

The Pilsen Zoo has an interesting history and contemporary circumstances. In short, it went through relocation from its original location to its current one, is fully integrated with the botanical garden, while the DinoPark exhibit opens seasonally. A standalone exhibit in the center of Pilsen called Akva Tera also belongs to the Zoo. Exhibits in the Zoo are as natural and free-range as possible, are divided into continents and biotopes, and host a collection of 1200 species, including the majestic Indian rhinoceros. The zoo specializes in rare island species of animals and plants, mostly reptiles since the 60s, but also a large amount of birds after the year 1999.

Founding of the Pilsen Zoo dates to 2nd September 1926, when it was decided in a meeting of the Iris association to lease the greenhouse in the area of the military swimming pool of the Plzeň Doudlevec district, convert it into a breeding ground for fish and turn its surroundings into a zoo. In December 1926, the first greenhouses, aquariums and three aviaries with birds of prey, foxes and a jackal were opened. A brochure commemorating the 10th anniversary of opening the zoo in 1936 is the only official source material about its oldest history. Heads of the zoo were at first called administrators, beginning with A. Lokajíček (1926-32) and thereafter A. Pavlík (1932-1953). In the era of the Park of culture and leisure (Park kultury a oddechu - PKO), the garden was headed by a headman. They were J. Hájek, Z. Veselý, I. Hašková-Svobodová and Z. Kožíšek. The role of director first appeared after the zoo left PKO, joined with the botanical garden and became independent (1981). This post was consecutively held by P. Vlček, A. Šašek, F. Sládek and J. Trávníček.

Beginning in 1940, the zoo, so far consisting of mostly smaller species – fallow deer, raccoon, roe deer or donkey, was changed by the arrival of the first leopard, wolf, lions, and bears. Probably the most unique animal was the sun bear (1942), and in 1959 the saiga antelopes. This timeframe also includes the disastrous anthrax outbreak of 1961 forcing the zoo to close. More large animals appeared in this period, including the camel, llama, blue wildebeest, yak, zebu, nilgai, emu, greater rhea, or cougar.

Since 1959 there were plans to move the zoo to the Lochotín district. After the closure of 1961, it took until 1963 to open a makeshift construction site of a new zoo in Lochotín. A new aquarium and terrarium exhibit opened in 1962 in the center of Pilsen called AKVA TERA. Since the early 1960s Pilsen hosts a large collection of reptiles, later further enlarged by the creation of new exhibits. Zoo in Lochotín started practically from scratch – with only 29 animal species. The zoo was a construction site for many years and many of the makeshift exhibits operated for extended periods of time. The exhibit went through many cosmetic improvements and crucial reconstructions, however until the 90s they were mostly cages, fencings, tiles, and concrete. Since the middle 60s chimpanzees were added, and since 1971 tigers came to life in the Pilsen Zoo. Zebras live here uninterrupted since 1974. The zoo kept throughout its history a host of remarkable species, including the reindeer, cape buffalo, the rare half-monkey potto, Galapagos tortoise, rhinoceros iguana, dusky wallaby, Dorcas gazelle, polar bear, Asian black bear or American black bear.

The zoo began spanning an area of 3 ha, but it eventually encompassed the whole available area of 21 ha. The zoo was further developed after 1996 with the approval of

“development General”, leading to progress towards a zoogeographic bio-park. Between 2003 and 2007 the zoo had more than 300 000 visitors annually, while in 2019 the number reached the record breaking 504 000.

In the early 90s the diversity of species and the progressivity of architectural features started to increase. Thus began the reconstruction of the worst exhibits, while dry or dykes or moats were constructed, island exhibits for monkeys were made, iron bars and tiles were replaced by glass and steps were made to transform the old kettle zoo into a natural bio-park. It was decided to reshape the zoo into several units representing the zoogeographical regions of the world, replacing the model of aviaries and cages for individual species with biotope specific exhibits with a mix of plants and animals with the goal of maximal possible representativeness. The zoo is beginning to take part in many European Conservation Programs (EEP). Many unique exhibits were created in the Pilsen zoo, including the Czech river, Underground world, Kingdom of venom and others. In the last 25 years, many new pavilions have been opened to the public.

The year 2010 was a great historical milestone. The zoo became home to the Indian rhinoceros, pygmy hippopotamus, and the Rothschild's giraffe for the first time. The zoo also hosts many less-known species, for example the bizarre-looking naked mole rats. The newest addition are the aardvarks who live in the zoo since 2019.

The botanical garden was opened in 1961. The botanical garden soon became intertwined with the zoo and its green and flowery scenery differentiates it from other zoos in Czechia.

The feeding and falconry shows in the amphitheatric are also noteworthy, as well as stylish restaurants and the souvenir shop U Lemura. The children can take advantage of the vast natural playground near the amphitheatric and the indoor playground near the Lüftnerka farmstead. The visitors can also quench their thirst at the numerous water fountains. The zoo is open 365 days a year.

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