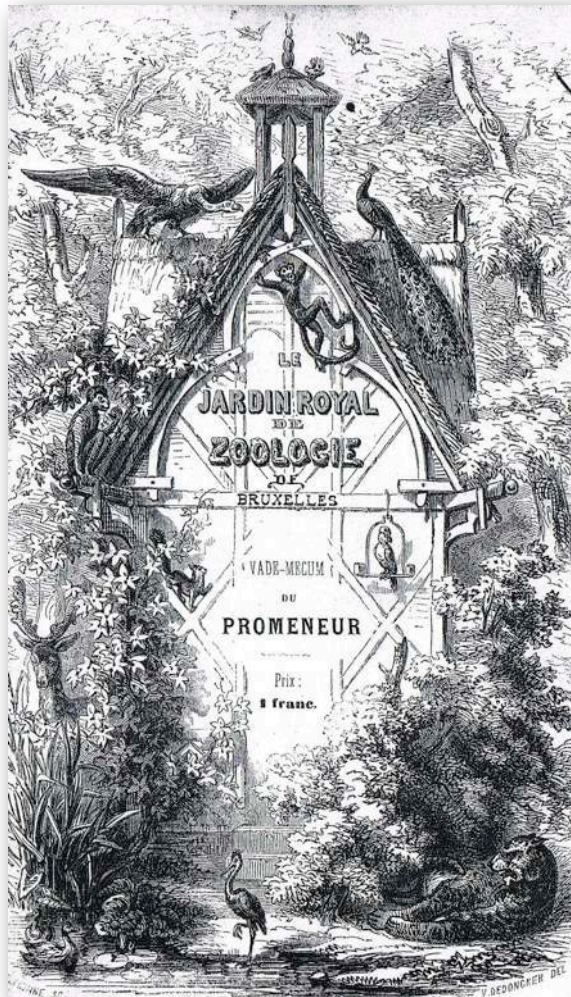


Fig. 1. Cover of the guide-book of the Brussels zoo [Hymans, 1856] *Le Jardin Royal de Zoologie de Bruxelles. Vade-mecum du promeneur* (Source: Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences).

zoological garden, a winter garden and a natural history museum. The influence of the Antwerp Zoo was evident, but the plans were not realised. In 1851 a new initiative was launched, the *Société royale de Zoologie, d'Horticulture et d'Agrément*. One year later, the society numbered 710 shareholders [Brauman and Demanet, 1985] and its capital amounted to 600.000 Belgian francs [Van Driessen, 1982]. The 16 acre estate of the Chevalier Dubois de Bianco was acquired, situated in the present *Parc Léopold*. In 1860, the old convent of the redemptorist sisters was purchased, expanding the garden's surface area to 27 acres. A farm (selling eggs, butter and fruit), a skating rink and a bandstand were constructed. The architectural showpiece of the zoo was the Victoria Regia greenhouse, built in 1853 in order to host the giant water lily [Brauman and Demanet, 1985]. When the zoo closed down, the greenhouse was moved to the National Botanical Gardens in Meise, where it can still be admired.

8. The first director of the Brussels zoo was Jean Linden, a renowned botanist. The zoological part was entrusted to John Wilhelm de Muller. After de Muller's departure, in 1856, Linden managed both the zoological and the botanical divisions. Right from the beginning, the project was plagued with problems, culminating in 1853 with the death of 140 of the 567 animals. Up until the closure of the zoo, animals constantly died. Particularly under the management of director Hammelrath,

the gardens gave its visitors and shareholders a general impression of neglect, as exemplified by a letter of complaint from 1873 [Brauman and Demanet, 1985]. Linden, foreseeing the zoo's bankruptcy, left in 1868. He founded an independent institution, the *Horticole Internationale*, hosting his plant collection [Anonymous, 1994].

9. The Brussels zoo never became a successful enterprise. Its purpose was mainly entertainment and amusement, more than science. It also lacked an influential, committed personality – comparable to Jacques Kets, the first director of the Antwerp Zoo – to take charge. The development of the *Avenue Louise* and the *Bois de Cambre*, started in 1861, created new entertainment possibilities for the middle classes [Van Driessen, 1982]. All its efforts notwithstanding, in 1876 the board of directors was forced to close the zoo. A new society for the scientific exploitation of the zoo was created, the *Société Royale de Zoologie à Bruxelles*, but this also went bankrupt in 1878. In 1879 and 1880 all the animals were sold [Brauman and Demanet, 1985].

10. At the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Belgian independence, the zoo's grounds became a public park: the *Parc Léopold*. In the old convent a natural history museum was established, later to become the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences [Brauman and Demanet, 1985]. This museum attracted other scientific institutions, including the Solvay Institute of Physiology, the University Institute of Hygiene and the Pasteur Institute. The *Parc Léopold* still has these functions, but as the landscaping has been conserved, the park retains its function as a green lung for the city [Van Driessen, 1982].

