

Report on National Zoo Association Trip, 2013

Caroline Lees*

Introduction

Sally Walker is currently progressing the development of a number of national zoo associations across South Asia. The purpose of these is to establish, strengthen and energise local zoo networks, which should ultimately result in greater regional cooperation and activity under the SAZARC umbrella. I accompanied Sally on a trip to Nepal to assist with this initiative from August 8 – 11, 2013 and the following report describes the outcomes of discussions held there.

During the three days, we worked through a number of topics with Sarita Jnawali, and met also with her colleagues at the National Trust for Nature Conservation, and with government representatives. Discussions were varied and topics re-visited with different people at various times. For ease of reading, descriptions of discussions are grouped here by topic, with accompanying background information.
CL=Caroline Lees; SW=Sally Walker; SJ= Sarita Jnawali.

Why build a Nepalese Zoo Association?

Zoos can be a potent force for public education, conservation and management of wildlife and can achieve more, in less time, if they work together. Zoo Associations can provide a valuable framework through which this collaboration can be fostered and directed. They can help zoos by (see top right): These potential benefits will be felt to differing degrees by different zoos, and each may become more or less important during different phases in the development of an Association. They are discussed further in the following paragraphs with respect to the situation in Nepal.

Association structures

Any analysis of regional and national zoo associations will reveal some commonality in

Why build a Nepalese Zoo Association?

Providing a single voice	• For stronger representation to government and other agencies on zoo and conservation-related issues
Setting and promoting standards	• Encouraging and supporting zoos to achieve better performance in all areas of operation.
Promoting healthier animal populations	• Science-based collaborative planning and management improves viability, longevity and conservation value of zoo populations
Encouraging knowledge and skill sharing	• Building networks of knowledge and skills in all relevant areas so that zoos can learn from each other.
Capacity building	• Opportunities for staff development and training can be created through association-wide initiatives

Association Structures and Supporting Legislation

structures and activities. A typical example includes three tiers: 1) a Board of Representatives, usually elected by members, to oversee all Association activities; 2) a series of Association-related work programmes, each with a committee or other appropriate body of oversight, and each directed towards promoting activities that will further the mission of both individual zoos and of the collective; 3) activities – these are the actions carried out by zoos and their staff aimed at progressing the programmes developed through their Association.

Supporting legislation

In many other countries zoos are not able to operate without a government licence or permit and there is legislation which prescribes how zoos or wildlife facilities must operate in order to receive a licence. Zoo Associations often play a role in the development of that legislation and in the ongoing inspections or reviews that relate to zoo licensing. Zoo Associations are often formally registered entities and this can be important in legitimising any role in the regulatory process.

Situation in Nepal

In discussions with SJ and government representatives it seems that identifying a useful structure for a

Nepalese Association at present might be premature. There are few zoos of any size in Nepal, though there is a growing number of community forest facilities that are holding small numbers of individual animals, some charging a fee for viewing. The implementation of pending zoo legislation may prevent many of these facilities from continuing, however the government situation at present is in flux and though the proposed legislation is in process, it may be some time before it will be in place. In the interim a “Zoo Policy” will be released, which will define what a zoo is under the law, lay out the intentions of the pending zoo legislation and specify criteria for licensing. This is likely to be completed in the next 8-9 months and it is envisaged that many of the community forest facilities will choose to cease operating at this time. Others will be likely to close once the legislation is passed. Until the likely scale and composition of membership of a Nepalese Zoo Association is more secure, the effort involved in structuring and registering such a body may not be warranted and SJ will monitor and evaluate the situation as things progress. Generating useful activity in priority areas through a less formal “network” may be the best use of available effort.

*Co-convenor, CBSG Australasia
Email: caroline@cbsgaustralasia.org

Constitution or Charter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining the purposes of the Association and how it operates
Membership "rules"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly stating what members can or should expect from their Association and what is expected of them. • E.g. a Code of Practice, Conduct and/or Ethics
Communication vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member database (institutions and individuals) • e.g. newsletter, email listserver, web-site.
Regular activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A regular meeting • A newsletter or other regular communication • Campaigns (e.g. all zoos simultaneously raising awareness for conservation issues using common materials, activities) • Training

Association Essentials

In general, the following things form the fabric of Association-related activities and interactions:

Situation in Nepal

Until the zoo situation in Nepal is more clearly resolved (which seems likely to happen over the next 1-2 years), any zoo association-related activity may be more usefully targeted towards the latter two of these.

SJ, through the Central Zoo has already organized a number of **training** initiatives for veterinary and keeping staff and has plans to make training a twice-yearly activity, involving staff from other facilities. She has also communicated with Indian Central Zoo Authority (CZA) training initiatives with a view to sending staff. The possibility of keepers from outside the region visiting Nepal and working with keepers on the ground there in a training and mentoring capacity may also be worthwhile. CL will investigate Australasian opportunities. The idea of a **newsletter** was discussed, as a way of bringing zoos to a shared understanding of each other's characteristics, capacity and activities, and as a way of bringing information and advice from the wider zoo world to

Nepalese institutions. Regular newsletters can be a vital and popular vehicle for communication, giving members the opportunity to show-case facility upgrades, important breeding events and new education initiatives, and giving Association staff and position-holders a tool for stimulating interest in Association programmes.

