Chimpanzee Enclosure Enrichment in Kanpur Zoo

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Chimpanzees belong to the family Hominidae, the other well-known members of this family are human beings, gorillas and orangutans. The male chimpanzee is around 1.7 m tall and the female is somewhat smaller. The chimpanzee's arms are longer than its legs; the arms are one and a half times as long as the body's height. They use their long, powerful arms for climbing trees. While walking on the ground, chimpanzees use their knuckles for support with their hands clenched, a form of locomotion called knuckle-walking.

Chimpanzee feet are better suited for walking and chimps can walk upright on two legs because their soles are broader and the toes shorter. When carrying any food in their hands they tend to walk on their feet. The chimpanzee has mostly frugivorous diet.

Chimpanzees natural habitat is the rainforest, although wild chimps are also known to inhabit swamp, savannah, woodland, and bamboo forests. Chimps in the wild spend equal time on land and in trees, but they do most of their eating and sleeping up in the forest canopy.

Chimpanzees live in large multiple-male and multiple-female social groups called communities. Within a community, a definite social hierarchy is dictated by the position of an individual and the influence the individual has on others. Chimpanzees make tools and use them to acquire food and for social displays.

Chimpanzee tool-usage includes digging into termite mounds with a large stick tool, and then using a small stick that has been altered to "fish" the termites out. Chimps communicate in a manner similar to human nonverbal communication, using vocalizations, hand-gestures, and facial expressions.

Trimming the branches of the tree for the chimpanzee enclosure.

Above: Downloading in the enclosure.

Right: Taking the tree to the pit

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The Chimpanzee enclosure in Kanpur Zoo

Kanpur Zoological Park has a very big dry moated island enclosure for the chimpanzee. The island is in a parabola or circular shape. The open island is connected to sleeping cells. The open enclosure has a small tree and a cement concrete umbrella shaped shade. The chimp knuckle-walk down into the moat and up on to the top of the island and then towards in sleeping cell gate. It repeats this circular walk at regular intervals and sometimes rests in the small tree for a while. When it is in the tree it wags its hands. While taking circular movements the chimp picks up small pieces of rubble inside the enclosure and throws it on to the visitors. From time immemorial it was trained for sticking out its tongue, clapping and asking for fruits.

Placing the tree inside the pit

Enclosure enrichment

After observing these stereotypic movements in the animal, we decided to take up enrichment of the enclosure so that the animal might spend more time keeping itself busy thus lessening the interaction with visitors. Otherwise, visitors who want to get its attention throw stones and other acts to bring about retaliation, which entertains such visitors.

Erecting the tree

The animal being arboreal in nature and the enclosure having only a small tree and a concrete shade it was decided to go for a big tree and ropes inside the enclosure. This would substitute for its arboreal habits.

Kanpur zoo occupies a very large area and has undulating terrain. The soil is sandy and is an extension of 'Khadar' areas of the Ganges. Khadar areas are the extension of sandy riverside beds. These areas extend further into bangar areas which are sandy and ravine areas. The zoo is a bangar area.

Chimp inspecting the development

The zoo was artificially planted with Neem (*Azadiracta indica),* Jamun *(Sigyzyum cuminii),* Chilbil *(Holoptelia integrifolia),* Shisham

(Dalbergia sissoo) etc. During rains some of the trees get uprooted and fall. Two big ones that had fallen deep were dug on the top of the island at a distance of about 15 mts apart.
We took care to see that the animal could not jump outside the enclosure from the top or with the help of ropes tied to the trees.

The tree was unloaded in the enclosure and was painted one meter from the lower end with Black japan, so that it is not attacked by termites. The tree was rolled manually near the pit and with the help of pullies the tree was made to stand inside the pit. The pit was filled with rubble and sand so that it stands erect. Strong jute ropes were tied on the forking of the tree top and the remaining rope was tied to the cement concrete shade. So that, the animal has much freedom for moving on the ropes. Ropes were passed through the Jeep tyres which were placed on the top rope.

The entire operation took about three days. All these days the animal remained inside the sleeping/ retiring cells.

Immediately after the work was over the animal was allowed in to paddock. The chimp came out in open and was astonished to see the new developments inside its territory. It carefully observed every new development. Then it tested the strength of ropes. It gradually climbed up and up and went on to the top of the fork and stood on it and saw the aerial view of its enclosure and the surroundings. Sometimes it stands on the ropes and walks on them, sits on the top fork and enjoys its fruits.

Thus we could complete one mission of enriching the chimp enclosure with a large tree so that it fulfills its arboreal nature.

The entire operation was caught on the author's blackberry mobile phone camera.

Above : Chimp testing the ropes in his very much enriched enclosure
Below: Mr. Chimp enjoys the elevation - now he can see far away.