2.2. New initiatives in the 20th century

11. In the first half of the 20th century, various attempts were made to create a new Brussels zoo. The first proposition concerned the establishment of a *Jardin d'Acclimatation* on the grounds of the *Rouge Cloître* in Auderghem, in 1908. It described an extensive « *Promenade à travers le Jardin d'Acclimatation* » (Walk through the Acclimatization Garden). The infrastructure comprised a monkey palace, two tropical gardens, a « *jardin alpin* » (Alpine garden), two bandstands, a lake for swimming, a farm and a dairy farm, an aquarium, a restaurant and a

banquet hall [De Contreras, 1908]. The plans were never realised [Baetens, 1993].

12. In 1911 new plans for a Brussels zoo were made. The Antwerp Zoo received a « *lettre par laquelle Monsieur Zwicker-Lotar de Bruxelles demande divers renseignements en vue de la création d'un jardin Zoologique à Bruxelles* » (a letter from Mr. Zwicker-Lotar of Brussels, requesting various information for the purpose of creating a zoological garden in Brussels) [KMDA Archive, 1911]. It is unclear whether the plans were further developed. In 1912, a project for some animal enclosures in the *Parc Josaphat* in Schaerbeek may have existed, but this could be a confusion with one of the later Brussels initiatives [Anonymous, 1975].

13. Between the wars, two new projects for a zoo in the capital were envisaged. At the occasion of the 1935 World's Fair, plans for a zoo in Schaerbeek were made. The new society counted baron 't Serclaes, L. Jacquet, G. Ide, A. Verhaegen, J. Leeuw and R. Henry among its members. Once again interest was lacking. One thousand shares were sold, raising a capital of 500.000 Belgian francs, much less than the 16 millions expected. A few animals were bought but after the World's Fair the initiative was abandoned [Baetens, 1993].

14. In 1936 the *Société anonyme Jardin Zoologique de Bruxelles* was created by R. Branquart, F. Demets and J. Mathieu. The entire project, established in Zellik, near Brussels, would require 30 millions Belgian francs. The money would not only be used for the creation of the park and the animal enclosures but also for several restaurants and dancing halls, sports clubs, tennis courts, a solarium, two swimming pools, a model farm and an animal clinic. The capital failed to materialise and the plans were shelved [Anonymous, 1936].

3. The Brussels Zoo as an urban institution

3.1. A middle class initiative

15. Nearly all 19th century zoological gardens were initiated by the urban middle classes, whose political influence was increasing. Their

newly acquired status was expressed in various social and cultural activities and projects, including the zoo. 19th century Brussels was distinguished by an extreme activity, with the construction of worker estates, commercial and residential districts. The zoo contributed to the city's prestige. This was enhanced by Brussels being the capital of independent Belgium [Brauman and Demanet, 1985], a factor which would also play an important role in later projects for a Brussels zoo [Anonymous, 1936].

16. The zoo guide-books show that the middle class took pride in 'its' initiative in the city. The Brussels zoo was created with the help of « *quelques hommes influents* » (a few influential men) echoing the idea of the « *plusieurs personnes haut placées dans le monde bruxellois* » (several prominent members of Brussels society) of 1847. The main aim of the 1851 Brussels zoo was the entertainment of the middle class: « *La Société a pour objet de créer un vaste établissement qui servira de lieu de réunion et d'agrément, et de se livrer aux opérations déterminées par l'article suivant (...) La Société achète et vend, aux conditions à déterminer par le conseil d'administration, tous les objets qui dépendent de ses collections zoologiques et horticoles* » (The Society has the purpose of creating a vast establishment, functioning as a meeting place and a place of entertainment, and of executing the activities defined in the following article (...) The Society purchases and sells, under conditions to be determined by the board, all objects related to its zoological and horticultural collections) [Société Royale de Zoologie, 1851].

17. In a context of increasing urbanisation and industrialisation, the zoo was to be primarily a "green lung" for the city: « *...la capitale ne possédait, avant le Jardin Zoologique, aucun endroit où l'on pût aller respirer librement la tiède atmosphère des jours d'été* » (...before the zoo, the capital lacked a place where one could freely breathe the tepid atmosphere of summer days). Other venues with the same function were pictured in a negative light. The park was nothing but a « *lieu de parade* » (a parade ground) for rich ladies, « *on y défend aux hommes de fumer et aux enfants de courir* » (men are forbidden to smoke, children to run). The « *Boulevard* » and the « *Jardin Botanique* » were too dusty and did not offer much shadow. The zoo therefore would be a solution for those looking for entertainment « *entre l'heure du café et*

l'heure du thé » (between coffee time and tea time). It has an explicit refuge function for the middle classes and fulfils the need for a « *lieu de promenade* » (a walking venue) for the citizenry. Note the discrepancy between the words « *lieu de parade* » and « *lieu de promenade* ». It illustrates the more exalted purpose the zoo had chosen, contrasting with the city park of Brussels: « *on y défile* » (people parade there) [Hymans, 1856]. One can of course wonder if there actually was a difference between *parade* and *promenade* in the Brussels zoo. For the common people took an ironic view of the zoological garden:

