



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

ZOOS VICTORIA MINUTE TO MIDNIGHT GALA DINNER

Friday 20th May, 2016

The Honourable Luke Donnellan MP, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and Ports

Ms Anne Ward, Chair of the Zoological Parks and Gardens Board and **Board Members**

Dr Jenny Gray, Chief Executive Officer, Zoos Victoria

Directors of the Melbourne Zoo, Healesville Sanctuary and Werribee Open Range Zoo

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders, including of course Murrindindi, with us this evening.

It is a delight for Tony and me to be with you in this magnificent setting, to celebrate the extraordinary work of Zoos Victoria, across its three landmark locations in Healesville, Werribee and of course right here in Parkville.

I am delighted to follow in the footsteps of, as best I can tell, ALL of my predecessors since Governor Barkly in 1857, in becoming the Patron of Zoos Victoria (or its forerunners).

In my short time in office so far, we have visited Healesville, and I have been fortunate enough to visit here. Those visits were in close succession. Werribee is on the agenda, as soon as time will permit.

I have been in my role now for 10 months. I was prepared for some aspects of what the role would entail. I was well aware of the responsibilities as the guardian of the State's Constitution, in leading certain ceremonial occasions on important days such as ANZAC Day, of the international engagement on behalf of the State and of the community engagement throughout Victoria.

In that latter role, I knew that I would visit wonderful places, meet fascinating people, encounter things and ideas, previously way outside my day to day life, and I knew that my horizons would be widened and my preconceptions challenged.

My recent zoo visits have done just that.

You might expect me to say that it is because I learned so much about the animals. That is of course exactly what I had expected as the visits came around, particularly as I knew I would be privileged enough to have experts showing me around to describe them to me. And I did learn a great deal about the beautiful creatures housed at the zoos.

What I hadn't expected, was that my learning would be somewhat reversed. That is, that the animals would teach me so much about the people charged with their care.

Let me explain what I mean.

I saw the dedication of the zoo keepers when it came to training the animals.

Although at first I thought it was skilful, and amusing, to see the gorillas meticulously following the instructions to hold up a hand to the side of the enclosure or to move an ear close to the wire, I soon came to understand that this was no sideshow, but a carefully choreographed program to ensure that the animals are able to assist the keepers with their own healthcare (the animals' healthcare, not the keepers'!)

I saw that same targeted and caring training repeated with the elephants, but with the double twist of it being in Thai, the elephants' native tongue. Doesn't that say so much: the keepers adapting to the elephants' language, not the other way around.

I saw the ingenuity and vision of the zoo management at the Healesville Sanctuary Wildlife Hospital, where the facility's practices are fully transparent. Literally. You might expect a hospital to be back of house, for the public to see and enjoy the healthy animals, whilst the poorly ones are looked after behind the scenes.

But thanks to the ingenuity - and the boldness – of those in charge, the public is privy to every aspect of the animals' care, from arrival, through diagnosis, surgery if it is required, and even post-mortem, when sadly that is needed in order to further the veterinarian's knowledge of what caused the demise of a particular animal or bird.

I saw the profound affection with which the keepers approach their work. I could choose any example. It was palpable in every part of the zoos.

The Lord Howe Island Stick Insects are a great case in point. This is the insect found in 2001 on Balls Pyramid, some 23kms from Lord Howe Island, after it was thought it had become extinct in the 1920s, when rats were introduced.

I'm aware that I may well be one out here, but I don't find the Lord Howe Island Stick Insects particularly cute. Truthfully, I don't even find them remotely attractive. I do however appreciate their importance, and the sterling job done by keeper Rohan Cleave in the breeding program.

I wasn't just impressed by Rohan, and his team's success in rebuilding the insect's numbers, I was especially taken with the affectionate way he spoke of (and to) them, explained them, handled them and nurtured them. I felt quite guilty for holding one with only one thought racing through my mind, which was: "I hope it doesn't run up my sleeve"!

I certainly learned of the zoo staff's unswerving commitment to conservation, that went well beyond just that Lord Howe Island stick insect program.

I saw it replicated in many parts of the zoos.

At Healesville Sanctuary I learned about the repopulation work being carried out with Tasmanian Devils. Prone to a rare and infectious facial tumour, these native marsupials are an endangered species. Zoos Victoria is breeding and managing a captive population that will prove vital to the survival of the Tasmanian Devil.

And then there's the Southern Corroboree Frog. Mostly from the Kosciusko National Park - and known for its distinctive bright yellow and black stripes – the little frog is on track to being removed from the critically endangered list, thanks to the Zoos Victoria breeding program.

But as the Governor of Victoria, I was particularly heartened by the elaborate 27 year long captive breeding program at Healesville, to re-establish a stable wild population of the Helmeted Honeyeater: our State bird. The program is successfully supplementing wild populations through captive breeding, as well as maintaining the insurance of a population in captivity.

I was particularly taken with the educational component of the modern zoos' work. My own childhood recollection of zoos, (granted, far further back in time than for many of you here this evening), is of animal enclosures, signposted by a relatively rudimentary description of the animals and where they came from.

We certainly were not treated to the stimulating and evocative experiences devised so cleverly now.

I was impressed by the interactive experience offered to children and adults alike, for example, in the Palm Oil 'Zoopersmarket', located at the orang-utan enclosure.

Visitors there can pick up a barcode scanner and scan some of their favourite foods to see if they are made using sustainable palm oil or not. What a simple way to educate the public about a complex problem, all done with the orang-utans, the end victims of unsustainable palm oil harvesting, happily looking on, or swinging nearby.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate the people of Zoos Victoria, led by Board Chair Ms Anne Ward and CEO Dr Jenny Gray, on their tireless work and dedication to the future of our precious wildlife, not only here in Victoria, but around the world.

Dr Gray, it should be noted, is the President-Elect of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the peak organisation of the global zoo and aquarium community. Its member organisations collectively welcome over 700 million visitors annually, and with Dr Gray at the helm in time to come, we can rest assured that not just Zoos Victoria, but the global zoological community will be the better for it. On behalf of the people of Victoria, I congratulate Dr Gray on her appointment and wish her all the very best for her term.

And again, on behalf of the people of Victoria, may I thank you, the guests of this important evening, in supporting the vital work that Zoos Victoria carries out.

Enjoy the remainder of this beautiful gala dinner, and thank you.