

NOVEMBER—DECEMBER / VOL. 11, NO. 6

# KOALAS

**T**o the Australian aborigines, the Dreamtime was the time of creation. It was then that the creatures of the earth, including man, came into being. There are many legends about that mystical period, but unfortunately, the koala does not fare well in any of them. Slow-witted though it is in life, the koala is generally depicted in myth and folklore as a trickster and a thief.

One tale tells of how the koala was forced to live among the newly created people of the earth. His hosts did not treat him well and refused to give him water in a time of drought, so the koala stole all the tribe's water and hid it at the top of a very tall tree, which he had caused to spring up from a mere bush. In another story, a koala joins forces with a starfish, a bird and another animal to steal a whale's canoe.

However illogical the notion of a canoe-owning whale might seem, the koala itself, zoologically, seems hardly more logical. It is one of the world's two favorite teddy bears. The other, of course, is the panda, although neither the panda nor the koala is a bear at all. In fact, unlike the panda—which is a kind of cousin twice removed to the bears of the world—the koala doesn't even come close. It is related to the wombat distantly, to the kangaroo even more distantly, and to the opossum. It is a marsupial, pouch and all. But then again, it isn't a run-of-the-mill marsupial: the typical marsupial pouch runs transversely, across the body, while the koala's pouch opens to the rear and extends upward and forward. That, apparently, keeps it from getting snagged on tree limbs.

The koala, all 10 to 30 pounds and two to three feet of it (there is an amazing range in size among adults), is a beast of tall trees. Koalas live most of their lives high up in any one of 35 species of eucalyptus, or gum tree. They subsist on eucalyptus leaves, which they can't digest on their own. They rely on microorganisms in their digestive tract to do it for them. They can also handle some mistletoe leaves and some leaves from a tree known as the box.

With so particular a diet, the first koalas in captivity died quickly because no one knew what to feed them. Until recently, very little, if anything, was known about the biology of the koala. And the knowledge we now have has come from field studies using animals that have been captured, marked and released. Situated on the marsupial family tree somewhere between the opossum and the tunneling wombat (koalas have cheek pouches to help them handle their tough, fibrous diet, and wombats have traces of the same kind of pouch), the koalas are a kind of zoological dead end. Their diet and their need to stay high in their gum trees have made them so specialized that they would be incapable of handling any marked change in their habitat or food supply.

*Continued on Page 2*

*Photo by Austin Weeks*





On occasion the koala does come down to the ground, usually to shuffle over to another tree, generally taking the opportunity along the way to lick up some gravel to aid in digestion. It is then that koalas are most vulnerable to their foremost natural enemy, the feral Australian dog we call the dingo. How much trouble they have with snakes is not really known, but Australia's pythons could give them a problem.

Koalas may be solitary, or a mature male may assemble a small harem, which he guards jealously. Mating occurs every other year from September to January, and gestation is abbreviated. (All marsupials have brief pregnancies. Even the great gray kangaroo, at 175 pounds, has a gestation period of less than 40 days.) For koalas, it is anywhere from 25 to 30 days. At birth, the single offspring weighs a barely believable one fifth of an ounce—or even a little less—and it must remain in its mother's pouch on one of her two nipples for six months if it is to have any chance of surviving. It is entirely dependent on its mother for at least a year. Once on its own, however, unless a dingo happens to get it during a transit between two trees, the koala is likely to live to be almost 20.

During the mating period, the increasingly bellicose male displays a surprising range of noises. (For some reason, people tend to think of koalas a virtually mute animals, except for those that speak English on TV in Australian airline commercials.) The territorial, harem-guarding male may issue a startling guttural roar, mew like a dyspeptic cat or make a staccato sneezing sound that can be confused with the distress of a human suffering from a head cold. On rare occasions, apparently when it is in a really foul mood, the koala makes a very loud and rapid ticking noise—like a time bomb counting down. All in all, the koala has a fairly extensive, and expressive, vocabulary.

To add some emphasis to their noise-making, the males discharge an oily substance from glands in their chest. This makes a mess of their fur, but it also gives pungent notice of prior claims to a tree and to breedable females. The noisy, musty beligerence of a koala during the mating season takes people by surprise; it just doesn't see in keeping with the animal's cuddly appearance. Koalas are, in fact, less cuddly than they look. Most

Photo by: Cindy Zeigler



wild animals are.

