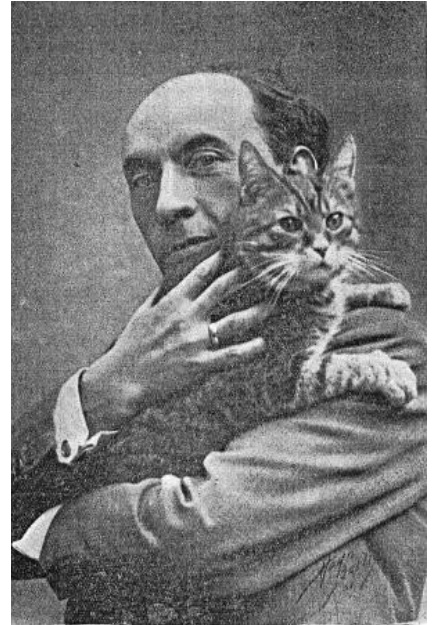


THE ORIGIN OF WORLD ANIMAL DAY

The idea of World Animal Day was originated by Heinrich Zimmermann, a writer and publisher of the magazine Mensch und Hund/Man and Dog who was born in Warsaw, Poland but moved to Berlin, Germany.

He organized the first World Animal Day celebration on 24 March 1925 in Berlin, and moved it to 4 October for the first time in 1929. Initially he found a following only in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia. Every year Zimmermann worked tirelessly on the promotion of World Animal Day. Finally, in May 1931 at a congress of the world's animal protection organizations in Florence Italy, his proposal to make 4 October World Animal Day universal was unanimously accepted.

Heinrich Zimmermann (1887 - 1942) was a journalist, editor, writer and animal protection activist. As key organizer for the movement for the prevention of cruelty to animals, he was also the publisher of the magazine Mensch und Hund/Man and Dog with new issues every two weeks. He used the magazine to promote the welfare of animals to the general public and established a World Animal Day Committee.



Heinrich Zimmermann

Zimmermann was also the publisher of two heavy volumes of the Lexicon for Friends of Dogs and the book Animal Brother. After organizing World Animal Day first in Berlin, he managed to have a resolution adopted at the International Animal Protection Congress in Florence, Italy on 8 May 1931, making 4 October celebrated worldwide as World Animal Day.



The first World Animal Day took place on 24 March 1925 in the Sport Palace in Berlin, Germany. Over 5,000 people attended the event. There was a simple reason why the date was 24 March: The organizers had planned on 4 October, but the Sport Palace, which was the only venue large enough to hold the thousands of visitors, was not available on that day. In the ensuing years, the organizers stuck with March but in 1929 World Animal Day was celebrated for the first time on 4 October; the day it was originally intended to be.

Sport Palace, Berlin. Venue of the first World Animal Day celebration 24 March 1925 attended by 5,000 people

World Animal Day was chosen to be on 4 October as it is the feast day of Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, including animals. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) was the founder of the Catholic Franciscan order. Legend has it that Saint Francis was able to talk to animals, which is why he is depicted in numerous paintings in their company. He would also preach to the animals and even tamed a wolf.

He died on the eve of 4 October, which became his patron saint's day. Assisi is a town in central Italy, north of Rome, only two hours from Florence where in 1931, 705 years after Francis' death, World Animal Day was officially adopted.



Saint Francis and the wolf



Assisi, central Italy

Misconceptions

Often, it is wrongly reported that World Animal Day was adopted at a meeting of ecologists in 1931 and that the day was intended to highlight the plight of endangered species. Maybe this mistake is made because Saint Francis is also the Patron Saint of Ecology.

The Florence meeting which took place was an International Congress of Animal Protection Organizations. As early as 1860 biennial meetings of these organizations were held across Europe and were often attended by hundreds of people from many countries. It was animal protection organizations who selected World Animal Day, in Florence Italy, not ecologists.

Source: Wim DeKok, World Animal Net