

# THE ANIMAL PARK XII MONTHS

Dear friends,

We are publishing a new issue of our zoo's newsletter after a yearlong break. We were planning to release a new issue by the season's start hoping that COVID-19 would not prevent our patrons, unable to visit us for quite a while, to finally come over, take a walk, read about what happened in the Park in 2021 and how your favorite critters lived through that difficult year (which now seems such an easy year and almost a good one). Now it is twice as important for us to share with you the latest about our animals – your friends: how they live during the war and what happened to them under the occupation. In these difficult times, we have mastered only an abridged version of the newsletter, and therefore we will only write about the most important.

Indeed, everything is relative, and now that a mere hike out of town or a Sunday outing with your family seems like a whole undertaking (safety not assured), we reminisce about our anxieties of the COVID period as if it were some sort of a training which the Park even benefited from. So, what is the zoo life like during a war?

The war came to the Park in its very first days. Let's recap what exactly happened:

On February 24, the Park's staff gathered in confusion. The only activity we could pull off that day was looking for diesel. As queues lined up at gas stations, the common sense was telling us that power outages were only a matter of time. In hindsight, we can confirm that we lost electricity on the third day, while natural gas (something we did not expect at all) disappeared about a week later. As you understand, cold is our greater enemy than hunger: while rations can be cut, sub-zero temperatures would kill heat-loving animals almost immediately (that's inside the indoor winter enclosures that house 80% of the Park's animals). Fortunately, due to a rise in gas prices over the past several years, we designed a hippopotarium equipped with pellet heaters, and managed to install a couple of backup pellet heaters in other buildings. That's the second factor that allowed us to survive.

The first one is our staff – the personnel that stayed in place after the Russian Federation troops had entered the territory of the Dymer community where the Park is located. The day af-



ter the war started, in an effort to stop the advance of the Russian troops, all bridges across the Irpen river were blown up, and the Park, together with the entire Dymer District, was effectively cut off. For more than a month, five zoologists, a doctor, one volunteer and two security guards stayed in the Park around the clock until the withdrawal of the Russian troops at the end of March. They lived in enclosures where they managed to maintain some kind of acceptable temperature for exotic animals, ate what was left in the feed kitchen and what they could find in the village, or what the Red Cross would bring them from the "mainland". In addition to that, several of the Park's zootechnicians stayed in the village during the entire period of the occupation. They went to work through the Russian checkpoints and brought along whatever they could. Our kudos and praise to them!

Unluckily, the occupation began at the month's end, three days before our scheduled monthly feed delivery. The feed kitchen was practically empty. On the last day, we did not have time to bring any supplies and, honestly, did not expect that we wouldn't be able to

leave and get back into the Park anymore. The Russian troops set up checkpoints near the blown-up bridge and prohibited any movement in the direction of the nearby town of Dymer. It was only possible to evacuate towards Kyiv. They didn't let anyone back, though: whoever stayed behind had to stay, whoever left wasn't allowed back in. Our only physical contact with the Park was a Red Cross group of four people. Russians took their names and up until March 25 did not mind them crossing in the direction of Demydiv via the blown-up bridge carrying medicines, food and whatever else – anything that fit in their hands. Basically, the Park could rely only on what was left in the village and what the evacuating locals would offer.

For a while, our staff would go out in search of food and diesel at the addresses that the remaining villagers told us over the phone (while there was reception), but later on this also became impossible, as scavenging around abandoned houses in the de-

serted village could be poorly perceived by both the Russian patrols and the locals. Everyone who remained in the neighborhood shared their supplies with us, and the owners of the 355-bus route gave us part of their stock of diesel. It allowed our generator to work a couple of hours a day to pump water and start pellet heaters. We thank them again.

In the first days, after the disappearance of heat in the primates' section, our zootechnicians put all the monkeys in small kennels and moved them to the hippopotarium. Those were small portable cages used, among other purposes, to transport domestic pets (ours are larger, of course). Even one full day in such a kennel is already hard to endure for animals, and they had to stay in those kennels for several weeks. Looking ahead, I can say it exhausted them enormously, and, alas, some of them died.

