

10th Year Celebrations - S.A.Z.A.R.C. South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation

The first inspiration for a regional zoo association for South Asia came from my attending CBSG and WAZA meetings where the other national and regional zoo associations met, by having established regional networks for taxon groups and, most importantly, my feeling that I wasn't much involved in the zoos of India who had a Central Zoo Authority to give money, organise training, etc. on a much grander scale than ZOO ever could. I had visited some of the countries and knew that their zoos could benefit by feeling a part of a greater whole, so ZOO ventured to organise the first meeting of South Asian zoo directors. I visited nearly all the countries and invited Directors and a senior staff of each major zoo to this meeting, and selected about five zoo directors from India that I felt would be "sensitive" to the sensibilities of directors of zoos from much smaller countries. We combined this meeting with a meeting of CBSG (Dr. Seal himself attended) and a 10 day zoo educator training course. Actually there were different audiences for each meeting but not entirely. We still combine those elements in our meetings, training concurrent with the zoo meeting.

The first night the zoo participants from different countries got together for our "welcome" and "getting to know one another" evening, was very touching. The zoo directors were moved and excited by getting to meet. Some of them choked up as they related their loneliness for speaking to others of their kind. Most of them had not even met some of the directors in their own country until they attended this, much less those of the region. We had a closed meeting of zoo directors (and me) to discuss whether to found an association and there was overwhelming positivity. We discussed a name for quite some time and got derailed by the lack of a sexy acronym for any of our suggestions, then Dr. R.K. Sahu of Ahmedabad Zoo suggested the South Asia Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation and because the name was close to SAARC, the regional economic, social, political association AND because its acronym was so sexy and powerful ("Saaah Zaarck!") we all agreed.

After that SAZARC has met every year in some way. On the anniversaries of SEAZA, our sister Asian zoo association, South East Asian Zoo Association we have taken a few people to that anniversary meeting, first to get advice and encouragement and later to both learn from them and support our elder sister.

Every other year, when we had meetings in South Asia we have featured a training in some important zoo topic. The first year it was zoo education in Nepal, then SEAZA where the theme was animal welfare, then Zoo Standards, Welfare, Legislation in Bangladesh, Nutrition in Sri Lanka, Population Management in Pakistan, ISIS/ARKS/ZIMS in Coimbatore, Zoo Legislation I in Ahmedabad, Zoo Legislation II in Sri Lanka and will be Zoo Safety : Emergency Response Protocol and 21st Century Crises again in Nepal coming full circle. It is a great satisfaction to know that three countries are actively going for zoo legislation as a result of these meetings.

Our problem in SAZARC has been primarily financial. Zoos in South Asia can't get their governments to fund their travel and stay in foreign countries (or even within their country sometimes). ZOO has had to raise funds for air fare and accomodation as well as souvenir etc. every year. Western Zoos, Western zookeeper organisations, one American government (USFWS first year), WAZA, one animal welfare organisation (UFAW) and a private charity (Lord Robin Russel) as well as the host countries, to a varying extent, have contributed. We can't keep asking for conservation dollars meant for field projects for our association, not for the whole amount. This year, for our anniversary meeting, we will be asking governments to provide air fare and we will find a way to pick up the rest.

SAZARC has been ZOO's favourite project. The satisfaction, fun, education, enthusiasm, affection and camaraderie circulating in these meetings is palpable and wonderful. I hope it can continue ... this year will tell.

Sally Walker, Founder/Director, SAZARC