« *Moi, le Jardin Zoologique,
Bien plus qu'eux tous, j'ai des attraits
Et même au Jardin Botanique,
En tous temps je pourrais
Rendre des points, si je voulais.
Outre mon orchestre,
J'ai maint site alpestre,
J'ai maint groupe équestre;
J'ai mes animaux,
Leur voix forte ou grêle
Hurle, beugle ou bêle
Mais toujours se mêle
Aux chants musicaux.
Là-dessus, le Jardin Botanique, vraisemblablement jaloux du Jardin
Zoologique, apostrophe rudement ce dernier:
"toi, Casino zoologique! (...)
Ton concert est fort peu sacré,
Mais il faut que le public sacre."
Insolent! Répartit le Jardin Zoologique, je lâcherai sur toi mes animaux
féroces...
Pauvres bêtes ! Répond le Jardin Botanique ! Ils cessent d'être féro-
ces dès qu'ils entrent chez toi... c'est le contraire du public...»
[Quievreux, 1938]*

("Me, the Zoological Garden, much more than them all, I have attrac-
tions.
Even compared to the Botanical Gardens, at all times and for all fac-
tions,

I make towards beauty no infractions.
In addition to my orchestra full of grace, I have so many Alpine sites of
architectural ingenuity,
and equestrian groups of so much dexterity.
I have my animals which squeak, rumble, moan, hiss, howl and
groan.
Always in harmony with orchestra's musical tone.
The Botanical Garden, presumably jealous of the Zoological Garden,
sharply retorts to the latter:
"You, Zoological Casino! (...)
Your concerts are hardly profound,
And the public unpleasantly astound."
So the Zoological Garden retaliates "You impudent scoundrel; I'll set
all my ferocious animals free..."
And the Botanical Garden answers: "poor animals! Contrary to your
visitors, they cease to be ferocious once they cross your door...")

3.2. Competition with other zoological gardens

18. The Brussels zoo guide-book explicitly refers to the other Belgian zoological gardens: « *Tandis qu'Anvers et Gand créaient des ménageries, Bruxelles cherchait surtout à se donner une promenade* » (Whereas Antwerp and Ghent created menageries, Brussels primarily desired a promenade) [Hymans, 1856]. The competition is often negatively presented, for while the word '*ménagerie*' is a common synonym for 'zoo', in this guide-book it is given a negative connotation: « *on n'a pas besoin, pour attirer la foule, de ce qu'on appelle communément une ménagerie, et que nous appellerions volontiers la foire aux animaux* » (in order to attract crowds, one does not need what is commonly called a menagerie and we would prefer to call an animal fair). The Brussels zoo, on the other hand, is considered to be « *le plus beau jardin public qui existe dans la Belgique entière* » (the most beautiful public gardens in the whole of Belgium). There is also criticism of the way in which Antwerp organises concerts. Their visitors tend to drink a lot and it is rather a « *lieu de parade* ». Antwerp is called ironically « *la ville la plus aristocratique du pays* » (the country's most aristocratic city) [Hymans, 1856].

19. The rivalry between Brussels and Antwerp surfaced once again in 1935, when the *Handelsblad van Antwerpen* mocked the plans for a new Brussels zoo. The author of the newspaper article considered the capital of 100.000 Belgian francs insufficient for the creation of a large scale project, rather than a “*Zoologieke in miniatuur*” (a teensy-weensy miniature zoo). The plan was clearly too ambitious for Schaerbeek, “famous for its little donkeys” [Anonymous, 1934a].

20. This criticism did not go unnoticed in Brussels. Two members of the board, R. Hottet and D. Paniels, reacted in a letter explaining they had no intention of overshadowing the Antwerp zoo. Further on, the tone becomes more vicious: “The truth you have been looking for with an unlit lantern, is only to be found in your Society”. They also thank the journalist for “reminding us to welcome the Schaerbeek donkeys to our zoo”. Jacques Kets’ 1843 collection is called “a place where 100 years ago the people of Antwerp could admire wonders that today would not even be tolerated in a village fair”. They ask the newspaper in the future to refrain from “inaccurate communications”, clearly showing “envy and small town politics” [Anonymous, 1934b].

4. The Brussels Zoo as a scientific institution

4.1. A reference to tradition: classification

21. The zoological gardens created all over Europe in the 19th century often had unequivocal scientific aims. In the zoo guide-books of the period, animals were classified according to their species, often with a mention of their Latin names, as customary in natural history represented by among others Buffon, Audubon, and later Darwin. Although the Brussels zoo had a less scientific character than its Antwerp and Ghent rivals, the zoo guide-book mentions several naturalists, albeit casually through the text. The author shows a clear liking for the American ornithologist John James Audubon, who described animals « *avec une rare exactitude* » (with rare accuracy) [Hymans, 1856]. Audubon perfectly fitted with the 19th century spirit, with his interest in nature, love of freedom and cult of the individual [Schrevels, 1985].