The koala sleeps the day away tucked up high on its perch and then feeds for most of the night, which makes it difficult to see koalas, much less study them. White settlers were in koala country in eastern Australia for more than 10 years before they reported seeing their first specimen. In Australia today, the koala has a variety of names including—quite pardonably—teddy bear and native bear. They are

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***For koalas, the fork of a tree is an ideal place for sleeping, playing and rearing young.***

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also known as bangaroos, kool-ewongs, narnagoons and buidel-beers. The latter four names, of course, are not likely to be used in everyday conversation outside of Australia.

The European discovery of the koala occurred in 1798. John Price, a servant of Captain John Hunter, the governor, went exploring with an ex-convict named James Wilson. Southwest of Sydney, They encountered a

koala, which Wilson likened to a South American sloth (the poor koala, it seems, has always had an identity crisis). The next explorer to report seeing a koala was a French ensign named Barrallier, who came across one in 1802 and said it was a kind of monkey. He traded some spears and axes with the natives for the "monkey's" four feet, which he sent off to his boss in a bottle of brandy. Slowly but surely, with family affiliations in a perfect muddle, the koala made its way into the European consciousness. That's when the killing started. The koala's dense gray pelt is luxuriously soft and fine, and by the early decades of this century, the animal had been hunted almost to extinction. The koala is now protected wherever it is found.

No one knows how many koalas there once were, how many there should be or, indeed, how many there are today. It is hard to get much of a fix on the word *endangered*, but the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the internationally recognized arbiter of the status of species, does not list the koala as endangered, threatened or even rare. Protection has evidently



been working, and the only precarious perch that the koala may now be astride is the branch on which it sits as it sleeps away its days.

It was not always that way. As recently as 1924, nearly 2 million koala skins were exported from Australia's eastern states. Three years later, 10,000 licensed trappers exported more than 600,000 pelts from Sydney alone. Public outrage at the massacre led to the enactment of protectionary measures. Today, killing a koala in Australia is considered only slightly less offensive than doing in your neighbor or spouse.

In the wild, koalas are about as inoffensive to human interests as animals can be. They don't bother agricultural enterprises, and there are no reports of attacks on man. But a koala in hand is quite a different thing from one in the bush. They have well-developed claws—as their arboreal life would naturally require—and they bite with a particularly grinding action. To look at its perennially sleepy eyes, its bulbous patent-leather nose and white-rimmed furry ears, one would not think a koala capable of any offense at all. Still, if one has to handle a koala—and most of us never have to—it's advisable to wear gloves and lift the animal from behind, under the armpits.

The early European interest shown in the koala is not difficult to understand. All the animals of Australia were oddities to Europeans who were just becoming aware of the little-known continent. Kangaroos, wombats, wallabies and the particularly dangerous snakes of the area attracted a great deal of attention. Australian animals still do, but none more affectionately than the koala. It is one of the most primitive mammals in the world and would probably make one of the least satisfactory pets (and one of the most difficult to feed). Yet each night its toylikeness is hugged to sleep by millions of children around the world. The koala that we grew up hugging is far more legend than zoological fact. The koala that exists in fact is far more interesting than its legend. It is ancient, it is secretive, and it acts in ways no one would expect it to act. Belying our first impressions and preconceived notions, the koala—mythic trickster of the Dreamtime—if something of a trickster after all.

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# TOUCAN TIDBITS

## Calendar Of Events

Membership to the Zoological Society of Florida offers many benefits over and above unlimited free admission to Metrozoo. Throughout the year many other free events are available to Society members. Watch upcoming issues of Toucan Talk, as well as the local newspapers, for details on the schedule of events here.

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**November 2nd**  
1:30 & 3:30 (following the regular bird presentations in the amphitheatre)  
The Miami Twisters - Rhythmic Gymnastics team

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**November 3rd**  
Clark Terry in Concert — 2:00

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**November 16th**  
Volunteer/Staff appreciation (by invitation) — 6:30

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**November 17th**  
Steppenwolf and Guess Who in Concert — 2:00

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**November 28th - December 1st**  
Fracé Exhibit featuring "Regal Bengal" and Charles Fracé (in person) — 10:00-4:00

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**DECEMBER**  
Free Concerts scheduled... watch for performance dates and times in your newspaper...

