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# NEW YORK ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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NEW YORK ZOOLOGICAL PARK

Bronx Park, New York 60, N. Y.

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## INFORMATION SERVICE

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Three duck-billed platypuses, variously called "living fossils" and "the most wonderful of all living mammals," are expected to arrive at the Bronx Zoo this afternoon. They are the only platypuses outside their native Australia and have been exhibited only once before, when the New York Zoological Society displayed one specimen for 49 days in the summer of 1922.

The furred, web-footed, duck-billed, poison-spurred, egg-laying little animals that rejoice in the names of Penelope, Betty Hutton and Cecil, will be allowed to rest for a few days in seclusion in the Bronx Zoo and will be put on public exhibition next Wednesday afternoon at 3 o'clock in a 47-foot "platypusary" especially built for them in the center of the Zoo. Australian officials and members of the Zoological Society will be given a preview on Tuesday afternoon, and thereafter they will be exhibited daily for about one hour, the length of their appearances being determined by their reaction to New York crowds.

The platypuses, as well as two short-beaked echidnas from Australia and Tasmania, the only other egg-laying mammal in the world, arrived in Boston late last night aboard the freighter Pioneer Glen of the U. S. Lines. During the whole of their journey of 13,000 miles they were under the care of David Fleay, director of the Sir Colin Mackenzie Sanctuary at Healesville, Victoria, and of Mrs. Fleay.

"If exhibition plans proceeds as we have every reason to believe they will, between one million and two million persons will see the platypuses this summer and we even hope that some of them can have the experience of letting the animals take food from their fingers," Fairfield Osborn, president of the New York Zoological Society, said today.



"Sixteen months ago the Zoological Society began negotiations for the exhibition of platypuses in the Zoological Park. These discussions involved Dr. Herbert Vere Evatt, the Australian Minister for External Affairs; Senator Benjamin Courtice, Minister of Trade and Customs; Fred Lewis, Chief Inspector of the Fisheries and Game Department of Victoria, and A. A. Lindsay-Field, president of the committee of management of the Sir Colin Mackenzie Sanctuary. Australia long ago adopted a policy of strict protection for her unique fauna, but when these officials understood the eagerness of the New York Zoological Society to do everything necessary to insure the safe transportation and exhibition of the platypuses, and what their exhibition would mean to the people of America, they gave their fullest cooperation. To these gentlemen, and especially to Mr. Lindsay-Field and his committee, who agreed to release Mr. Fleay from his duties for several months so that he might give his personal care to the platypuses in transit, Americans owe their thanks for an opportunity to see an animal that only once before has been brought out of Australia, and which is literally the strangest animal, and the most interesting zoologically, in the world today."

Nineteen platypuses were captured in the spring of last year by Mr. Fleay. From these he selected a young male and two young females which were temperamentally suited to exhibition, and liberated the others. For a whole year they have been in training for exhibition in the Bronx Zoo, being accustomed to a feeding period in mid-afternoon and learning to take food from the hands of visitors. In a wild state platypuses are almost entirely night-feeding animals.

Mr. and Mrs. Fleay left Brisbane on March 29 with the male platypus in a portable platypusary, a combination swimming-feeding tank and sleeping burrow 12 feet long, and the two females in a similar contraption 15 feet long. Because platypuses have virtually insatiable appetites, they carried many thousands of frozen and living earthworms, grubs, crayfish, mealworms and frogs. En route fresh supplies of living earthworms were obtained at Pitcairn Island in the Pacific, and the New York Zoological Society last week flew 10,000 living earthworms to the Panama Canal.



Zone by Pan-American Airways to supplement the animals' diet on the last lap of their journey.

The male platypus, about 16 inches long, weighs four pounds and is about two years old. The two females are two and two and a half pounds in weight, respectively, and approximately sixteen months old. Penelope, the smallest of the females, has put on weight during the voyage.

Except for the period immediately after sailing from Brisbane, when all three platypuses were upset by their transportation by air from Melbourne to Brisbane, and for two days last week when the lack of fresh food caused them to go off their appetites, the platypuses have been healthy and vigorous, rolling and playing in the water of their platypusary tanks as they fed each night. Variety of fresh food is extremely important to their well-being and the New York Zoological Society has been preparing for their arrival by growing vast numbers of earthworms in a "farm" in the basement of the Lion House, as well as arranging for supplies of crayfish, tadpoles, grubs and mealworms.

Special quarters had to be built for their exhibition. The Zoo's model platypusary consists of a concrete tank 20 feet long with covered wooden tunnels at each end, one series of tunnels leading to an earth-filled burrowing box which the animals will hollow out themselves, and at the other end a blind tunnel filled with hay. During the day the platypuses will sleep in the tunnels or in the earth burrows.

Three tiers of platforms on each side of the platypusary will enable the public to see the animals in their swimming tank and to watch while Mr. Fleay feeds them. Since they seldom remain outside their tunnels for more than an hour in daylight, visitors will have to file slowly past the swimming tank to give as many persons as possible a chance to see them.

Mr. Fleay, a noted Australian naturalist and authority on the life and habits of the platypus, who successfully bred and reared a baby platypus at the Healesville sanctuary in the winter of 1943-1944, believes that Penelope, Betty Hutton and Cecil have every chance of living for many years in the New York Zoological Park.



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He expects to remain at the Bronx Zoo for several weeks to make sure that the platypuses are thriving in their new home, and to train a member of the Zoological Park's staff in their care and feeding.

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