

New look, focus eyed by Ueno Zoo

Tokyo's 110-year-old Ueno Zoo has embarked on a program to take it into the 21st century.

Zoo authorities say that instead of just displaying animals, like conventional zoos, they will promote breeding endangered animals and educating the public on the importance of preserving the environment.

Called "Zoo 2001 plan," it is part of a blueprint for change drawn up by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government for its zoos and aquariums.

The basis is a world strategy for wild animal protection announced in 1980 by the International Union of Nature Conservation.

Under the plan, about ¥55.9 billion will be spent by the end of the decade for animals, with particular attention on 50 rare species.

As a first step, Ueno Zoo — the nation's oldest — is constructing a new habitat for gorillas and tigers for completion in 1994.

The facility, with a total floor space of 4,400 sq. meters, will have basement living quarters for animals and a ground-floor display area, with vegetation simulating a natural environment.

The public will be able to view the animals through reinforced glass windows.

The zoo plans to obtain two bands of gorillas, each with five members, and hopes to develop a breeding program.

The zoo's breeding programs will involve 16 species in all, including western lowland gorillas, Bengal wildcats, Malayan bear and African python.

The zoo also plans to build a

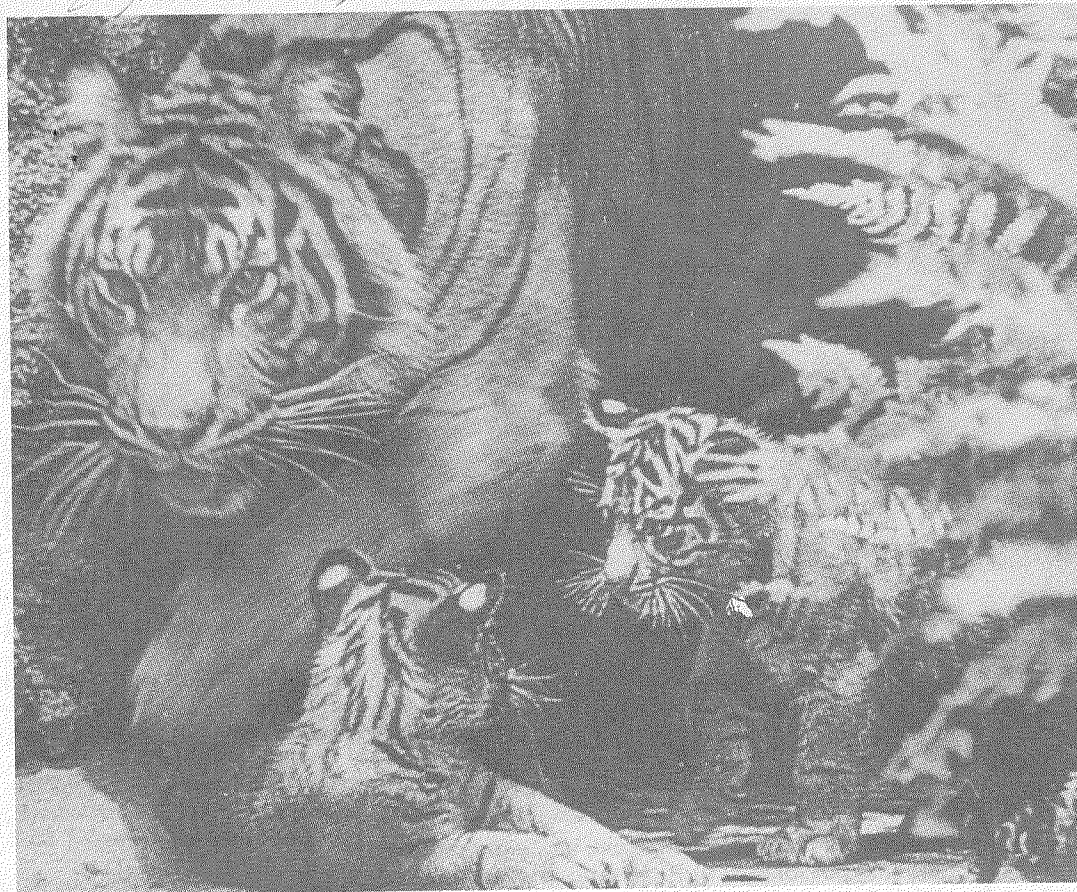
seminar house and a facility for training environment education specialists.

The 14-hectare zoo currently has about 2,000 animals and fish of about 400 species.

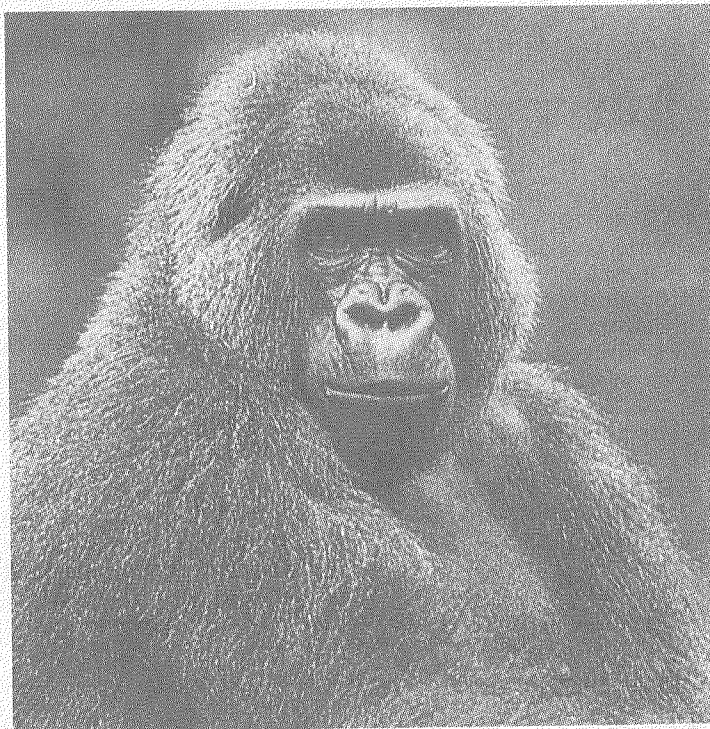
The number of visitors has been declining gradually from 4.54 million in 1989 to 4.45 million in 1990 and 4.24 million in 1991.

Mitsuko Matsui, who became the zoo's director in July, said the zoo is trying to keep its animals healthy and make their living environment as close as possible to a natural setting.

The 144-member Japan Zoo and Aquarium Association also has programs for animal breeding and preservation, but the Ueno Zoo's plan is far larger in scale, according to the association.



TIGERS will be getting a new home at Ueno Zoo in a special facility for endangered animals.



GORILLAS are one of 16 animal species targeted for a breeding program at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo.