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*- English version -*

### ***UNSEXY CELEBRITIES: Photographer Alexander von Rechwitz has captured the Berlin Zoo's inhabitants on film***

At first, he didn't get it. Malaga-born photographer Alexander von Rechwitz, 38, had been living in Berlin for a while but every time he read about Effi, Bulette or Sangha in the newspapers, he was puzzled.

He concluded that because the names cropped up so often they must be celebrities. Everyone seemed to know them - except him. How could he have known that animals from the Berlin Zoo have been part of public life in Berlin for generations? People know and love them well, and the birth of a successor makes people in the German capital go wild. Effi the monkey, Bulette the hippo and Sangha the gorilla gin are just some of the animal stars Berliners regularly visit their darlings, and the chequered history of the zoo has done nothing to alter this fact.

The royal menagerie donated by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV in 1842 formed the initial stock of the zoo that opened two years later and today has one of the broadest collections of animal species in the world.

During the war years, the animals shared the same fate as Berlin's human population, suffering hunger and distress. The people grew attached to them - like Knautschke the hippopotamus. He was born during the Second World War and became more famous than many a mayor, which gave rise to an expression still widely used amongst Berliners: „He's as well-known as Knautschke.“

During the 1960s the zoo was used as a recreational area by West Berlin residents cut off from East Berlin and the surrounding countryside by the Berlin Wall. They liked going to say hello to Knautschke and co. because there, you could stretch your legs - in the zoo of all places where the wild animals were confined. Kindred spirits, so to speak?

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This love affair fascinated Alexander von Rechwitz. In a project lasting over two years, he photographed the animals in a way that is usually reserved for glamour girls. He gave the city's famous animals a face.

The black-and-white photographs (originally 125 x 125 cm), depict the animals as individuals rather than as representatives of a species. The monkey is more than just a hairy distant cousin: it's the saucy gorilla gin, Sangha. Bulette is not just a hippo, but a sensitive creature with a tear in the corner of its eye. And the marabou, generally considered an exceptionally ugly fowl, has taken full advantage of the photo opportunity.

Alexander von Rechwitz has produced some fascinating eyeball-to-eyeball contacts with the animals in his 6x6 close-ups. And he has discovered that animals give off a lot of energy. "They can change you even if it's only for a few hours."