



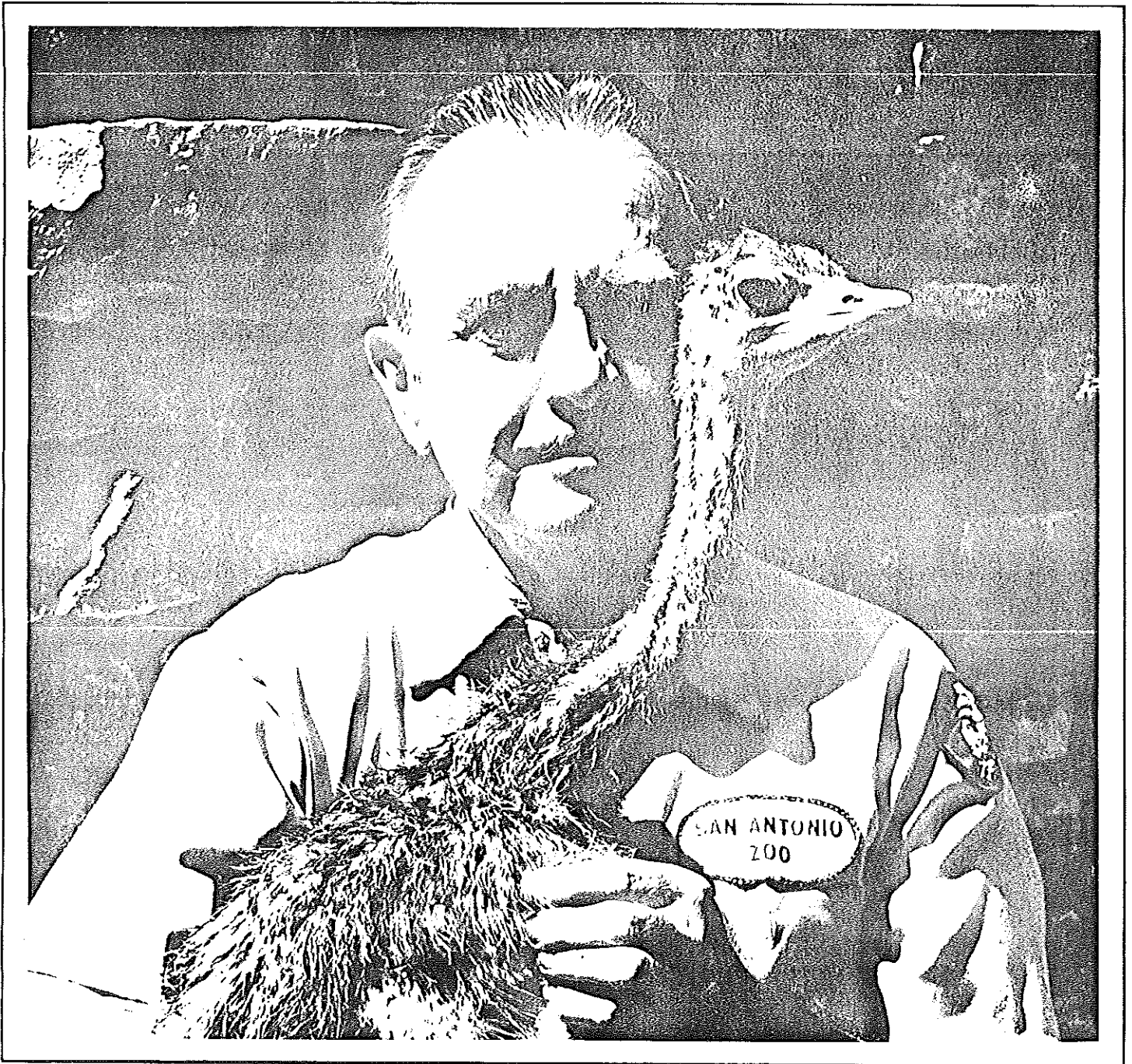
San Antonio's

INCUBUS From The WOOD

Volume 5, Number 6

Published by San Antonio Zoological Society

December 1979



HENRY MILLS, KEEPER OF THE YEAR

keepers who relay them to the proper authorities to take action. . . but the keeper is the beginning, the initiator of the action.

