

# Kabul Zoo, Afghanistan ... an Update

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## The animals of Kabul Zoo

The animals of Kabul Zoo had a problem for years with visitors tormenting them by poking sticks through the bars or even chucking stones or other items at the animals. This has been a perennial problem in virtually all the South Asian countries. Due to the high illiteracy levels in Afghanistan, signs erected to combat the bad habits of the public didn't work. Instead, the zoo staff discussed and decided to bring out the big guns, and tackle the problem electronically with CCTV (See Aziz Gul in the monitoring room). A visitor has to be pretty brazen to ignore the loudspeaker chiding him politely for messing with the animals.

This is just one example of the work - much of it innovative and expensive - that the Kabul Zoo and its Mayor, officers and friends have achieved since war effectively flattened the zoo, injured and killed many animals. When the plight of the zoo and particularly the male lion, Marjan, who was blinded by enemy fire was brought to public attention, the whole world was touched and brought out help.



**Food storage area**

Selected Kabul Zoo personnel have visited India several times in order to learn new methods of animal management, public education, and other zoo basics. Those visits have been very helpful to the zoo. The Kabul zoo now provides over 40 different diets for the animals and the development of a relatively sophisticated system.



**Aziz Gul Saqib, Director, Kabul Zoo, in the CCTV monitoring room. Strategically placed CCTV cameras have been installed around the zoo. A public address system is linked to it and any misbehavior picked up is dealt with a publicly delivered warning. Embarrassment is effective! Many zoos in Asia have this problem (notwithstanding zoos in the rest of the world) but few will take such an expensive and time-consuming step. It is an unusual case of animal welfare at work !!!**



**A newly refurbished education and meeting room. It is sometimes used by councillors from the Kabul City Government for their official meetings, also. Last year the zoo had its highest visitor levels ever, with over 650,000 people passing through the zoo. In addition, as part of its education programme, some 40,000 school children visited the zoo on free study visits. This education / meeting room was exceptionally busy and appreciated.**

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The zoo only has one lioness now after her companion died three years ago. Editors' note: it would be nice if some zoo would contribute one or two of sterile lions as companions for this lovely and lonely lady. She is successor to the late Marjan, the one-eyed lion who captured the heart of the international press when they covered the start of the battle to oust the Taliban.



The peacocks are in good numbers in the zoo and have spacious and well-vegetated enclosures which look like their natural habitat.



Two vultures that form part of the zoo's captive breeding programme. Last year the zoo released into the wild 60 birds that had come through the programme.



The zoo's three camels relax in the afternoon sunshine.



The brown bear was part of a consignment of animals originally donated to Kabul zoo nine years ago by the Chinese government.



Tail end of a group of school kids brought to the zoo by their teachers; it is a very popular learning activity!





Although Kabul Zoo has literally risen out of ashes and has much to be proud of, it also has a way to go before taking its place as a modern zoo. This is important because it is the ONLY zoo in a country, e.g. Afghanistan. These two pictures symbolize a problem ... they are very old fashioned ... small cages in the 21st Century? Concrete islands with no trees for primates, no shade, etc. Both exhibits have been recently constructed.

On the other hand, the two exhibits below also have been constructed relatively recently and while they are not the same level as western landscape exhibits, they have retained their trees, bushes, grass, open space, some even have ponds. It would be very nice if the Kabul Zoo stopped with the 1950' exhibits and got into the 21st Century. In earlier days when they were struggling on every level it is understandable they couldn't study modern design but now ...? The municipality government is enthusiastic to improve ... a good sign for future.



Left to right : Dr. Jamshid, the Zoo's young veterinarian, Dr. Jalil, Mayhew Foundation's "go to" guy for Kabul Zoo base; visiting American veterinarian, Dr. Susan Chadima; and the zoo's manager, AzizGul Saqib.

Dr. Jalil is a member of the Mayhew's veterinary team in London, with additional responsibility for developing the Mayhew's animal welfare work in Afghanistan. He visits the country twice a year and is in regular touch with Kabul. He is a graduate of Kabul University's veterinary science faculty and has been with the Mayhew since 2001.