Education is likely to be one of the main functions of zoos in Nepal. SJ reported that the Central Zoo receives around 1 million visitors each year, an extraordinary number for a facility of that size (6 acres). The majority of visitors are school aged children

and the zoo has five education officers who provide both formal and informal education products, including visits to national parks to experience NTNC's field activities. This is a powerful resource for environmental education in Nepal and a functioning Association or Network could play a valuable role in extending this role to other institutions through education training and the production and dissemination of education materials. SW has compiled many years of education materials generated through Zoo Outreach Organisation (ZOO) and will send these to SJ as a valuable starting point for this.



Sarita arranged for National Trust for Nature Conservation senior staff to meet with Caroline and Sally to discuss various zoo issues. Photo by Sally Walker.

Good Animal Care: the Building Blocks

Improving the facilities and care of animals is one of the most valuable outcomes of inter-zoo cooperation through zoo associations and networks. The diagram below illustrates the typical building blocks for ongoing improvements in animal care across a group of zoos. The foundation is typically a set of standards – ideally developed by a neutral, informed body with input from those expected to implement the standards (stakeholders). To support improvements there would ideally be enabling processes in place: for example funds that can be applied to for infrastructure changes; accessible training initiatives; and ongoing access to expert advice. Regular independent, transparent assessment of each zoo against the agreed standards is key, as is the regular review and revision of the standards as broader industry practices and local zoo capacities evolve.

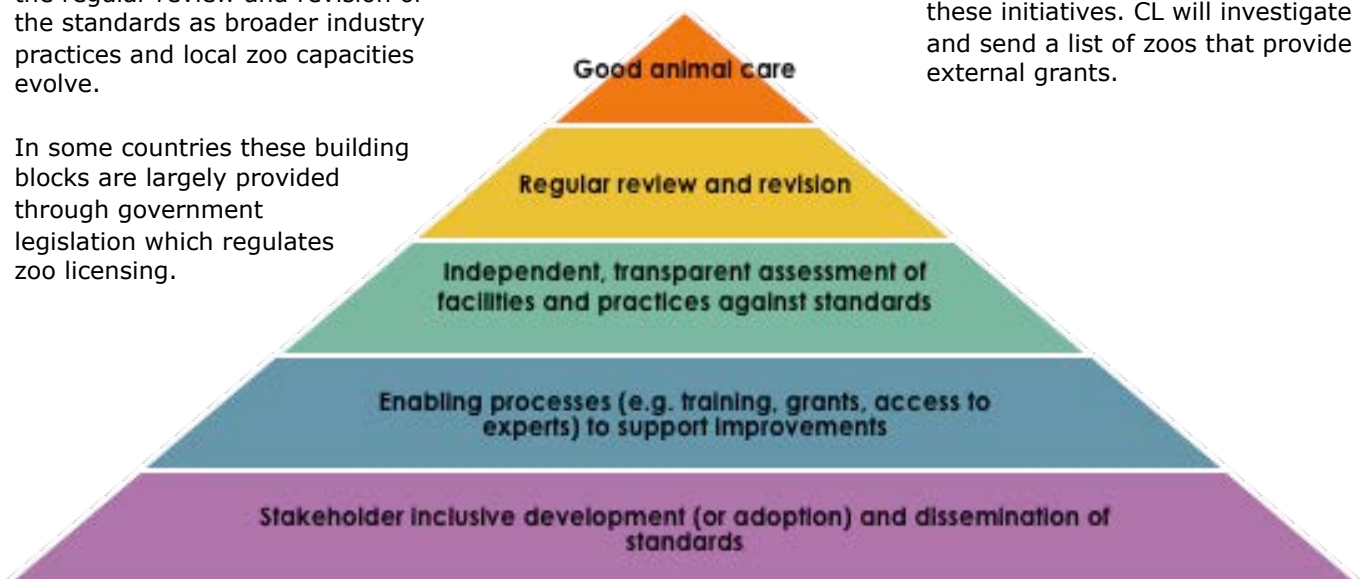
In some countries these building blocks are largely provided through government legislation which regulates zoo licensing.

In other countries and across regions it can be an Association operated programme of accreditation. This can be an expensive and labour-intensive undertaking for an Association. One of the benefits of government-led evaluation is that licences can be suspended or revoked where institutions fail to meet standards over a long period of time. Associations can generally only revoke membership benefits though in practice, in some countries or regions, Association accreditation is sufficiently prestigious that its loss may trigger a local authority review of the zoo involved.

Situation in Nepal

Implementation of the zoo legislation that SJ and colleagues have underway should provide a major step forward in driving animal care improvements in Nepal.

In terms of enabling processes, as mentioned earlier, SJ has already organized some training opportunities in the areas of animal keeping and veterinary care, and intends to provide at least two training opportunities per year. Once more information is available about which institutions in Nepal might be long-term prospects it could be useful to assemble representatives to discuss training priorities and other resource needs towards advancing animal care standards. Central Zoo is developing a new facility outside central Kathmandu. This facility will have more space and an opportunity to demonstrate modern zoo design and practice. The presence of a facility like this in Nepal could set an important example for other institutions. Improvements are also underway at Central Zoo. There may be some opportunities through Australasian zoos to help fund these initiatives. CL will investigate and send a list of zoos that provide external grants.



