

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY
CONSERVATION IN CAPTIVITY by Rebecca Perry

OWLS opened its new 2012/2013 session with an excellent talk from Rebecca Perry about not just the above title, but also about the work she does at Colchester Zoo, where she is a Director of Conservation, Education & Research. The zoo is supported by Action for the Wild, which assists conservation projects worldwide not just financially, but with technical help as well. The talk and the conservation work was explained and summarised under four headings:

The history of zoos, The roles of the modern zoo, zoo breeding programmes and zoo 'reintroduction'.

Zoos and the love of animals go back to Ancient Egyptian times over 4,000 years ago, when gifts were given to Pharaohs and in Roman times when elephants and lions were all the rage, through to medieval times, Henry I,II,III and into the 18th century when the first zoo was opened in Vienna for the reigning Imperial family.

London Zoo was the third 'western' zoo to open in 1826 and reopened/alterd in 1847.

By the time of the 20th century, zoos had changed with the emphasis on opening to visitors and broadening horizons, giving much more general information on wildlife to the public.

This was enhanced by the work of people such as Gerald Durrell and David Attenborough.

Zoo designs changed as well with Hamburg Zoo becoming the first to have no bars or cages on certain animal display areas. Now, in the 21st Century, more awareness of conservation and holistic ideas have come into play and the gap between visitors and animals has become much closer. So we have the five 'freedoms' Conservation/ Education/ Research/ Recreation and Welfare.

Colchester Zoo (three miles from Colchester) opened in 1963 and was owned by Frank Farrar and originally covered 25 acres of land. By the time 1983 arrived, the area had received a makeover. The place had been sold to Anthony & Dominique and was now a privately owned zoo covering 60 acres with a Staff of 300 and housing 280 species.

Over the years the zoo, with Action for the Wild has linked up worldwide with projects involving breeding and conservation work and coordinates with member zoos in many countries.

Rebecca went into great detail about the progress of the breeding programmes of various habitat up to August 2012 showing statistics and giving updates on endangered species. All zoos nowadays collaborate with conservation organisations and support various projects many of which are in Africa and Asia.

Colchester Zoo meanwhile, is going from strength to strength, with numbers increasing and a new area having been opened in April last year.

Bob Jenkins

The OWLS meeting paid tribute to Ann Roberts and Angela Root, two long serving members who have recently passed away.