Saving animals in war-time conditions is not easy. If the small and calm ones can somehow be warmed, accommodated and fed, the task is unsolvable with the larger animals. You can't put a blanket on a rhinoceros, and as soon as the temperature drops below 18 degrees centigrade, our Archie sneez-



Photo from the occupation, John, March 2022

es the very next morning. Fortunately, every summer, we prepare an annual supply of hay and therefore the food issue wasn't as harsh for the ungulates. Although hay became the ration's only ingredient, it was still available. The monkeys had to switch to a terrible diet of carrots (that's what there was most of in the storage) and apples (that's what our neighbors would mainly bring us). Our zoologists would also cook something on bonfires, flavoring it with what you can for the smell.

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We at the Park treat all our animals with great attention, but, of course, each employee has his or her own (albeit secret) favorite. In my family, there is no mystery here, so when we found out that the animals were cut off from the mainland in the occupation, Anya and I immediately thought about the orangutans.

**Y**osya and Magda had grown up in our family even before they moved to the zoo, and once that happened, Anya continued to play the role of the monkeys' mama. Daily eight-hour long sit-rounds with them, attempts to teach them something ("Can you imagine, Yosenka figured how to put together the cubes correctly! See how smart he is?"), and, most importantly, love and care allowed Anya to stay in the orangutan family as a parent. I didn't have as much success: with age, Yosya Mykhailovych decided that one head of the family would do.

Orangs are solitary animals, their men don't live in families, and the presence of another bearded candidate for the patriarch was, in his view, one too many. Yosya did not become less friendly and still would happily sit down with me for conversations over raspberries or peas, he just asked for a netting between us. Otherwise, when he is in a bad mood and you come into his enclosure, you can immediately see how he is perplexed, doesn't quite understand why you entered without asking and is getting nervous for no reason. Unfortunately or fortunately for that matter, you can't treat him like a pet, where you can establish dominance by training and suggestion, and sometimes even by a one-time power action (with a clear understanding of the reciprocal power action you will undergo at home later), and even that is useless. An orangutan is seven times stronger than a human, and if he wants something, he will calculate the right moment and will act in a matter of seconds – this has happened in zoos before. To



War and Yosya

## A BITTER INSULT: Evacuating Yosya and Magda, the Orangutans

my exhortations to Anya that it's time for her to limit direct contact with Yosya – he has grown up, sometimes he is not in a good temper – I hear nonsense like «let it be» and so on. Well, we are adults and adult orangutans, so let it be.

From the very first days of the siege, as the situation in the zoo worsened, Anya pursued towards me the message in the spirit of Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin] appealing to Alexander Grigorievich [Lukashenka], "You won't leave your best friend in trouble, or should

I get my point across differently?", the only difference being that I also sincerely wanted to pull out of there the so much used to individual care orangs but couldn't quite calculate the risks. When, after electricity, the gas went out as well, and we had to catch all the other monkeys, put them in kennels and move to the hippopotamus's enclosure, the moment of truth came by itself – the orangs would not fit into a kennel and would not sit in it.

We undertook the first evacuation attempt on our own: our doctor and the senior zoologist for primates pumped up the monkeys with sedatives

need to understand that in a state of extreme stress, the orangs would not obey even Anya – and here they were clicking their teeth trying to reach to our employees, all this right in front of a Russian checkpoint. Finally, we barely managed to drag them, bruised and soiled, back to the zoo, put them into their enclosures and, thus, made them angry for a long time and taught to react badly to the sedation gun.

We took a break and began to reflect on our mistakes. At this time (two weeks after the start of the invasion), the Russian patrols on the bridge established a policy of not allowing people into the territory of the Dymer community. They agreed to let through only four Red Cross employees every day, outside the curfew. One of these "iron people" was Yulia. One can imagine what they had to endure: on their shoulders lay the delivery by hand of medicines and food for those who stayed under the occupation. For some time, we met every morning and Yulia would add to her load our bag of feed or a canister of diesel. Then she would have to wade through the icy water.