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**December 21st**  
Members' Day — see insert for schedule of "First" events and R.S.V.P. form

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**January 19th**  
Fourth Annual **Jungle Jog**  
New Course and Date

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**February 14th**  
Sweetheart Safari and Supper

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**March 30th**  
Easter Festival & Balloon Release

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**May 11th**  
Mother's Day, Adopt-An-Animal Breakfast with the Beasts

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### Travel Note:

There is still time to join the 8 day expedition to the Amazon which leaves Miami February 22, 1986. For registration form and more information call the Travel Coordinator at 255-5551.

## Gymnasts To Perform At Metrozoo

The MIAMI TWISTERS, a local Rhythmic Gymnastics team, will perform at Metrozoo November 2nd at 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. The team of 26 girls boasts national champions for compulsory, individual, and floor events. The team has also won many state and regional awards.

Rhythmic gymnastics is the new Olympic sport which made its debut in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. The gymnasts perform traditional dance and gymnastic moves while manipulating hand-held apparatus such as ropes, hoops, balls, and ribbons.

The girls are coached by Maureen and Mary Ellen Holdreith from the Dance and Gymnastics Center in West Kendall. Both women taught at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs this past summer.

## Metrozoo to Host 1986 Girl Scout Cookie Kick-off - January 18

The 1986 Girl Scout Cookie Safari Kick-off will be held at the Concert Field, Metrozoo, on January 18 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. All Girl Scouts, girls and adults, in uniform, past or present, will be admitted at a 50% discount.

Through the Metrozoo and Girl Scout Council of Tropical Florida's partnership, a festive and exciting 1986 Girl Scout Cookie Safari Kick-off will feature zoo animals, music, celebrities, a cookie tasting contest with local media personalities and free prizes including drawings for beautiful animal lithographs by T.A. Strawser.

The Kick-off will preview the 1986 Girl Scout Cookie Sale which will involve over 10,000 Girl Scouts in Dade and Monroe Counties. From January 23 to February 9, the official dates of the sale, the public will have the opportunity to purchase the most delicious cookies in America -- and, at the same time, support Girl Scouting!



# Photo Contest Results

The first annual photography contest sponsored by the Zoological Society of Florida in conjunction with Kiwi Bags, British Airways, and Kenya Photo Mural was an overwhelming success. A panel of professional judges selected seven winning photographs from nearly 400 entries.

Congratulations to all the winners, judges choices, and honorable mentions. Members and participants were invited to view

the photographs during the exhibit of selected entries scheduled from October 9th through the 27th at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

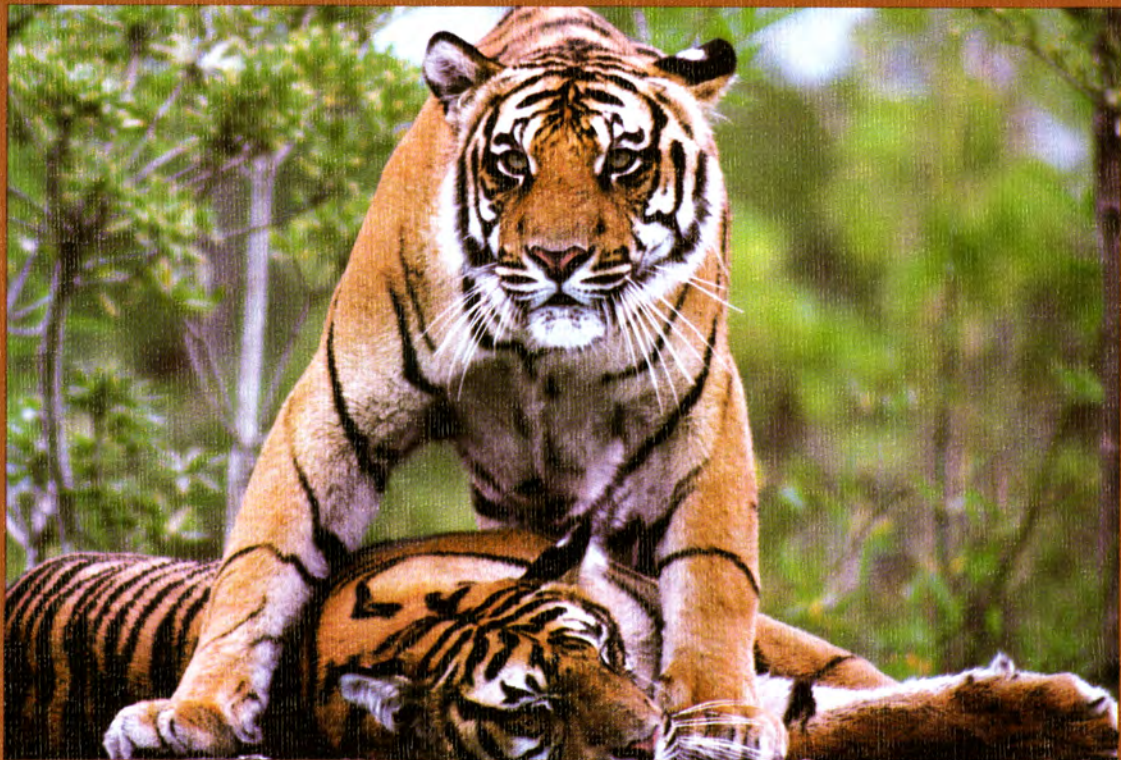
Many thanks to all those who participated in the event. Be aware too, that the cooler winter weather results in more active animals and many more photo opportunities at the zoo. It's not too early to think about the second annual contest!