Zookeeping is probably one of the most misunderstood jobs in the world, or so it seems to us after a few years of seeing and talking to applicants for keeper positions. How often job applicants close their applications with the resounding statement, "I just *love* animals!" And how often they are so surprised to hear that though it's nice to love animals, it's not a requirement for zookeepers. In fact, emotional attachments are not at issue one way or another.

For the most part zookeepers must be willing, and able, to do hard, outdoor, physical labor, in all weathers putting the welfare of the animals before their own. Rain, sleet, snow, holidays, natural disasters — none of these excuse zookeepers from feeding, watering and caring for each animal in their assigned area. And for all this devotion to duty, they will very likely be kicked, bitten, scratched or trampled by one of their charges.

While he is handling this difficult job, the keeper is on view to the general public and expected to be a goodwill ambassador for the zoo. What's a tactful way to suggest to a visitor that throwing stones at the animals to wake them is not nice and not at all acceptable? How do you tell a mother or a teacher that you'd really rather her children didn't climb the guardrails and stick their hands in the cages? What's a polite way to say, "We'd really prefer that you stay on the walkways rather than tramping through the flowerbeds and shrubbery."? And, of course, there are the wonderful questions. Being a zookeeper is the same the world over, it seems, and though the questions and comments be in German, Italian, French or Hindustani, the words are the same — and equally baffling and frustrating. There are relatively innocuous ones like, "Why is the man in the cage?" or "Is it fun to feed the animals?" Probably the most maddening question is, "Do you work here?"

Picture a zookeeper in uniform with a zoo patch on his arm literally ankle deep in rhinoceros manure when a visitor leans over and asks, "Do you work here?". The answers one is tempted to make are innumerable and in some cases unprintable. The one that appeals to us most is, "No mam, I lost a contact lens, and I'm looking for it." As you stand there, rake and shovel in hand, wheelbarrow at the ready, the next question is a real poser. "Why are the rhinos locked up?" Now the visitor can see these monsters in the holding pen irritably banging the door like battering rams. "Does he dislike zookeepers in general, or is it only me he wants to see impaled on a rhino horn?"

Why, then, does anyone become a zookeeper? It's certainly not the pay which usually starts at minimum and seems to rise at just under the inflation rate. Most keepers ask themselves this same question now and then, but watching the birth of a baby giraffe or helping the veterinarian treat a rare and beautiful animal are treasures not to be found in an ordinary job. Our jobs give us our identity and feeling of importance. Without that, all the money in the world is not enough. The person responsible for the care of animals whose world population is a few hundred or less is no ordinary person. Someone who associates daily with exotic animals from faraway places is no ordinary person. Zookeeping is exciting, challenging, demanding and just plain hard work, but one thing it isn't. It isn't dull!



**Ingrid — Snow Leopard
Born March 16, 1979.**

THE SNOW LEOPARD FACTORY

By Debbie Fore, Small Mammal Department Supervisor

" . . . breeding results from San Antonio Zoo . . . have been the best in the whole world . . ." — Leif Blomqvist, International Studbook Keeper for Snow Leopards.

Snow leopards (*Panthera uncia*) are so rare that a record or studbook is kept, listing each animal in captivity. The man quoted above registers every birth, death or shipment of this species, so such a statement coming from him is quite an honor.

San Antonio Zoo acquired its first snow leopards in 1970 — a three-year-old male named Frosty and Crystal, a young female. Both animals were wild caught. Since that time five unrelated animals have been added to the zoo's collection through trades with other zoos. Twenty-five cubs have been born here, six of them this year — one male and five females.

At present it is estimated that there are only about 500 snow leopards in the wild and about the same number in captivity in zoos throughout the world. It is very difficult to be precise about the number, however. Even today the range of the snow leopard is not absolutely certain. We do know it occurs in the mountains of central southern Russia, such as the Pamirs, and from there eastward to Tibet and the Himalayas. Farther north it extends to the Altai and Sayan Mountains and into Mongolia and western China. All these areas are rugged terrain, hard to traverse for an accurate census.

Our six 1979 babies are on exhibit in one of the large cages near the main concession stand in an area we usually call the Snow Leopard Factory. Do come and see them, for they will soon be dispersed all over the world as a result of breeding loans to other zoos, trades for different bloodlines and sales or trades to acquire other species. Our factory keeps turning out snow leopards, but so far, we still have a waiting list for surplus, and we have no trouble placing them.