22. The recognition of tradition however did not necessarily imply it being slavishly followed. The Brussels zoo guide-book sometimes challenged famous naturalist and did not always agree with their ideas: « *Nous en sommes fâchés pour les faiseurs de systèmes* » (These system builders irritate us). [Hymans, 1856]. Buffon receives much attention and is approved of in some passages: « *Or il s’accouple et produit à l’état de domesticité, cela est prouvé depuis l’antiquité, quoique Buffon ait affirmé le contraire [...] Le cerf, a dit Buffon, est le plus bel ornement de nos forêts* » (Domesticated, it mates and reproduces, as was confirmed even in Antiquity, however Buffon states the contrary (...)) According to Buffon, the deer is the most splendid jewel of our forests) [Hymans, 1856]. In a different passage, he is radically refuted, for example in his description of the hyena: « *Or presque chaque mot de ce passage frappe à faux. Il est vrai que Buffon était moins un observateur qu’un peintre d’animaux* » (Almost each word in this passage is in error. In fact, Buffon was less an observer than a painter of animals) [Hymans, 1856]. In this way, the Brussels zoo appears to attempt a dialogue with the naturalists, stimulating the reader to observe the living animals in the zoo.

23. The zoo guide-book also addresses the evolution of man. The chapter on apes refers to « *des babouins et des macaques (...) que certains physiologistes appellent des hommes dégénérés* » (baboons and macaques (...) which some physiologists call degenerated humans) [Hymans, 1856]. Where Darwin emphasised the evolution of nature, others feared a degeneration of mankind. The zoo’s visitors noticed many similarities between apes and humans, which often caused an uncomfortable feeling [Kemperink, 2001]. In the Middle Ages, apes were already seen as “*naturae degenerantis homo*”, degenerated humans. They were almost universally pictured holding a stick of leaning on a rock, referring to their inability to stand upright. The guide-book adopted this representation, which even survived into the 20th century [Schiebinger, 1993].

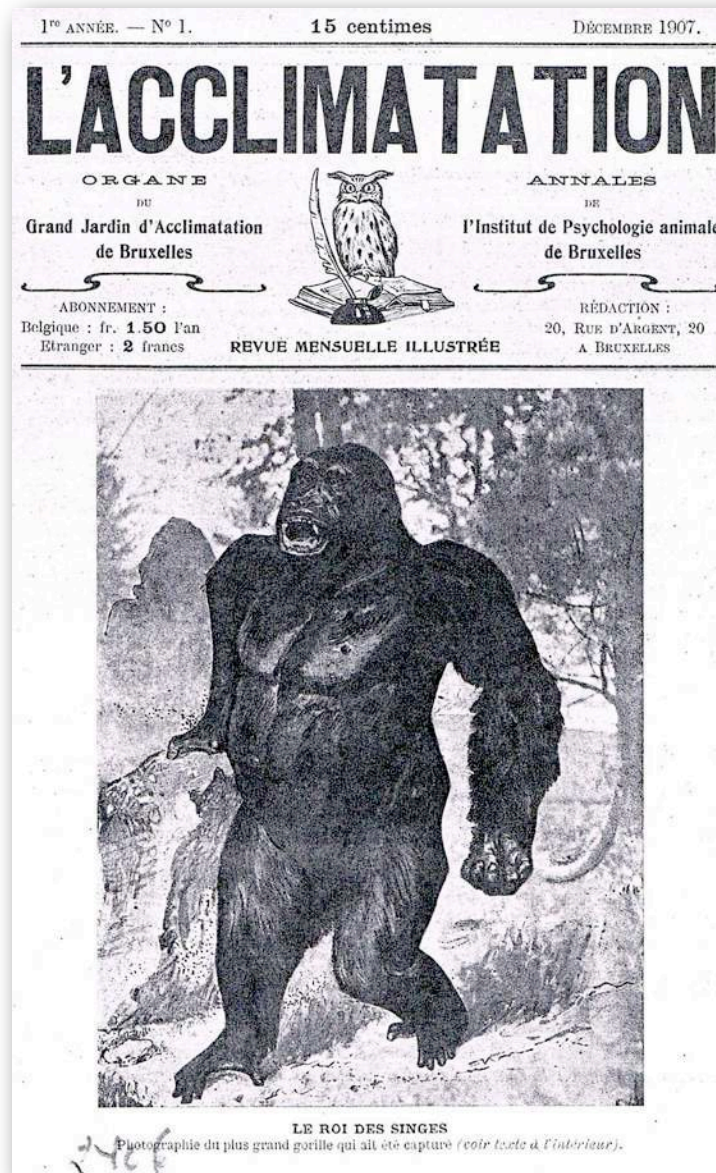


Fig. 2. First edition of *L'Acclimatation*, journal of the Jardin d'Acclimatation de Bruxelles in course of incorporation (December 1907. Source: KU Leuven, Central Library).

