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**Press release**

## **In memory of Dr Bernhard Blaszkiewitz**

### **Berlin's zoos pay tribute to former director**

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Dr Bernhard Blaszkiewitz last week. A qualified biologist, Blaszkiewitz served as director of Tierpark Berlin from 1991 to 2014 and of Zoo Berlin from 2007 to 2014 – making him the first joint director of the Zoo, Tierpark and Aquarium.

### **Life and work**

Bernhard Blaszkiewitz was born in Berlin on 17 February 1954. He started regularly visiting Zoo Berlin as a child. While studying biology at Freie Universität Berlin from 1974 to 1978, he interned as an animal keeper at the Zoo. Following stints at other German zoos in Frankfurt and Gelsenkirchen, he returned to Zoo Berlin in 1984 as a curator. In 1987 he completed his doctorate at the University of Kassel, before succeeding Tierpark founder Prof. Heinrich Dathe as the director of Tierpark Berlin in 1991. In 2007, he also became the director of Zoo Berlin, taking over from Dr Jürgen Lange. He was closely involved with the Zoo and Tierpark throughout his life and, particularly during the uncertain times that followed the fall of the Wall, he campaigned tirelessly for Tierpark Berlin to maintain the form and size it still has today. In the 1990s, the Tierpark in the eastern part of the city was emerging from financial difficulties and was in dire need of modernisation. By the year 2000, Dr Blaszkiewitz had overseen the replacement of many animal stalls and facilities – some of which had only ever been provisional – with new, modern buildings. This included the construction of extensive habitats for domestic animals, mountain animals, and African ungulates. The Primate House, the Giraffe House, and popular walk-through habitats like the Lemur Woods, the petting zoo and the kangaroo area were also built during his time as director – a period of more than 20 years. In 2013, he opened the World of Birds at Zoo Berlin.

Blaszkiewitz was passionate about animals in all their diversity and had extensive knowledge of many species, with personal favourites including manatees and rhinos. His wide-ranging interest in animals and the history of zoos found expression in the more than 600 scientific and popular science publications he produced during his 40-year career. His travels took him not only to zoological institutions around the world, but also to the animals' habitats in the wild. He particularly enjoyed his visits to Africa. Blaszkiewitz was a well-known figure in the international zoo community and an active member of numerous zoological associations.

### **An eventful career**

During his time as director, Blaszkiewicz strived to ensure greater species diversity at Zoo and Tierpark Berlin. Highlights included the successful captive breeding of African and Asian elephants and Indian rhinoceroses. The first two koalas on German soil were loaned to Tierpark Berlin from San Diego Zoo in 1994 – the same year the first manatees arrived. However, Blaszkiewicz also had to make some difficult decisions during his time as director. For example, all the apes had to be removed from the Tierpark by the mid-90s as it was no longer possible to keep them in a modern, species-appropriate manner.

Other highlights of his time as director included:

- 1991: First successful breeding of white-lipped deer in Europe
- 1992: First successful breeding of Australian pelicans anywhere in the world
- 2003: First successful breeding of martial eagles anywhere in the world

### **Dedicated service to Berlin's zoos**

“He was a passionate zoologist who had a decisive influence, particularly on the Tierpark, over the past decades,” says Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem of his predecessor. “It is largely thanks to his efforts that the German capital is home to two outstanding zoological institutions whose species diversity is unparalleled around the globe.” Frank Bruckmann, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Zoologischer Garten Berlin AG, adds: “We will forever honour the memory of Dr Bernhard Blaszkiewicz. He unwaveringly forged his own path, guided by a firm set of values, and put his life at the service of Berlin's zoos. On behalf of the Supervisory Board, I would like to express our sincere condolences to his family.”