

Miranda Stevenson, OBE, a friend of South Asian conservation Sally Walker

About a week ago I went to London from USA to attend a party! It was a very special party for a special person ... Miranda Stevenson, Chair of the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums, BIAZA and long time fan of Zoo Outreach Organization. She is retiring at the end of March and David Field, a long term chela and friend of Miranda and London Zoo Director arranged a "Retirement Party" for her ... but without her knowledge! It was to be a "surprise party" and as Miranda's best friend (well, she is *my* best friend) I was expected to attend but also do it secretly! I figured that some one would spill the beans about the party and she would find out. But I didn't want it to be me.

Why, you ask, am I featuring an illustrated story about Miranda. Well, Miranda visited our Subcontinent times to teach zoo people from South Asian countries a range of topics on zoo management. She was a very popular lecturer in our SAZARC meetings. That's why ... we should not forget her and we won't. She will be coming again in July to teach how to organise and maintain NATIONAL zoo associations.

I first met Miranda Stevenson in the early 80's at Edinburgh Zoo. Miranda was tasked with giving me a personal tour around the zoo. I ended up staying with her a few days of this trip, which led to my staying with her or sharing a room at many events, conferences and layovers, and also trundling down to her country house at Hampshire to enjoy a little country life with her and her tolerant husband Chris.

Miranda was a bit younger to me but far more experienced in the zoo world, so I counted on her as a mentor as well as a friend. She knew everyone in the zoo community and, unlike me, was liked by everyone she knew. She shared knowledge and enthusiasm with me and with anyone who approached her for assistance. She never bragged about her own achievements, to wit, I learned of her OBE (Order of the British Empire) from a magazine a few months after. I only learned of her EAZA Award yesterday(!) having begged her for documents that would help me write this article, as I knew well that I was deficient in knowledge about my best friend!

Miranda is retiring from her job as Association Chair of BIAZA end March and is such a humble person she will



PARTY: It was a dark and wintry night ... all loyal friends of Miranda ran the gauntlet of creepy scenes to reach the Reptile House (arrrrrrggggg) in order to pay homage to their zoo queen. It was a surprise that Miranda (who is very nosy and stubborn) did not get it! She was really surprised when David led her in! Photo by Chris Morris.

PAST : Portrait of Miranda checking one of her presentations at a South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation SAZARC Conference in Lahore, Pakistan. Photo by Z.O.O.

Photos by Chris Morris, John Pullen and Sally Walker



PARTY: About one fourth of the room! A great turn-out for a great person at a great zoo.



Many many dignitaries of the zoo world ... Jo Gipps, Brian Bertran, Roger Wheeler, Simon Tonge, Michael Brambell, (not pictured Peter Olney, Fiona Fiskien, Lesley Dickie, and so many more....)

never write an autobiography relating her successes and triumphs in the world of zoos and conservation. I want to share with our South Asian readers how much she gave to zoos, conservation, animal welfare and people in those fields. Many South Asian zoo professionals met her and learned from her by attending and teaching at three South Asian Zoo Association conferences ... in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

David Field and his elves arranged a party for Miranda attended by a skillion friends and fans. We talked till horse, drank till tipsy, ate till sluggish and danced till dizzy. A grand time was had by all. Congrats David!

Miranda's zoo career started when she took a job as a zookeeper at Chester Zoo, where she made friends with both humans and animals and generally loved her work there. After some time she decided to top up her degree in Natural Sciences (Trinity College, Dublin) with more academic creds and took a post as Scientific Officer at the Welsh Plant Breeding Station (1972) and later as a researcher and a Ph.D. scholar at University College, Wales. Her love of primates surfaced when she pursued her doctorate on 'An Ethological Analysis of *Callithrix j. jacchus* with Special Emphasis on Playful Interactions.' Following this she accepted a Curatorial position at Edinburgh Zoo (1978) and was promoted to Dy. Director (1996). Her move to Edinburgh Zoo brought about her membership in the European Association of Zoos and Aquariums in which she was very effective and dedicated. She became an enthusiast of zoo membership societies, promoting and helping them throughout countries and even continents. Her expertise on primates led her to manage the EEP and an



PARTY : Miranda chats with "last ditchers" at the party: Lesley Dickie, Sally, Chris Morris (husband) and Annie (all the way from Spain).

International Studbook for Diana monkey (*Cercopithecus diana*). She also presided over the EAZA Primate Taxon Advisory Group and generated the first Regional Collection Plan for EAZA on Primates.

In the latter part of 1980 she joined a panel for the EEC CITES Committee which formulated standards for best care and housing of primate all of which fed in to the high standards of care and coordinated breeding programmes in EAZA facilities. Miranda Chaired the Penguin Taxon Advisory Committee (TAG) which perhaps was the basis for her extreme passion for penguins which motivated her colleague David Field to bully a famous cartoonist in Great Britain to create a cartoon of a penguin with Miranda's face and a penguin's body presented to an overjoyed Miranda at her so-called Retirement party!

At the end of the 90's Miranda became CEO of the Marwell Conservation Trust in England where she created new exhibits and a popular new Conservation Education Center, new performance reviews and many, many other improvements.