It was with Yulia that we completed our challenge to get the orangutans out of the freezing zoo. This time everything was much more complicated. The water near the destroyed bridge was rising and we needed to find boxes for transportation on a raft, because should the orangs have woken



Photo from a military drone. Mid-March 2022, crossing at the Demydiv bridge. Who knows, maybe the red dot by the bridge is our Julia and the cargo on a tug raft are our sleeping red monkeys.

and in bags and blankets hauled them to a river crossing in a car of our administrator's husband. This operation turned out to be a failure and almost a tragedy. When Yosya woke up in the middle of a blown up bridge, he did not like what he saw and decided that the salvation from dragging in the frost was on the railing. We barely managed to tear him off from it. You

en up during the crossing, I wouldn't even want to think how it might have ended (although now that I think about those boxes that could have slipped off into the water... it's just scary). Another difficulty was the cold and the snow. Fortunately, the Russian patrol saw the monkeys through the holes and did not demand that we open the boxes. The Red Cross carried



Magda in Evacuation in the Lviv Region



Together at home



the orangs through the crossing, we put them in a car and rushed home. Magda did not wake up for an hour and at some point, she even stopped breathing; Yosya woke up again earlier than planned, started to rage, but then saw his crib, pulled himself over the railing and fell asleep again. The very next day we called for help to screw back together and reinforce everything that the orangs began to

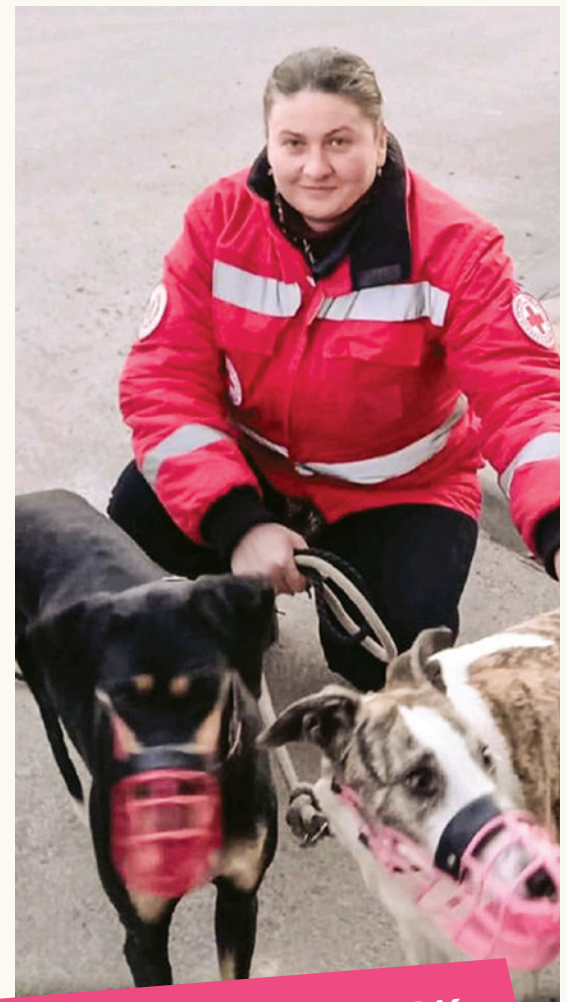
take apart: the enclosure the size of a room turned out to be small for them, and it was not designed for such adult monkeys. A day later, it became clear that inside the room they would feel as bad as in the zoo (except here it was warm and there was food, of course), so we began to call our colleagues. Yosya and Magda (together with mama) were accommodated at the Limpopo Zoo in Drohobych, where we also brought the other monkeys the day after the liberation of our Park, on March 31.

Besides Limpopo, I would like to say words of sincere gratitude to other zoos that sheltered us in difficult times: we have a rather large group of primates and the rest of them went to warm up and eat fill at the Rivne and Lutsk zoos.

Later, two days before the re-opening of the Park, on May 14, I met them all at the enclosures. Without any exaggeration, when they finished unloading the other inhabitants of the primate enclosure and large cages (kindly

provided by the Kyiv zoo) with Yosya and Magda appeared at the far end of the truck, I experienced a moment of disappointing sadness – the orangs looked at me once and then just looked past me, not reacting to anything: neither my greetings, nor me as such. Like tired humans, they looked over me and to the side, as if offended old people who understand everything but see no reason to explain anything because of their sheer disappointment with the interlocutor. Some argue that animals cannot accurately convey thoughts because they cannot speak, but it sounded very clear from Yosya's cage: there is no need to explain yourself or apologize – we simply cannot be treated like that...

The orangs are not vindictive, they have already come to their senses, they communicate with us and misbehave – sometimes they drive mama Anna crazy. When it thunders somewhere, they look up at the sky. They were always afraid of thunderstorms, and when thunder rolled, they would dash into our arms. Since from their concrete enclosure where they spent the two weeks in the occupation no missiles and tanks were visible, they probably decided that it was a long and terrible thunderstorm.