Left Sarita and Caroline at the hotel garden waiting for the car to Chitwan NP.

Rt: Remarkable half-self-portrait of Sally, Sarita, Caroline and Sally in an ancient canoe on Chitwan waters.

Iphone Photos by Sally Walker.



Cooperative Species Management: Building Blocks

One of the main functions of many Associations is the coordination of animal breeding and transfers amongst zoos. Carefully managed, this coordination can improve the genetic and demographic health of captive populations and in some cases make them valuable resources for conservation.

Situation in Nepal

Animal care was discussed previously. Further to this, SJ reported that Central Zoo is already using the industry standard for animal records keeping (ISIS - ARKS 4) and training for the zoo's records officers has been provided. Promoting the importance of consistent, accurate animal records keeping can be difficult. The importance of showing institutional representatives how the data can be used to add value to their daily operations was discussed. Electronic records keeping can be difficult due to a lack of computers at some facilities and the unreliable electricity supply. Good records can be maintained using a simple card system and templates for this are available through various regional zoo association offices. CL can provide these though SW may have access to a version already in use in South Asia.

It is unlikely that involvement in managed programmes will progress any further in the short-term. Individual species are held in very small numbers in Nepal – too small to form the basis of a manage programme in isolation from captive populations elsewhere. Links are being developed with zoos in neighbouring countries but it will be some time before a solid culture of cooperation is developed. Also, transferring animals to and from Nepal

can be problematic. Transport for importation may be prohibitively expensive in some instances and transfers to the outside may take the form of state gifts and so often fall outside the sphere of influence of the zoos. In

the longer-term though, participation in regionally or globally managed programmes for key species may become a possibility and this could be mediated through a local Zoo Association.



Group photo of participants of the 10th South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation SAZARC, hosted by Kathmandu Zoo & NTNC in Chitwan National Park. The very first SAZARC meeting was held in the Kathmandu Zoo also in year 2000.



National versus Regional Associations

Nepal currently comes under the umbrella of the regional zoo association SAZARC. The different but complementary roles of national and regional zoo associations were discussed with staff of NTNC and are summarized in the table.

In addition to the activities discussed in this document there are many potential projects that zoo associations can engage in for their members. Some examples from other countries are outlined below:

- establishing email discussion groups for those working in different areas of zoo operation, so that ideas and materials can be shared and issues raised and discussed (e.g. education officers, veterinarians, directors, horticulturalists etc.).
- staff exchanges as part of capacity building
- running collaborative campaigns in which a central issue is raised with the public about a species or conservation issue, simultaneously across all member institutions. Resources can be pooled to provide a single set of education and promotional materials for the campaign, both local and national media can be mobilised, advertising and sponsorship can be centrally coordinated. These can be very powerful.
- collaboration on sponsorship, PR, bulk purchasing and so on.

Though projects like this may not be a good fit for Nepal at present, they may stimulate ideas for similar initiatives that could be pursued with the local resources and interest available.

Summary

Though there are many challenges ahead, SJ and the wider NTNC are achieving great things in the areas of zoo modernisation, connecting zoos with wildlife management and conservation, and providing environmental education services to large numbers of Nepalese visitors and students. There is potential for Nepal to be a shining example in the region of the potential synergies between *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation work, particularly in the context of SAZARC. With the pending zoo policy and legislation this would be a good time to begin to shape the development of a national zoo association capable of enhancing and expanding inter-zoo cooperation over the longer-term. It is hoped that this trip has helped to lay the groundwork for that.

Caroline M. Lees first was a zookeeper in zoos in England then became the Conservation Coordinator for the British and Irish Zoo Association. After moving to Australia she was Acting Executive Director of the Australian Regional Association of Zoos and Aquaria. She was Coordinator of Australasian Species Management Program in their Association. Currently she is Program Officer of the IUCN SSC CBSG Regional Network in Australasia.

National Zoo Associations	Regional Zoo Associations (e.g. SAZARC)
Boundaries coincide with regulatory catchments – good opportunities for government liaison.	Boundaries cut across regulatory catchments. Government liaison can be onerous but carries weight.
Easier to meet face-to-face – relationships are key though regular communications and transparent policies and procedures are also important.	Harder to meet – relationships important but regular communications and transparent policies and procedures are key.
Easier to exchange animals but populations smaller and less viable.	Animal populations are larger but exchanges can be more difficult and expensive.
Good building blocks for regional associations – can initiate and pilot future regional activities and lead implementation of regional directions.	Can add value to effective national associations, setting broad directives, transmitting good practice between countries etc

We at Zoo Outreach Organisation are thankful to our sponsors for their travel support to visit S.Asian countries to discuss establishment of National Zoo Associations. We could not have done so without assistance from the Chester Zoo, UFAW and Conservation Breeding Specialist Group.