4.2. Acclimatisation

24. Apart from classification zoological gardens attempted acclimatisation. They tried to habituate exotic animals to the European climate and to breed them for consumption or other purposes. The zoo guide-books also often referred to acclimatisation possibilities. The hokko was considered to be the exotic bird best suited to acclimatisation: « *Au résumé c'est un oiseau paisible et stupide, qui ne fuit pas le danger, faute de le voir; il s'approvoise aisément et s'accommode avec les autres animaux domestique. Sa chair est un assez bon manger* » (In conclusion it is a peaceful, stupid bird, only dangerous if one should stumble over it; it is easily domesticated and tolerates the presence of other domestic animals. Its meat is quite tasty) [Hymans, 1856]. This bird carried all desirable qualities for acclimatisation: its beauty appealed to bird lovers, its meat surpassed that of the pheasant. No wonder the author was surprised « *de chercher ces oiseaux sur nos tables et de ne les point trouver* » (to look in vain for these birds on our tables) [Esquiros, 1854]. The main elements of acclimatisation were the animal's character and its potential for adaption to domesticated life. Even when describing the seal, the zoo guide mentions his friendly nature and intelligence [Hymans, 1856]. The seal possessed particular virtues: affable nature, fast swimmer, excellent catcher of fish, with the potential of becoming to the fisherman what the dog is to the hunter [Esquiros, 1854].

25. Acclimatisation remained fashionable into the 20th century: the new zoo to be created in Auderghem would promote the acclimatisation and breeding of exotic animals [De Contreras, 1908]. The acclimatisation movement attempted not only to domesticate animals but also to facilitate scientific research [Lever, 1992], or, as the Brussels zoo put it: « *avec la seule intention de conquérir, s'il se peut, la Vérité* » (with the sole intention to capture Truth, if possible) [L'Acclimatation, 1907]. Up until the second world war, large scale acclimatisation had its advocates [Boulineau, 1934], although the movement was less influential than in the previous century. The later arguments primarily promoted acclimatisation and domestication in the colonies [Baratay *et al.*, 2004].

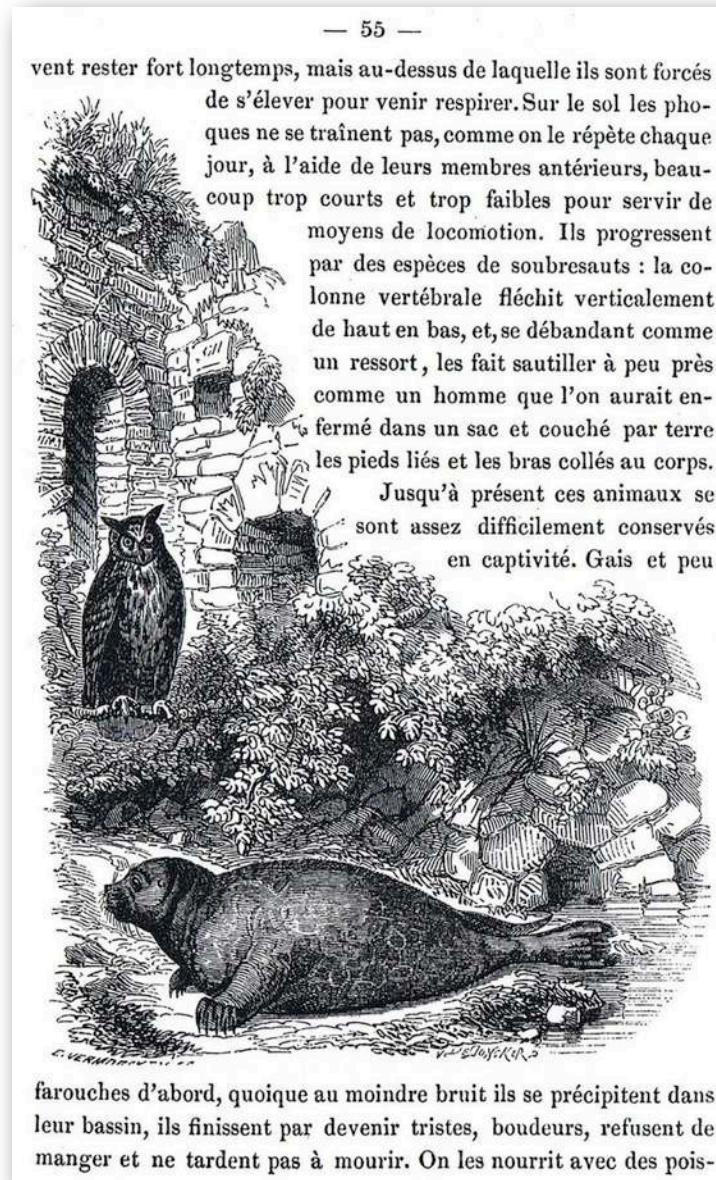


Fig. 3. Fragment from the guide-book of the Brussels zoo [Hymans, 1856] *Le Jardin Royal de Zoologie de Bruxelles. Vade-mecum du promeneur*, p. 55. Source: Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences.

