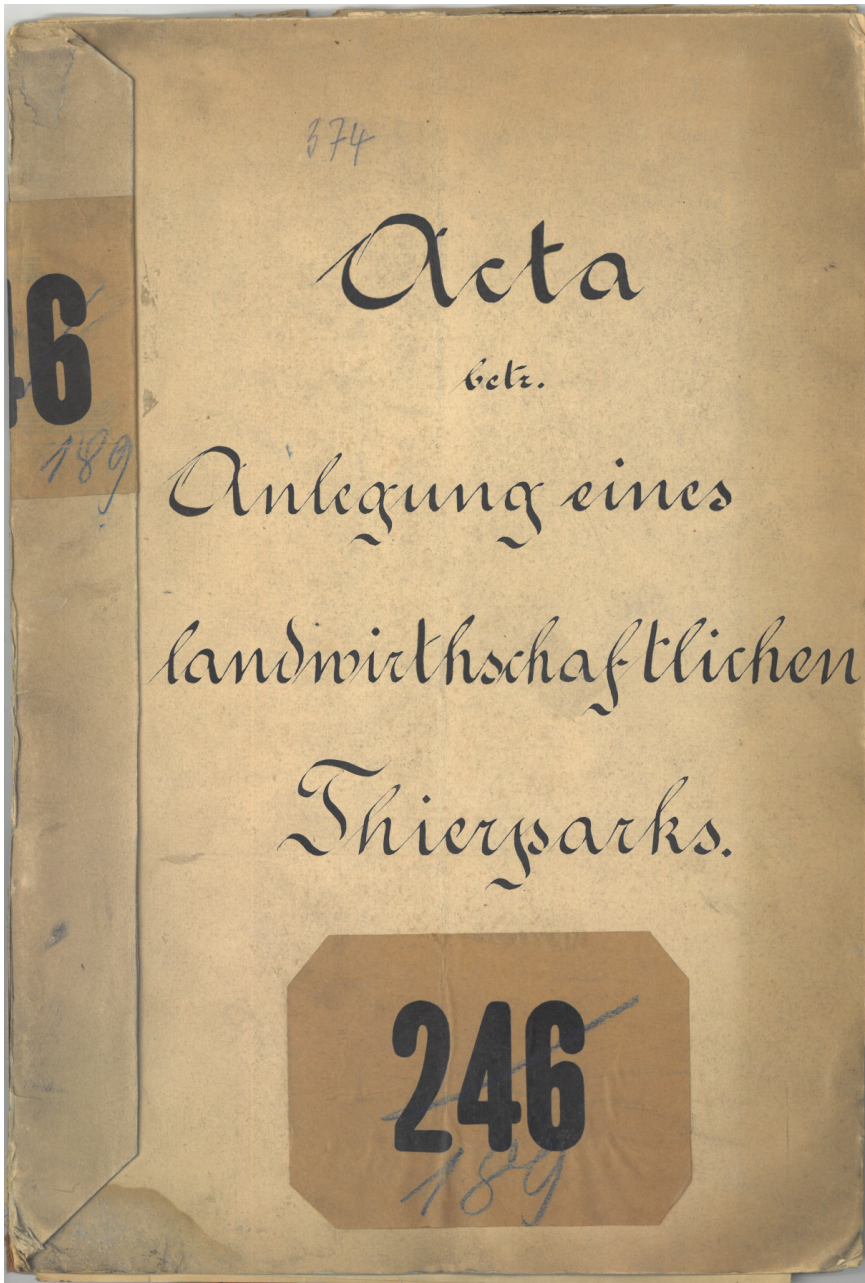


Lions or Cows?

Domestic animals at the zoo



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File on the establishment of an agricultural zoo in the archive of Berlin Zoological Garden. (AZGB. All rights reserved.)

In 1900, a good 50 years after the opening of the Zoological Garden in Berlin, zoo director Ludwig Heck negotiated with the Royal Ministry of Agriculture, Domains, and Forests the establishment of a section at the zoo where

agricultural and veterinary work could be carried out.¹ It was about getting approval for a (state feed subsidy) for keeping and acquiring agriculturally significant livestock at the zoo to meet the teaching and studying needs of the (Agricultural University) and the Veterinary University. The plan was to set up “a collection of modern livestock breeds, specifically cattle and sheep, as well as the odd pig and horse and fowl”,² which the two universities would select and house at the zoo. The idea to keep and display livestock at the zoo was nothing new. In fact, it went back to the beginnings of the Berlin Zoological Garden. In 1840, founding director Martin Hinrich Lichtenstein wrote a memorandum persuading the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV to decree the establishment of a zoo near Berlin. In this memorandum, which was presented to the king by Alexander von Humboldt, Lichtenstein argued that establishing a zoological garden would not just serve (amusement) and education purposes, but that “the actual task of facilities like this [would be] breeding and proliferating beautiful and useful animals, [and] refining our domestic animals”.³ He thus elevated the breeding of livestock and the associated “promotion of agricultural operations” to some of the core tasks of the zoo that was to be founded.⁴