**Grand Prize Winner:** Jacklyn Klionsky



**First Prize / Black & White:** Rick McCawley



**First Prize / Color:** Ernie Klock



# EDUCATION OUTLOOK

By Diane Ledder,  
Education Coordinator

## Classes For Children

### Metrozoo-Inn

Experience the sights and sounds of the zoo after dark. Spend the evening with zookeepers who will show you the zoo as you've never seen it before. Bring your sleeping bag and a toothbrush; we'll supply dinner and great adventure.

December 20 • Grades 4-6  
5 p.m. Friday to 9 a.m. Saturday  
\$17.50-Members/\$20-Nonmembers

## Classes For Teens

### Toucan Team

For students interested in careers in veterinary medicine, wildlife biology and zoology, this course provides a unique introduction to the life sciences. Participants will be eligible to join the Service Team, our teen volunteer organization, upon completion of the course.

6 consecutive Saturdays  
November 9 through December 14  
9:00 a.m. to noon  
\$60-Members / \$70-Nonmembers

## Classes For Families

### Breakfast with the Beasts

Take advantage of this opportunity to enter the zoo in the early morning hours. Join us for a continental breakfast, followed by a lesson in zoo nutrition. Learn how and what our animals are fed, and meet some of Metrozoo's most personable residents up close.

Sundays, November 17, December 15  
8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.  
\$8-Members / \$10-Nonmembers

## Classes For Adults

### Adult Lecture Series

We're offering 3 more lectures in our fall lecture series that you won't want to miss. Come have a glass of wine and hear our Metrozoo staff speak on the following topics:

**November 6.** General Curator, Bill Zeigler, will speak on his involvement with the Sumatran Rhino project and other "Species Survival Programs".

**November 13.** Dr. Gordon Hubbell, Director of Education for Metrozoo, will talk about a topic of interest to most Floridians: Sharks!

**November 20.** Curator of Mammals, Rick Barongi, will discuss his most recent trip to Zaire to transport 3 okapi to Antwerp, Belgium.

\$3 per lecture - Members  
\$5 per lecture - Nonmembers  
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

### Night Owls

Unwind after a busy week with an overnight adventure at the zoo. The program is taught by our zookeepers and includes great food and wine plus a presentation by our veterinary staff. Come and see what everyone's been talking about!

November 15  
\$17.50-Members / \$20-Nonmembers



## Coming Soon...

### The Biology Captive Wildlife

An introduction to the biology and management of captive exotics will be offered through the biology department of F.I.U. again in **January**. Check the next newsletter for specific dates and times.

### Supper Safari

This popular evening program is filled for November and December. Another class will be offered in January.

### Two for the Zoo

Look for a new weekday program designed for preschoolers and parents together, starting in January.

### Seniors Program

Monthly programs for seniors will begin in January and will include a classroom presentation with live animals and a tram tour of the zoo.