In 2000 Miranda left Marwell to become a free ranging consultant, helping zoos, including ZSL (London Zoo) by managing their conservation programmes. In 2003 Miranda took up the job she is retiring from now, the Director of BIAZA, British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

Throughout her career Miranda has always taken interest in the "big picture", e.g. the international zoo community. She contributed largely to this community by participating in the creation and compilation of the 2nd World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy: Building a Future for Wildlife.

Miranda has also served her regional zoo association as a member of the Legislation Committee. This served South Asia well as she made three trips to SAZARC meetings where she taught the principles of zoo legislation, animal welfare, conservation and animal management in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. She has already agreed to visit India (for the first time) to help the writer convince selected members of SAZARC to create National level zoo associations in their country, as the cost of flying to different countries for meetings and conferences is beyond what their governments or zoos will contribute.



David's greatest party achievement .. he convinced a famous cartoonist passionate about penguins to create a cartoon for Miranda ... seen here admiring with awe and delight her portrait with a penguin's body created just for her. She is well known for her penguin passion!



Top photo:
Miranda speaking at the Inaugural function of the 3rd Annual SAZARC conference held at Dhaka Zoo in Dhaka, Bangladesh.



Bottom photo:
A gala dinner was held the last day of the conference with multiple dignitaries from government departments associated with the zoo. Miranda is speaking with the Dhaka Zoo Curator (not seen) with Sally, R.K. Sahu, Director of Ahmedabad Zoo, Gujarat, India and M.M. Qazi, Director of Karachi Zoo, Pakistan.



Miranda explaining how she will go about a mock inspection of some enclosures in Dhaka Zoo. Our hope was that some of the participants would pick up suggestions and inspect their own zoo often. Miranda has done myriad zoo inspections over the years and also contributed much to the process through committee membership.



South Asia Experience

Dhaka Zoo, Bangladesh

Miranda's first visit to South Asia was in 2002 when we (SAZARC) conducted our third conference in Bangladesh with themes of Standards & Legislation as well as Conservation & Welfare in zoos, Bangladesh Zoo Association, SAZARC constitution approval.

In this conference Miranda explained so clearly the theme of legislation for zoos, a working group of primarily Bangladesh participants worked very hard and created a very reasonable skeleton of zoo legislation for Bangladesh. It has to be sent to government of course and a government committee used it as a working draft. Today it is completed and awaiting final approval in the legislature.

Miranda also explained about National Associations and how, although Bangladesh was a member of SAZARC, they could benefit by a National Association as well, since not all could attend SAZARC in other South Asian countries due to costs of travel. This did not materialise then but there is another and stronger initiative which the writer has initiated for all the countries with multiple zoos to create national legislation. A workshop has been planned and Miranda will attend and assist with problems of this workshop. She also spoke much about animal welfare in zoos and at the writers suggestion we challenged the zoo to open to our inspection and comment. They agreed and this turned out to be a kind but truthful exercise and all the participants were benefited.



Lahore Zoo, Pakistan

The second time Miranda visited South Asia (2004) was for our Fifth SAZARC conference in Lahore Zoo, Pakistan. The Training theme was on modern zoo population management which Miranda knows very well and we had Dr. Robert O. Lacy, Population Biologist and Chair of the Conservation Breeding Specialist group IUCN SSC who gave excellent technical lectures on the same topic. People in this part of the world do not have much opportunity to learn such topics and the conference attendees were very pleased to have the opportunity from a persons such as Bob and Miranda.

Miranda was accompanied by her husband Chris Morris and both added much to the social agenda. After the conference the Pakistani's insisted on a tour of interesting aspects of the country which was much enjoyed.



Top : Validictory ceremony after a very successful conference. In this conference, we organised also the first 2 day Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, South Asia was conducted at this conference and worked so well that it was continued at every conference since.

Middle : Lahore and Pakistani Press interviewed Resource Persons and other guests as well as senior staff about the event. The interviews took place during a tour of the Lahore Zoo during the conference.

Bottom : Miranda's lectures were well attended and much appreciated by the South Asian Zoos' participants. The formation of SAZARC made it possible for zoo personnel from different countries in the Region of South Asia to meet for the first time and also be exposed to truly modern zoo management and principles.

Sri Lanka's National Zoos

Miranda's third visit to assist SAZARC was the 2nd Sri Lankan SAZARC conference and SAZARC's 9th conference. We had been pushing zoo legislation in several conferences but this one was meant to give a real kick.

In addition to Miranda we invited a lawyer, Dr. Kris Vehrs of the American Zoo Association who also was an Association Director like Miranda. They made a good team.

There were training lectures and zoo legislation working groups with the groups meeting by country. At this conference the Bangladesh contingent came with their own legal advisor and ministry officials, and with help from Kris and Miranda filled many gaps and tied many loose ends in their legislation draft. Every country had a working group of its own to discuss legislation.

The Central Zoo of Kathmandu had taken up zoo legislation at the behest of SAZARC Chair who convinced their government by sending Mr. R. Marimuthu to do a survey of the zoos of Nepal. Instead of one zoo as was claimed for decades, there were close to 20 zoos. Nepal used CZA as a model for their legislation.