5. The Brussels zoo as an entertainment institution

5.1. Walks, children and music

26. The Brussels zoo was conceived as a sort of public parlour, a *salon public*, offering the citizens a nice walk, enlivened with an animal collection to ward off boredom and stimulate scientific interest. The layout of the gardens was designed by Alphonse Balat and Louis Fuchs. Following 19th century fashion, they opted for the landscape model [Brauman en Demanet, 1985]. The cover illustration of the zoo guide-book shows the image the Brussels zoo created for itself: a natural wilderness with a central pavilion, surrounded by animals. The booklet's title is explanatory: « *Vade-mecum du promeneur* », guiding the visitors on their « *promenade* » through the wilderness [Hymans, 1856].

27. A popular form of entertainment were the children's rides on ponies, camels and even elephants. It is not a coincidence that these rides originated in this particular period. From the middle of the 19th century onwards, the idea that children needed entertainment adapted to their age came to the fore. An influential theoretician in this context was Friedrich Froebel, who pointed out the specific need for play of children, but added that it should be associated with an educational element [Miller and Robinson, 1967]. Children became a new target public, for the Brussels zoo also.

28. Concerts were main events at 19th century zoological gardens. Their popularity with the middle classes fitted with the bourgeois desire to adopt the traditions of the aristocracy [Miller and Robinson, 1967]. All zoos organised concerts and the bandstand was a fixture of any 19th century zoo [Peel, 1903]. Concerts offered the middle classes a way to distinguish themselves from the common people. The working classes were only allowed entrance on particular days and certainly not in the evenings, when the concerts were performed [Albrecht, 1993].

29. In the Brussels zoo also concerts were enormously successful. At first however there was a problem: « *les amateurs de musique se plaignaient du cliquetis des verres et des détonations de la bière de Diest ou de la limonade gazeuse* » (the music lovers complained about the clattering of glasses and the noise of Diest bier or gaseous lemonade).

By way of a solution, a bandstand was built « *sur le plateau supérieur du jardin* » (on the superior platform of the garden), far from the café. Still the author mentions that this did not change the ancient Belgian custom (of drinking beer) [Hymans, 1856]. The Brussels zoo published its own paper announcing and describing the concerts: « *une foule nombreuse de dames aux toilettes splendides et un grand nombre d'officiers, dont les brillants uniformes rehaussent tout l'éclat de nos assemblées* ». (a large crowd of ladies in beautiful dresses and many officers in splendid uniforms enlivened our reunions). This clearly shows that for the middle classes, the Brussels zoo was the place to see and to be seen [Le Jardin Zoologique, 1855].



Fig. 4. De Brusselse Dierentuin, lithography by A. Canelle from 1856. Source: archives of the City of Brussels.

5.2. Architecture

30. Zoological gardens developed a specific architecture, clearly illustrating the attitudes of the middle class towards animals. Architecture became an instrument for the self-confirmation of the rich and their need to set themselves apart. New industrial developments and fashions were readily adopted, including steel and glass architecture, neo-classicism and exoticism [Baetens, 1993]. In this way, the cages generally show the social, political and economic influences on the perception of exotic animals [Rothfels, 2002].

31. The zoos also copied each other's building styles: bear pits, Egyptian temples, Oriental pavilions etc. [Lambrechts, 2007]. Bears were kept in cages or pits, with an upright tree trunk they could climb. The bear pit of the Antwerp zoo was modelled as a cavern with several caves [Baetens, 1993]. In Ghent, the bear pit was an "ancient castle with battlements and embrasures" [Campens, 1853], a construction which was also adopted in Brussels [Hymans, 1856]. The bear pit was a striking illustration of the way animals were controlled and kept in an urban, middle class environment.

32. The dawning of the 20th century brought a dramatic change in zoo architecture, influenced by Carl Hagenbeck, the German zoo expert, who exposed the animals in apparent freedom to the visitors. The Brussels zoo already attempted to apply these principles in the middle of the 19th century. This is stated explicitly in the guide-book: « *Mais ciel !... que vois-je ? s'écrit la bonne qui mène promener son baby dans les allées. Que vois-je ? un loup dans les broussailles, un chacal prêt à s'élancer sur nous ! Au secours, au secours !* » (Good heavens! What am I seeing? A wolf in the bushes, a jackal preparing to attack us! Help! Help!). The bars however were cleverly hidden, giving the animals every liberty, « *excepté celle de vous approcher* » (except that of coming near you). This clearly fitted in the striving of the Brussels zoo of being different from the other zoological gardens [Hymans, 1856]. In order to avoid all misunderstandings, the description in *La Belgique illustrée* added that the enclosures « *pour être très habilement et très pittoresquement dissimulées, n'en sont pas moins solides* » (were cleverly and picturesquely camouflaged, but nevertheless very solid) [Van

Bemmel, 1880]. Half a century before Hagenbeck's strong influence on zoos all over the world, "his" principles were already being practiced in Brussels. But as Brussels lacked sound scientific guidance and successful implementation, its influence on other institutions was negligible.