### Enroll Me In The Following Programs

Programs \_\_\_\_\_  
Session Dates \_\_\_\_\_  
Program Fees \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Membership \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(If desired)  
Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## CLASS REGISTRATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Bus. Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Student's Age \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Member  Nonmember

**Membership** entitles you to free admission to Metrozoo and 70 other zoos, special events and the Society's publications. Family \$40 / Dual \$30 / Individual \$20. Annual memberships are tax deductible. All registrations must be paid in advance. Refunds will be made up to 1 week prior to class starting date.

Mail to: **Education Department ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF FLORIDA** 12400 S.W. 152nd St., Miami, FL 33177



# President's Message

The Zoological Society of Florida has experienced a year of reality in 1985. Our membership roles have increased to over 19,000 memberships representing more than 42,000 members, which is beyond our wildest predictions. We have seen construction commence for the Christopher A. Weeks Animal Clinic,



Lester Goldstein

which we have awaited for many, many years. When complete, the clinic will provide the Animal Science Department of Metrozoo with a state of the art facility for research, diagnostic and preventive treatment of Metrozoo's animals. Our society has committed \$750,000 for the construction, furnishing, equipping and completion of the clinic.

Growth necessitates expansion. The Board of Directors has increased its number to thirty-three for broader representation of the membership. The new Board of Trustees has increased its membership to one hundred and six members. On behalf of the Society, let me express our grateful and deep appreciation to the officers and directors new and old for their hard work, dedication and support to the Society and its various projects. Further, to those directors who have completed their terms and are moving up to our Board of Trustees, my congratulations and best wishes. I know we will have their continuing support. To the newcomers—welcome to the special team of people dedicated to the Society, Metrozoo and the community.

The Society again participated in the Metro Dade County budget hearings this year! Volunteer supporters of Metrozoo clad in pink Zoological Society shirts attended both budget hearings as evidence of the Society's support of Metrozoo. Roger Carlton, our First Vice President, and I made

presentations to the County Commission and once again successfully persuaded this august body to approve the measures which we presented. We expressed our thanks on your behalf to the Mayor and the other Commissioners for the continued support of Metrozoo.

These are some of the projects with which we were involved this past year. We have announced the Koala project elsewhere in this newsletter and shall announce exciting and new events and projects in future newsletters.

Let me remind you that the Zoological Society is each and every one of you! The goals this year could not have been realized without the hard work, support and generosity of the individuals, the corporations, the foundations as well as you, the members of the Society. My appreciation and thanks to all of you for contributing to our world class Metrozoo. As the President of the Society, I look forward to an even more exciting and eventful year in 1986 and I'm sure that with all of us working together this upcoming year will be an even greater success!

## The Zoological Society of Florida Welcomes Its New Board of Directors and Trustees

We are pleased to welcome three new members to our Board of Directors: Rick Hensler, of Kilpatrick, Healy-Noble and Hensler, Inc.; Hank Luria, of L. Luria and Sons; and George Fortner, of Southern Bell. These newly appointed members will join Frank Balamonte, American Bankers Insurance Group; Jeb Bush, Intramerica Investments; Roger Carlton, Miami Off-Street Parking; Ron Esserman, South Motors Group; Ray Goode, Babcock Company; Sherrill Hudson, Deloitte, Haskins & Sells; Laura Jack, Racal-Milgo; Charles Kantor, Eagle National Bank;

Debra Dunn McDonald, Dun Promotions; Richard Shack, Richard Shack, Inc.; and Dr. Herbert Wertheim, Dr. Herbert Wertheim Foundation who were elected by the Board of Trustees to complete the Zoological Society Board of Directors for 1986.

Our officers are Lester Goldstein, President; Roger Carlton, First Vice President; R. Ray Goode, Second Vice President; Jeb Bush, Secretary; and Lawrence O. Turner Jr., Treasurer. Ending their term on the Board of Directors and becoming part of the Board of Trustees are Robert Harris and Ana Soler.

## The Zoo Goes To Columbus.

Zoological Society and Metrozoo staff members spent the week of September 7th through 14th attending the A.A.Z.P.A. (American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums) annual conference in Columbus, Ohio. The meetings featured presentations on all aspects of animal management, education, marketing, and public relations. The conference was attended by over 1,200 delegates from zoos across the country.

