

PICTURE SUNDAY WORLD EXCLUSIVE

HERE'S LOOKING AT ZOO KID



CUDDLY. But the red pandas can be feisty

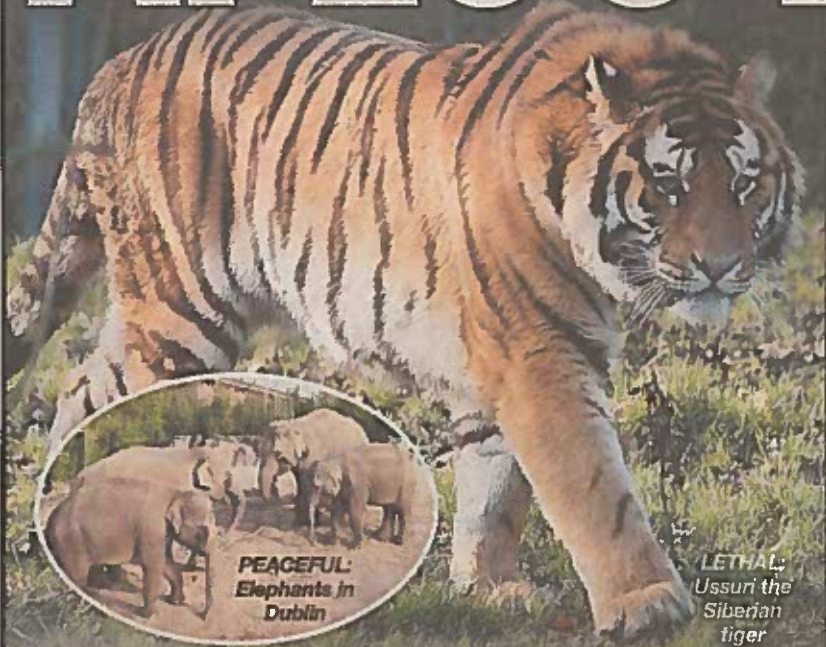
NEWS IN BRIEF

IT'S A STRING OF BAD LUCK

THE COUNTRY'S most famous banjo festival will not go ahead this year due to lack of funds.

The Johnny Keenan Banjo Festival, which was held in Longford for 10 years, last year controversially moved to Tullamore to try to boost its sponsorship and attendance figures.

However, organisers say it just hasn't worked out and it's believed money is one of the key reasons for the cancellation.



PEACEFUL: Elephants in Dublin

LETHAL: Ussuri the Siberian tiger

Ger's walk on the wild side to see beasts beat recession

SUNDAY WORLD reporters are known for going where others fear to tread.

So when the boss sent me off to meet with some wild beasts, I was all set for yet another scary encounter.

Luckily, my adventure was in the most civilised wilderness possible, as Dublin Zoo is the place for a walk on the wild side without the danger.

The award-winning zoo has been bringing wildlife from all over the world to our doorstep for 183 years, and was recently listed as one of the top three zoos in Europe, says head zookeeper Gerry Creighton.

"We had 1,029,000 visitors last year, which is some achievement during a recession when most places are struggling," Gerry says.

Gerry, who is familiar to fans of the popular RTE series *The Zoo*, may be Ireland's very own Dr Doolittle, but he says all the keepers have to wary of some of their most ferocious inhabitants.

Charm

Ussuri the Siberian tiger, who has just arrived from a zoo in France, is one cool cat, but he has yet to charm his way into the hearts of Dublin Zoo's two equally ferocious tigresses. Weighing 300 kilos and at 13 feet long, Ussuri is a massive beast and he's just two years old. "He'll put on another 50kg by the time he's fully grown," says keeper Ciaran McMahon.

Just yards away, a much bigger - but gentler -



TREAT: Geraldine feeding a giraffe at Dublin Zoo

By **GERALDINE COMISKEY**

beast showed his tender side. Uppali the Asian elephant nuzzled his four female friends, Dina (26), Jasmin (22), Amak (nine) and Asha (six). Uppali (17), is a bit of a playboy, and all four female elephants will get to bear his children, but his favourite is the mature lady. "He loves

Dina, she's an old girl and she knows what to do with him," Ciaran says.

Before I left there was just time for keeper Eddie O'Brien to introduce me to the red pandas. They look like teddy bears, but their cuddly appearance doesn't fool Eddie

"They have sharp little teeth and claws and they're not afraid to use them. I don't handle them unless it's absolutely necessary."

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WILDLIFE: Gerry and Geraldine



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