The same strategy had been used on India which claimed about 50 zoos in the early 80's but actually had 117 zoos after Zoo Outreach Organization surveyed, 139 zoos after Nandankanan Zoo Director surveyed and nearly 600 zoos as per survey of the Central Zoo Authority after its formation as part of zoo legislation of the country, and legal registration of all zoos. India was the first country in the region to create detailed zoo legislation including norms and standards which are assessed and revised if needed every year.

Sri Lanka was the first country in the region to have zoo legislation but it was an instrument to set up a series of zoos under the National Zoo, but the group urged them to revise their legislation to include norms and standards.

Along with the lectures and working groups, zoo visits were scheduled for three groups to conduct inspection on the enclosures while they visited and observe the facilities and standards of care and welfare. This exercise melded well with the legislation lectures and discussions.

The conference ended with a gala dinner and a socko tour around Sri Lanka!



Top: The legislation lawyer and professor, all decked out for a gala dinner.
Bottom: An inspection group headed by Miranda.



Miranda is a wonderful partner in any endeavour. She is loyal, astute, creative, honest, and unremittingly helpful. She has a knack for getting on with people, including those who work or have worked for her. She has gained the respect of the entire zoo community without a sliver of expectation.

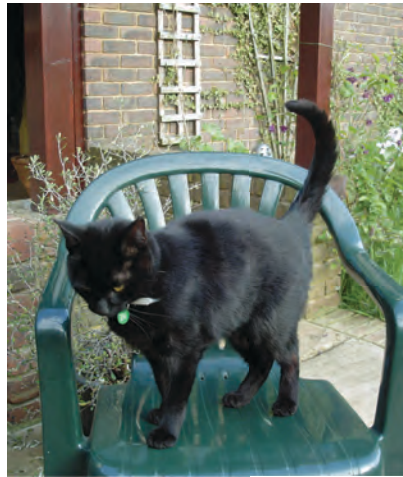
Miranda has been honoured by an EAZA Professional Excellence Award from her European colleagues and a much vaulted award from her country. The OBE, Order of the British Empire, (2012) is one of the highest awards a British citizen can receive and Miranda has done for her outstanding work for zoos and conservation. She is liable to have to endure further praise and honor as a host of awards are waiting to be linked with this remarkable zoo lady

... despite all that, Miranda does have some notable quirks. Fortunately for our friendship (sort of) I have similar quirks, such as a cat fetish, and a very tolerant spirit (smirk). Miranda and I are about equal on the topic of cats ... we adore them as elderly ladies should and always try to have them around and treat them like royalty. When I visit Miranda, I go to see her cats as much as (or more than) her and Chris, because her charming cats just adore me! All of us love to have the cats sleep in bed with us and Miranda's cats are generally cooperative. They tend to move around at night but normally do sleep with Miranda and Chris ... EXCEPT when Sally comes. The cats remember me from year or two and are quick to come to me for love and attention. Miranda and Chris will not admit it but they are jealous over the behaviour of their cats. When I'm around one or the other of the cats sleeps with me ... they take turns running one another off my bed. I can hear Miranda and Chris talking in low tones about how much time the cats have spent with me. I try not to overstay my visit as one never knows how far someone will go under such circumstances. See the next column(s) for some pictures of our cats!

The Archers!

Another quirk that is less attractive is Miranda's obsession with a 15 minute British radio programme that has been going on for over 60 years, that is **The Archers!** Miranda has been listening to this programme since she was a rather young child and seems to think still, that the characters are her kin. She has her life set up so that she will never miss a session of **The Archers!** Such as a radio ... in her shower stall! It doesn't matter what Miranda's guests want to do, first (on Archer days) everything in the house stops until every mundane minute has been listened to and dissected! If a guest doesn't listen, Miranda considers it an accident and hastens to catch you up with what happened. Well, what can you expect if someone has been listening to **The Archers** for 60 years. Even I confessed last visit that I thought it was growing on me.

Miranda's Cats



Saffron in the back garden (chair)



Sage in the grass.

Miranda's cat names are all herbs



Sage and Chris in trouble!

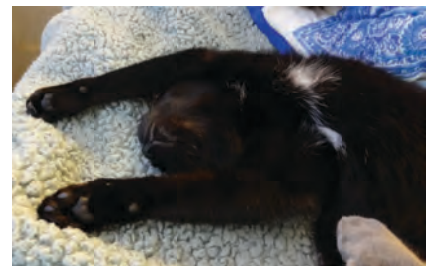
Sally's Cats



Red Panda lived in India



Google likes to sleep on my computer



Babycat likes to sleep on her back



Kirstin Pullen is the next incumbent Chair for BIAZA. Her favourite animals are gorillas, saki monkeys and hornbills. Animals and conservation have always been a part of her family ... her sister is a marine biologist for WWF, International and brother is Curator of Mammals at Marwell. She believes in the role of zoos and aquariums can play in the conservation of wildlife. Her hopes for BIAZA over the next 10 years are to become the recognised standard within the UK and Ireland, not just within our own profession, but also within the political, business and social communities.