This was at the heart of matters in 1900 as well, but now with the direct involvement of the universities. The agricultural zoo at the Berlin Zoological Garden would provide university lecturers and their students with material that they could use for demonstrations in “zoological and animal breeding lessons” as well as with material for breeding, cross-breeding, and feeding experiments. The plan also highlights the network of institutions that worked with live and dead animals, and knowledge about them, at the time. Berlin’s Royal Agricultural University had been founded in 1881 and was housed in a building complex on Invalidenstraße, the same street as the new building into which the Natural History Museum in Berlin would move just a few years later. On the other hand, the Veterinary University, which had been around since 1787 as the Veterinarian School, had been founded in 1889. It included a (Veterinary Anatomy Theatre) for performing public dissections in front of students as well as stabling and, later, a horse hospital. The university had initially been founded to battle the cattle plague that was jeopardising cattle stocks, while the establishment of the Prussian cavalry had turned veterinary knowledge into a military relevant resource. The zoo played a role in the planned collaboration as another place for keeping animals in the city.

However, the establishment of the Agricultural Zoo wore on. The application for money from the state budget first had to be approved by the House of Representatives and then negotiated in a contract. This was compounded by internal delays at the zoo, as it did not actually have the funds that it had budgeted to expand the cattle collection.⁵ But when a state feed subsidy of 6,000 marks was granted in 1904,⁶ 45 cattle, 24 horses, 18 pigs, and 52 goats and sheep moved into the zoo. The agricultural connection led to the zoo acquiring new animals that it could put on display without having to pay for their (upkeep). At the same time, the zoo thereby strengthened its links with university institutions and was able to highlight its own profile as a scientific institution. It thus became a field of applied sciences that generated (‘useful knowledge’) and could thus benefit from (state subsidies), which in turn legitimated the Zoological Garden’s shareholders’ association. However, these ideas were only temporarily implemented in actual zoo operations. In 1908, the Agricultural Ministry repeatedly enquired about the “building of purebred cattle stabling as well as

the breeding of purebred animals”.⁷ The zoo’s response has not survived, nor has any information about why the implementation was delayed and ultimately failed. The last piece of information contained in the file is a message from the ministry that the subsidy would be discontinued in 1912.⁸

Footnotes

1. There had already been earlier models. The Menagerie at the Parisian Jardin des Plantes, founded in 1793, was the oldest scientific zoo and became a role model for zoos worldwide. Alongside ‘exotic’ animals, the menagerie was also supposed to serve as a centre of “zoo technology”, for which Frédéric Cuvier designed plans to rear new pet breeds. [↩](#)
2. Ministry of Agriculture, Domains, and Forests to Zoological Garten Management, 15.07.1901, AZGB O 0/1/94. [↩](#)
3. Martin Lichtenstein. *Gedanken über die Errichtung zoologischer Gärten bei Berlin*, 1849, quoted in Heinz-Georg Klös. *Von der Menagerie zum Tierparadies: 125 Jahre Zoo Berlin*. Berlin: Haude & Spenersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1969: 28. [↩](#)
4. *Vossische Zeitung* 8 (1844), quoted in Annelore Rieke-Müller and Lothar Dittrich. *Der Löwe brüllt nebenan: Die Gründung Zoologischer Gärten im deutschsprachigen Raum 1833-1869*. Köln: Böhlau, 1998: 60. [↩](#)
5. One shareholder successfully objected, preventing the construction of an exhibition hall and all of the ensuing financial plans. Zoological Garten management to the Ministry of Agriculture, Domains, and Forests, 29.07.1903, AZGB O 0/1/94. [↩](#)
6. The zoo committed itself, in turn, to providing teachers and students at both universities with free entry. Cf. Actien-Verein des Zoologischen Gartens Berlin. *Geschäftsbericht über das Jahr 1904*. Berlin: 1905; idem. *Geschäftsbericht über das Jahr 1912*. Berlin: 1913. [↩](#)
7. Ministry of Agriculture, Domains, and Forests to the Aktienvereins des zoologischen Gartens, 19.12.1908, AZGB O 0/1/94. [↩](#)
8. Cf. Actien-Verein des Zoologischen Gartens Berlin. *Geschäftsbericht über das Jahr 1908*. Berlin: 1909; idem. *Geschäftsbericht über das Jahr 1912*. Berlin: 1913. [↩](#)