AN HONOR TO WORK

WITH SUCH PEOPLE

P.S. YOU WILL ASK, HOW'S OUR YULIA DOING?

Two weeks after the story with the orangs, Yulia was caught. At first she was locked up in Dymer, then there was Belarus, and Russia, and Crimea. Later she was exchanged in Zaporizhzhia. Just imagine what is behind this «later». When the right time comes, Yulia herself will decide what to tell, and we will listen with our mouths open and remember everyone she helped.

Just as I thought, immediately after her release, Yulia went back to work helping orphanages in the east.

It is a great honor for us to know Yulia and her colleagues from the Red Cross.

## PIG EARS

## AND SNOUTS,

or a Happy Ending Story



Our "front-line friend" Valentin, one of the volunteers who was helping the locals to evacuate during the occupation, every now and then comes to visit us at the Park. We used to also put him to the task of searching for provisions for our animals. In this regard, I have a story to tell. You can smile and call it a fantasy, but this is the holy truth ...

In mid-March, from one wonderful girl called Oksana (she also helped us locate food in the village), I heard that somewhere near Dymer there was a fodder factory which still had what is called "products of cutting the head parts of pig carcasses" that had not yet gone bad.

I called Valentin, told him what I knew and that I would now clarify the details and call him again, and asked him, meanwhile, to start moving in the factory's direction.

Further on, the events developed differently according to each of their participants.

### HERE'S WHAT I REMEMBER.

Oksana called me again to say that I needed to drive up to Dymer. There at the front of a column of tractors was the fodder factory and in one of the freezers there were pig's ears and snouts. I started

calling Valentin. He did not answer, which looked strange. There was almost no reception in the occupied zone, so when there was a signal, people usually picked up the phone immediately – a person would normally get out somewhere on a hill top and purposefully wait for a call. I dialed five times. The signal went through but there was no answer. Then I sent him a text (I saved it, of course, as a keepsake) saying where to drive and what to take there.

### VALENTIN'S STORY.

On the way to Dymer, he realized that he knew where this place was and needed no further explanation. He drove there right away and went into the factory. There he was immediately and unfriendly knocked down on the floor, a machine gun stuck under his nose, and asked what the hell he wanted

there. It turns out that a group of Russian soldiers camped out at the factory along with their ammunition. Then the phone rang. Once, three times, five times. Whoever was the senior among the Russians asked Valentin who kept calling him. Valentin, as an honest man, explained the matter and the purpose of his visit. He was ordered to hand over the phone, which at that very moment received a text message. The senior read it, pushed Valentin deep into the workshop towards the freezer, told him to take what he came for and get out.

A happy ending to the story which, I'm sure, makes you smile.

After all, the enemy soldiers could have reacted differently to a text message ordering Valentin to arrive at their place of deployment and bring back "as many pig ears and snouts as possible"...



Continues  
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The predators were the worst off. We used to prepare stocks of meat for two weeks – we always need a lot of it, and in war-time conditions it was almost impossible to get any. The animals did not die only because the occupation was relatively short – just over a month. When all the meat in the area, including trimmings, skins, etc., was used up, there was only one course of action left – not to think about the medium and long term but to search for what's essential just one day ahead. Found something? We thanked God, and we'd think later on about what's next. It is cruel to say, but in one case, the grief of our neighbors gave us an extra chance for survival. There is a horse ranch next to us, where, due to a broken leg, they had to say goodbye to one of the horses, then to another one. These deaths ex-



The sky above the Park in a missile pattern

tended our lives. We were thankful.

The animals reacted to extraordinary conditions almost like people. Realizing that something was flying from above and then made a big noise on the ground, they would look up at the whistle of a projectile and crouch. Then they figured their unloved concrete lairs (where they would sometimes be taken for veterinary procedures or to be separated from the pack) were bomb shelters, and they started going there themselves when the noise of a battle would be too loud.