Conclusion

33. The analysis of the various documents related to the Brussels zoo and the later initiatives to create a new zoological garden in the capital, yields some remarkable elements. The zoo guide-books draw an ideal image of a zoo, but contain many implicit and normative elements reflecting the modes of thought of the period, and this not only concerning zoological gardens. The guide-books reveal a comprehensive world view and attitudes toward the relation between man and animals, domestication and acclimatisation, even if these elements have often unintentionally insinuated themselves in the text [Mullan and Marvin, 1999].

34. Like all other zoos, the Brussels zoological garden was a middle class initiative. On the one hand its discourse was linked to the 19th century attention for industrial pollution and desire for a healthy urban environment. On the other hand, the zoo enhanced the city's prestige – every significant city needed a zoo – as is clearly illustrated by the competitive attitude toward the zoos in other cities. Until the interbellum, plans were made to give the capital a new zoo. As none of these projects were successful, Brussels is one of the few European capitals lacking a proper zoo.

35. The Brussels zoo tried to identify as a scientific institution. A remarkable aspect of this ambition was the attempted dialogue with scientists of the time. It wanted to instruct the reader and to encourage critical observations. Still, many traditional concepts stubbornly remain present in the discourse and the image building. Gradually, attention shifted from (theoretical) classification to (practical) acclimatisation. This became the new model of the zoo as a scientific institution: not only showing animals but also adapting, breeding, domesticating them.

36. The cultural activities and the ambitious architecture of the Brussels zoo made it a popular middle class attraction. Concerts but also children's rides on all sorts of animals became fixtures. This illustrates the way in which the zoo was mainly developed for the entertainment of the middle classes and how it capitalised on the 19th century views on children's education, instruction and entertainment.

37. The Brussels zoo possibly cherished the most idyllic ambitions of being a "modern" zoo, with spacious animal enclosures in a fairy-tale environment, half a century before the Hagenbeck principle was generally accepted. Reality decided otherwise. Ambitions and good intentions notwithstanding, the management never succeeded in making the zoo a lucrative enterprise. Concerts and other forms of entertainment could not raise sufficient funds to keep up maintenance of the zoo. This clearly shows the wide gap between the desire to develop a prestigious and scientific zoo and the actual results.

