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Press release

Berlin Zoo actively faces its National Socialist past

Exhibition on zoo history in the Antelope House / Heck bust receives information plaque / New fellowship programme

For years, the Berlin Zoo has already been actively dwelling on its political past during the National Socialist era. Since 2011, there has been an information plaque on the Antelope House in remembrance of the Zoo AG's Jewish shareholders, who, during National Socialism, were also discriminated against, followed and expropriated by the zoo leadership at the time.

In 2013, the zoo commissioned the historian Monika Schmidt to research the topic. At the end of 2014, the results of this work were published as the book *Die jüdischen Aktionäre des Zoologischen Gartens zu Berlin - ihre Namen und ihr Schicksal, ihr Engagement und ihre Bedeutung für den Zoo der Stadt Berlin* [*The Jewish Shareholders of the Berlin Zoological Garden: Their Names and Their Fate, Their Engagement and Their Meaning for the Zoo of the City of Berlin*]. The book is available in shops and will also be sold at shops at the zoo.

Following extensive consultation in recent months, in the meeting of the Board of Directors at the end of October 2015, the Board of Directors of the *Zoologischer Garten Berlin AG* [*Zoological Garden Berlin*] has also decided to take further action: The bust of the former director, Lutz Heck, will receive a reference to his career under National Socialism; the Berlin Zoo will develop an **exhibition in the Antelope House**, which will illuminate the past of the Berlin Zoo; and a fellowship programme for Israeli doctoral students will be created.

The **online petition** "*Keine Ehrung für Nazi-Zoodirektor*" [*No Honour for Nazi Zoo Directors*], which ran from September until the end of November 2015 and was directed at the removal of the bust of Zoo Director Lutz Heck, is being taken very seriously by the zoo. Even the zoo has understanding for the creation of the petition and, as the first step towards an active reappraisal of this dark past, an information plaque will be installed in front of the bust, informing visitors about Lutz Heck's National Socialist history.

Together with the experienced curator and historian Dr. Clemens Maier-Wolthausen, the zoo is planning an exhibition in the Antelope House. In the oldest building at the zoo, a permanent exhibition about the more than 170 years of history of the Berlin Zoo will be developed. The National Socialist era will, of course, be a part of the exhibition. Evidence of the exploitation

of forced labourers will also be examined for the exhibition. The necessary comprehensive research for the exhibition has already begun.

"We have taken the past couple of months and, with the help of historians, have determined that it will still take some time to process the history of the Zoo AG during National Socialism with the necessary care. We condemn the behaviour of the zoo's leadership in the National Socialist era and, with the planned exhibition, see it as our duty to inform our zoo guests also about this sad period of the zoo's history in a detailed and extensive way," explains Zoo Director Dr. Andreas Knieriem.

With awareness of its historical responsibility, the Berlin Zoo is also planning a **fellowship programme** with the goal of strengthening academic exchange between Israel and Germany. In this programme, doctoral students from Israel will be able to undertake research stays in Berlin. The first fellows are already expected in 2016. The cooperation partners are the Freie Universität of Berlin and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The programme is not just targeted towards young researchers who are writing a doctoral thesis in veterinary medicine, biology, wild animal research or zoo animal research, but will also support doctoral students in the fields of ethics and history.

"We are pleased that with this programme, we can strengthen the academic exchange between Germany and Israel in promising fields", says Frank Bruckmann. "Through a stay in Berlin, we want to make it possible for young academics to gain experience and make contacts that can help them later in their careers. We hope that in this way, we can build stable relationships between both countries. In remembrance of our common history, we view the programme as an investment in the future."

The total costs for these projects are in the mid-six figures.