

2 Amazing Animals

Warm Up Session



'Who's Who at the Zoo' is an amazing book of animals by Ruskin Bond. Each animal is special; none too stupid or ugly, says the author. Out of the twenty four animal friends talked of in the book, here are some for you.

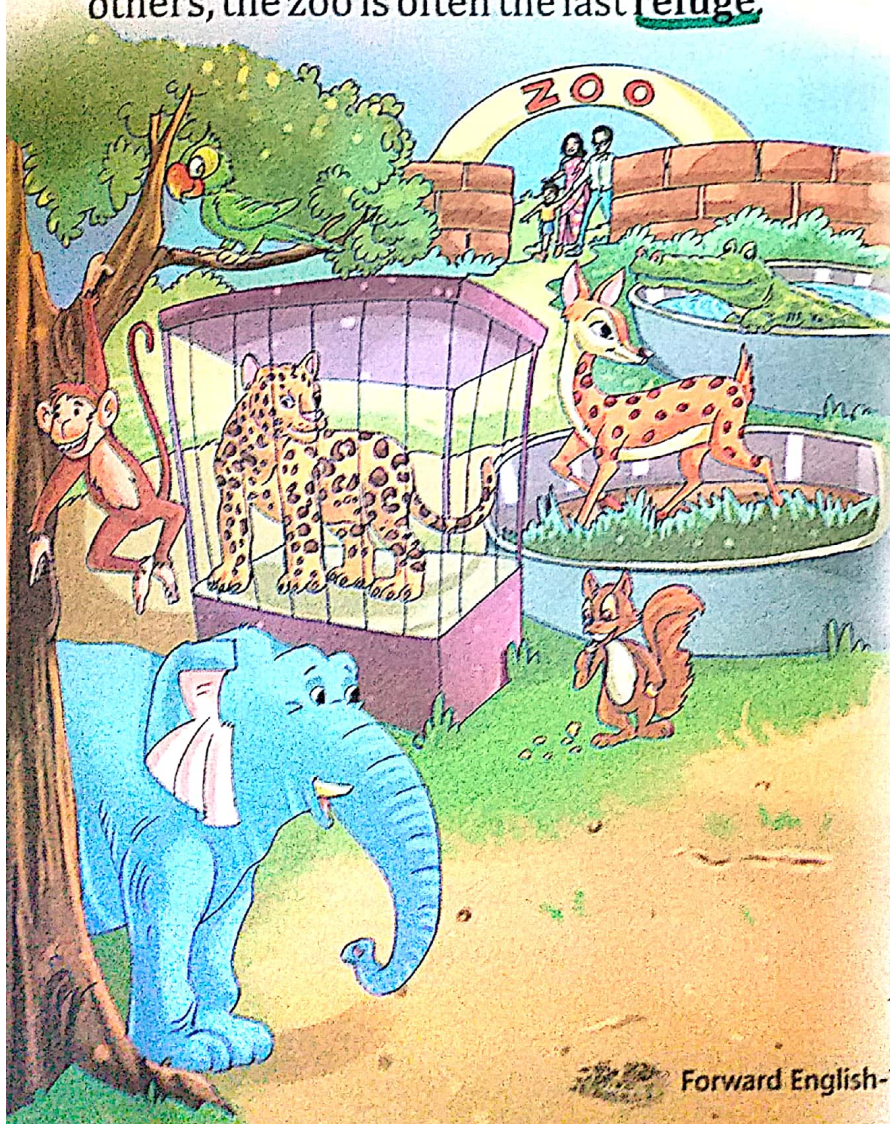
Reading Time



In an overcrowded world, where the forests and wilderness are fast disappearing, it is becoming more and more difficult for many birds and animals to find food and shelter. Some species have already died out. For others, the zoo is often the last refuge.

The preservation of wildlife is not the function of a zoo, which is really a sort of Grand Hotel for a large collection of animals. Wildlife is best preserved in natural sanctuaries. The function of a zoo is rather to bring animals closer to human beings, so that we may be provided with a close-up of the beauty, charm and fascinating way of life of birds and animals coming from different parts of the country, different areas of the world.

Not everyone is in a position to visit the Kaziranga Sanctuary to see a rhino; not everyone can go to the Gir forest to see a lion. But



any Delhi school child can see these animals in the zoo. Not everyone can venture into the rain-forests of South America to see a jaguar or a brightly-coloured macaw; but anyone living in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Bombay or wherever there is a zoological garden, can find these and other fascinating animals in residence.

The best zoos are those which attempt to provide their animals with conditions and surroundings similar to those in which they lived, when wild. After all, animals are as capable of being happy or miserable as humans, and there is no sadder sight than a wild animal cooped up in a cage so small that it is barely able to turn round.

The Delhi zoo is the largest in Asia. It is also reputed to be one of the best in the world. It has plenty of water for a bird colony; a spacious deer park; caves for tigers; trees for leopards; and large clean cages, where cages are necessary. This is the ideal kind of zoo: the equivalent of a good hotel for people. In fact, some of the residents in the bird colony have come there on their own.

The best way to learn about animals is to watch them. All that my book can do is to introduce you to some of the animals you may find in a zoo: some of them well-known, like the tiger and the elephant; others who are strangers, like the mandrill and the zebra. Of course, they can't all be included here. It would take a very fat directory to list and describe all the animals in the world which is an encouraging thought; for it would be a sad day indeed when all the world's animals could be put into one short list.

THE ADJUTANT STORK



If you have lived in or near an Indian village, you may have seen the adjutant, the long legged wading bird which likes stretches of open water in the countryside. An adjutant, as you probably know, is an army officer, and this particular stork is so named on account of its stiff, parade-ground walk.

The adjutant has fine flowing feathers, a great bare head and long legs; an altogether handsome bird, worthy of an officer's rank.

It has a powerful beak with which it can swallow an animal as big as a rabbit, or a bird as large as a fowl. It is very useful, like some vultures, for it clears the village street of refuse and destroys snakes and lizards.

This stork is easily tamed. The manner of its walk and its odd habits often cause amusement. My grandfather, who kept a number of pets, once had an adjutant stork. It was in the habit of standing behind grandfather's chair at dinnertime and taking its share of the meal.

Some writers have called the adjutant an ugly bird, because of its huge bill and the long pouch hanging from its neck.

But different people have different ideas of beauty, and I am with those who think the adjutant is rather good-looking. He also has the virtue of being a silent bird (he does not have any voice muscles), and the only noise he makes is a clattering of the mandibles. When he is in love he manages to emit low grunts.

The adjutant can be found throughout India (where there is water), but if you live in a city, you are most likely to see it in the bird colony at the zoo. It is there that you will also find its relative—the spoonbill, a bird not so large, but with a wide black beak like a spoon, with which it fishes out water-creatures very effectively.

—by *Ruskin Bond*