Bibliography

- ÅKERBERG, S., 2001. *Knowledge and Pleasure at Regent's Park : The Gardens of the Zoological Society of London during the Nineteenth Century*. Sweden.
- ALBRECHT, H., 1993. *Een halve eeuw 'Maatschappij voor Natuurlijke Historie' te Gent (1851-1914)*. Master's thesis History. Ghent. University of Ghent.
- ANONYMOUS, 1855. *Le Jardin Zoologique: journal de la Société de Zoologie et d'horticulture et programme officiel des concerts de symphonie et d'harmonie donnés par cette Société*, 12 and 19 August 1855.
- ANONYMOUS, 1907. *L'Acclimatation. Organe du Grand Jardin d'Acclimatation de Bruxelles. Annales de l'Institut de Psychologie animale de Bruxelles*, 1.
- ANONYMOUS, 1934a. Dierentuin te Brussel. De waarheid over die onderneming, In: *Handelsblad van Antwerpen* (4 oktober), p. 2.
- ANONYMOUS, 1934b. De Dierentuin van Brussel. Goedkope geestigheden. In: *Handelsblad van Antwerpen* (13 oktober), p. 2.
- ANONYMOUS, 1936. *Zoo Bruxelles. Un Jardin Zoologique, Pourquoi ? Où ? Comment ? Quand ?* S.l.
- ANONYMOUS, 1975. Een Brusselse dierentuin. In: *Zoo Antwerpen*, 41, pp. 16-17.
- ANONYMOUS, 1994. *Het Leopoldspark, Architectuur en Natuur*. Brussels: Publishing house Solibel Edition.
- ARCHIVES of the Antwerp Royal Society for Zoology, 1911. Antwerpen, 1.1.3, *Notulen van de Raad van Bestuur*, 11 maart 1911.
- BAETENS, R., 1993. *De roep van het paradijs: 150 jaar Antwerpse Zoo*. Tielt: Lannoo.
- BARATAY, E., HARDOUIN-FUGIER, E. and WELSH, O. (transl.), 2004. *Zoo: a history of zoological gardens in the west*. London: Reaktion Books.
- BOULINEAU, P., 1934. *Les jardins animés; étude technique et documentaire des parcs zoologique*. Limoges: Desvilles.
- BRAUMAN, A en DEMANET, M., 1985. *Le Zoo, la cite scientifique et la ville. Le parc Leopold 1850-1950*. Brussels: AAM Editions.
- CAMPENS, E., 1853. *De Gentsche Diergaerde*. Ghent: Willemsfonds.
- DE BEER, E.S., 1952. The development of the Guide-book until the early nineteenth century, In: *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 15, pp. 35-46.
- DE CONTRERAS, M., 1908. *Jardin d'Acclimatation de Bruxelles*. Brussels: Imprimerie F. Vanbuggenhoudt.
- ESQUIROS, A., 1854. Des Jardins Zoologiques. Les Sociétés d'histoire naturelle en Belgique. In: *Revue des deux mondes* (15 Novembre), pp. 689-716.
- HYMANS, L., 1856. *Le Jardin Zoologique de Bruxelles. Vade-mecum du promeneur*. Brussels: J.H. Briard.
- KEMPERINK, M., 2001. *Het verloren paradijs: de literatuur en de cultuur van het Nederlandse fin de siècle*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- LAMBRECHTS, W., 2004. *Science, Utilité, Agrément. De betekenis van de dierentuinen van Antwerpen, Gent, Brussel en Luik, 1843-1946*. Master's thesis Modern History. Leuven. University of Leuven.
- LAMBRECHTS, W., 2007. De geschiedenis van de Belgische dierentuinen. Een verhaal van wedijver, vermaak en exotische dieren in de stad. In: BROUCKE, K. et al. *O dierbaar Antwerpen, over olifanten, mensen en andere stadse dieren*. Tielt: Lannoo, pp. 118-124.
- LEVER, C., 1992. *They dined on Eland: the Story of the Acclimatisation Societies*. London: Quiller Press.
- LOISEL, G., 1912. *Histoire des ménageries de l'antiquité à nos jours, I-III*. Paris.
- MILLER, N.P. en ROBINSON, D.M., 1967. *The leisure age: its challenge to recreation*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.

- MULLAN, B. en MARVIN, G., 1999. *Zoo culture. The book about watching people watch animals*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- PEEL, C.V.A., 1903. *The zoological Garden of Europe; their history and chief features*. London: F.E. Robinson & co.
- QUIEVREUX, L., 1938. L'Évolution de Bruxelles vue par la lorgnette du théâtre. Le Jardin Zoologique et le Jardin Botanique. In: *Le Folklore Brabançon*, 18, pp. 21-24.
- ROTHFELS, N., 2002. *Savages and beasts: the birth of the modern zoo*. (Animals, history, culture). Baltimore: JHU Press.
- SCHIEBINGER, L., 1993. *Nature's body: gender in the making of modern science*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- SCHREVEENS, F., 1985. John James Audubon (1785-1851) and 'The Birds of America'. In KRUYFHOOFT, C. (ed.), *Zoom op Zoo. Antwerp Zoo focusing on Arts and Sciences*. Antwerp: Koninklijke Maatschappij voor Dierkunde, pp. 133-169.
- SOCIÉTÉ ROYALE DE ZOOLOGIE, D'HORTICULTURE ET D'AGRÉMENT DE BRUXELLES, 1851. *Arrêté Royal - Statuts*. Brussels: M. Hayez, Printer at the Académie Royale.
- VAN BEMMEL, E., 1880. *La Belgique Illustrée. Ses monuments, ses paysages, ses œuvres d'art*. Brussels: Bruylant.
- VAN DRIESSEN, H., 1982. Het Leopoldspark te Brussel van dierentuin tot openbaar park. In: *Zoo Antwerpen*, 4, pp. 94-102.

Financial support

Brussels Studies gets published with the support of:



Innoviris, the Brussels Institute for Research and Innovation



University Foundation



Fonds ISDT Wernaers pour la vulgarisation scientifique - FNRS

To cite this text

LAMBRECHTS, Wim, 2014. The Brussels zoo: A mirror of 19th century modes of thought on the city, science and entertainment, In: *Brussels Studies*, Number 77, June 2nd 2014, www.brusselsstudies.be

Links

Other versions of this text are available

ePub FR: <http://tinyurl.com/BRUS77FRE PUB>

ePub NL: <http://tinyurl.com/BRUS77NLE PUB>

ePub EN: <http://tinyurl.com/BRUS77ENE PUB>

pdf FR: <http://tinyurl.com/BRUS77FRP DF>

pdf NL: <http://tinyurl.com/BRUS77NLP DF>

pdf EN: <http://tinyurl.com/BRUS77ENP DF>

The videos published in *Brussels Studies* can be watched on the *Brussels Studies* Vimeo channel, available here: <http://vimeo.com/channels/BruS>