Zoological Society President Lester Goldstein attended the conference along with Executive Director Joe Ferrer, Development Director Cindy Zeigler, and Education Coordinator Diane Ledder. Docents Patti Ragan and Pat Kelly also attended.

Papers were given by Metrozoo staff members Dr. Gordon Hubbell, Director of Education; Rick Barongi, Curator of Mammals; and Janet Ross, Publicist. The conference provided a welcome opportunity to exchange ideas and information with other zoo professionals.



Business Manager, Metrozoo, Eric Stephens and Education Coordinator, Zoological Society, Diane Ledder.



Assistant Director of Metrozoo, Al Fontana with docents Pat Kelly (left) and Patty Regan (right).





Metrozoo is about to become the fourth zoo in the country and the first outside California to have koalas on permanent display. By next year we plan to have six koalas housed in a new "state of the art" exhibit featuring both indoor and outdoor viewing, supplemented by a video monitor for koala "close ups". The exhibit will be totally self-contained, including its own food preparation and storage areas, offices, and isolation ward. The dietary requirements for the animals will be met by growing eucalyptus on the zoo grounds. Seven acres of land are presently being cleared for the eucalyptus grove.

In order to fund the exhibit, the Zoological Society has committed to raise \$150,000 for its construction. To kick off the "koala campaign", Lord and Taylor sponsored a black tie dinner-dance and fashion show on Saturday, October 5th at the International Mall. The \$200 a plate event was hosted by Lord and Taylor chief executive officer Joseph E. Brooks and his wife, Alice. The guest of honor at the ball was "Blinky Bill", a very personable three year old koala on loan from the San Diego zoo. "Bill" and his keeper, Jim Maxwell also visited with zoo employees and volunteers during their four day stay.

The koala weekend was a memorable one for everyone involved. Members can become involved too, through the upcoming "take a koala to lunch" program, designed to raise funds for the Eucalyptus trees. Look too, for a special "koala mailing", coming soon, to support the program.



L to R: Joseph and Alice Brooks, Frank Batamonte, 'Koala' by Charles Frace.

Immediately after being presented with an appreciation gift for hosting the Zoological Society's Koalaball, Joseph Brooks, Chairman of Lord & Taylor, pledged an additional \$10,000 for the Koala Project at Metrozoo. Lord & Taylor joins ranks with the Dr. Herbert A. Wertheim Foundation as major contributors to the Koala Project scheduled to open December, 1986.



Members of the Koalaball committee: Kelly Sastre, Koalaball Co-Chairman; Frank Batamonte, Koalaball Chairman; Peggy Kaufman, Vice-President of Public Relations, Lord & Taylor; and Lester Goldstein, Zoological Society President.



A special thanks goes to the San Diego Zoo for their loan of Koala 'Blinky Bill' and his keeper, Jim Maxwell.



# KOALA



# Jungle Jog!!

The fourth annual Jungle Jog, sponsored by the Zoological Society of Florida and Racial-Milgo has been **rescheduled for January 19, 1986**. The change in date was necessitated by the unanticipated rescheduling of the Orange Bowl Marathon.

This year's race will take a new and much improved course through Metrozoo, covering more paved surface, and finishing within the zoo, on the concert field. First, second, and third place commemorative awards will be given in each of 18 categories.

Wheelchair and corporate divisions will also be featured. A one mile fun-run will follow the start of the five mile run.

The early registration fee for the five mile race will be \$8.00. Runners entering after January 3rd will pay \$10.00. Please call the Society office for further details.



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**Executive Director:**

Joseph E. Ferrer

**Editor:**

Diane Ledder

**Design:**

Janice McDougall

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## Frace Returns To Metrozoo

The Zoological Society of Florida once again proudly welcomes Charles Fracé and his presentation of wildlife art. Mark your calendars (November 28th - December 1st) and check your holiday gift list. Keep in mind that Fracé prints are collectors items — given today as a gift they will become even more valuable in years to come.

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## Holiday Magic...

The holidays are upon us; a time of gift giving. This season, the Zoological Society is offering its members a chance to give the ZOO to their family and friends at a discount! If you purchase a membership at the regular price, you can buy up to two additional memberships at half price. By now you should already have received our Holiday Magic mailing. If you have not, and would like to take advantage of this offer, contact the membership office at 255-5551.



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