There were also victims of shelling. There were no direct hits on us – the zoo was right between the two sides firing at each other – the enemy stationed its artillery batteries in Kozarovychi, five kilometers to the north of us, and the Ukrainian army was hitting them from the nearest forest near the blown up bridge. Before the departure of the Russians, there was such a fiery day that our bears Toby and Cuba fell into a terrible depression (they are generally well known phlegmatics, so this was unusual) and for two weeks they lay in apathy showing no interest in life, even when silence finally settled in and normal food reappeared. Archie, the rhinoceros, ripped his steel drinker out of the wall during the first shelling, and

for the rest of that day the staff was trying to persuade him not to get hurt on sharp edges, grinding them down right under Archie's nose (horn, that is). Nikolai Stepanovich, the head of our giraffe family, threw himself to the floor during the shelling, and it was surprising that he got up: a fallen giraffe usually does not get up. Some animals died of fear, crashing against the walls in a panic attack (monkeys) or from heart failure due to shock, like many birds and Zhuzha, the striped hyena.

Regrettably, the death toll would only increase later. It is known that zoo animals, like their relatives in the wild, do not show that they are feeling bad – in the morning, it is a normal animal, and in the afternoon, it just falls and dies. Then, during the autopsy, you are amazed at how it even lived with so many failed organs, although it wasn't visible on the outside. So died Raduga (Rainbow), the red she-wolf, because of

untreated ticks (due to the war, there were no deliveries of remedies), the female mangabey Laura, who had grown up in the kitchen at my place, suddenly collapsed and died of a stroke (accumulated stress); already in completely normal conditions, Uska, the imperial tamarin, a wonderful monkey, died because she did not receive medicine in time. Not from bullets and

shells on the battlefield, but this is the most direct consequence of the war, just on a short time delay.

We try not to be sad, because under such circumstances it was impossible to avoid losses, and we know it could have been much worse. The week following the one when we were liberated could be the last one for many – the animals would simply begin starving to death. When I first saw our lion Ludwig after the de-occupation, it was a real walking hanger: instead of a daily portion of meat or offal of about 6 kg, he received four kilos every four days – I think this speaks enough about how sad was the state of our affairs.

Our offices also got a slight hit from the enemy troops – overall, a small loss. But frankly, it is ridiculous to talk about any material losses, because we believe in this situation, in comparison with other affected towns – Bucha is just twenty kilometers away – we were just lucky. Still, I don't give up hope to trace down where my new shoes went from the closet and still keep the material evidence in the form of worn-out Russian army boots that ended up in their place – a joke I use to answer questions about our material losses. Because the lives of dead animals do not count as losses,



Kamchatka bears Toby and Cuba have arrived from the Brno zoo (Czechia)

but as tragedies that unfolded massively in nurseries, shelters, zoos, and simply among people who have pets. Although our animals cannot be returned, we still can (and should) take care of other lives, also in memory of the ones lost.



Our animals' keepers

## WE URGENTLY NEED YOUR HELP

Our email address: [1@12.org.ua](mailto:1@12.org.ua)

Our Facebook page: [Парк ХІІ Місяців](https://www.facebook.com/Парк-ХІІ-Місяців)

Our Instagram: [zoo\\_12m](https://www.instagram.com/zoo_12m)



Our Foundation was created with a single goal: to prevent animals from dying The XII Months Park in wartime. The Foundation's program includes:

- animal feed
- utilities for animals
- animal care

**No donation is ever too small.**

Our PayPal: [1@12.org.ua](mailto:1@12.org.ua)

### Our banking information:

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION «XII MONTHS PARK» ANIMALS' RESCUE CHARITABLE FUND»

**Code:** 43580570

**Account IBAN #:** UA073005280000026006455080336 gbp eur usd czk pln

**Beneficiary's bank:** OTP BANK JSC 43 Zhylyanska Str., Kyiv, 01033

**SWIFT code:** OTPVUAUK

**Payment purpose:** Charity donation

We are glad that we have brought to you, our dear British animal lovers, the military edition of our zoo newsletter in the same form the visitors of our zoo in Kyiv will receive it. There are more of us now – those who know how we are doing, how we fight and intend to win.

Of course, zoos do not fight with weapons in their hands. Our premier task is to protect the animals, the same way many zoos did it before us during previous wars and, as you know, they managed.

During the war, our country is primarily concerned with military topics and saving people – this is understandable. It often happens that the animals find themselves beyond the reach of hands and resources, so we really need your support.

This is why we decided to send you this news with the help of a friendly British zoo: we are alive and fighting. And we see ourselves together with you in a free Europe, when we win.

Thank you in advance for your kind donation.

Mikhail Pinchuk | Park XII Months | Owner