

# South Asian Educators at Second Asian Zoo Educators' Conference AZEC 2009

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Five educators from South Asia region viz., Bangladesh, India, Nepal received travel grant award from the Ocean Park to attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian Zoo Educators Conference held recently from 11-15 October 2009 at Ocean Park, Hong Kong. The theme of this conference was '*Saving the melting earth with limited resources but immense ideas*' which was very much apt for mitigation of climate change and the recent trend in zoo education in Asia. The 2<sup>nd</sup> AZEC 09 continued to provide a platform to share, network, learn from each other and to generate ideas with regard to global warming and climate change. Ms. Sarita Jnawali, Project Manager NTNC - Central Zoo who attended the conference said: "*the conference was first of this kind for me and provided an exceptional platform to learn and exchange knowledge on zoo education initiatives undertaken by the Zoos across Asia*".

The first AZEC was organized at Singapore Zoo in September 2007. The idea of AZEC is to provide a platform where professional zoo educators in Asia could meet once in two years to share ideas and discuss topics of common interest. The need for such a platform was very much felt and the initiation was taken by the Singapore zoo to fill the gap, leading them to host the first AZEC attended by 54 participants from 15 countries. The theme of the conference was 'Engage, Educate and Conserve'. ZOO/SANIZE facilitated help from Columbus zoo and Disney's animal Kingdom, sponsoring six candidates from South Asia. The participants included Rachana Shah, Central Zoo, Nepal, Bushra Nisar Khan, Lahore zoo, Pakistan, Gawsia Chowdhury, Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh, Lanka Kumari Dharmadasa, Elephant Orphanage, Sri Lanka, Meena Nareshwar, Centre for Environment Education, and Payal Molur from Go Wild Workshops, India.

The second AZEC 09 organised by Ocean Park, Hong Kong, was attended by 59 participants from Asian zoos and 25 Ocean Park staff altogether 84 representing 11 countries/region. Twenty-seven papers were presented including that of the key note speaker, Prof. L.S. Chan, University of Hong Kong. This year, five delegates from South Asia and one from China won travel grants sponsored by Ocean Park. The sponsored candidates included Sarita Jnawali, Central Zoo, Nepal, Israt Jahan, Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh, Meena Nareshwar, CEE, Latha Tampi, Zoo Watch and B.A. Daniel, ZOO, India. Chen Hongwei from China, Chengdu Zoo was the sixth candidate to avail the grant.

Asia is a region which is tough to organise such a gathering because of its language barrier. Being educators none of the participants felt the language barrier as evidenced by the variety of topics

discussed and enjoyed by all in the five day event. During the open ceremony Suzanne M. Gendron, Ocean Park welcomed all delegates and thanked Dr. Stephen McKeown the, President of IZE for his presence at the regional conference. The keynote address by Prof L.S. Chan, University of Hong Kong was most useful in updating the recent status and impact of climate change with some specific facts from Arctic region and his personal field experience. It was a good start for the conference and gave a good introduction for the theme. The remaining part of the conference included presentations, sharing of ideas, outdoor visits to other conservation organizations in Hong Kong, workshop –National Association of Interpretation, Ocean park visit, behind-the-scenes Ed-venture, and post conference events that included a Dolphin encounter at Ocean Park and a Dolphin Watch Boat trip.

The presenters shared their ideas and expertise about regional networking, developing education programmes, management abilities in education, staff and volunteer, teaching ability, community engagement programmes, exhibition ideas, species oriented education programmes, invertebrates conservation (butterfly) and education, summer camping, energy conservation, ecological foot-printing and about future zoo education.

Other most useful time of the events are visit to the Mai Po Nature Reserve and Kadoorie Farm & Botanic Garden. Amazing Asian animals Ed-venture particularly to the Red panda exhibit was amazing and the visit remain ever green in the minds of all visitors.

Jane Ng, Certified Interpretive Trainer, Ocean Park conducted a featured workshop which introduced the background, training and certification programmes of National Association for Interpretation NAI. With in limited time we could learn some key aspects of the Certified Interpretive Guide GIG training programme of NAI.

The social events organized by Ocean Park helped to break the language barrier and created a feeling of unity among the educators of the region. Conduct of this conference is another evidence to prove that team work wins. The Ocean Park team did great job in organizing this conference, however, thanks to Suzanne M Gendron, Executive Director, Zoological Operations and Education, Ocean Park, Ms Isabel Li the Education manager of Ocean Park Corporation / North and Southeast Asia Region Representative of IZE, and Ms Francis Tsang in

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particular for conducting this conference. The South Asian members would like to thank the south Asian regional Representative of IZE Sally Walker for encouraging us to take part in the conference which is very memorable and useful workshop that help us to involve more in Zoo Education.

### **Comments and experience of other South Asian participants**

**Ms. Sarita Jnawali**, National Trust for Nature Conservation - Central Zoo, Nepal  
The conference was first of this kind and provided an exceptional platform for me to learn and exchange knowledge on zoo education initiatives undertaken by the Zoos across Asia. Presentations delivered by representatives from different Zoos contained a vast amount of database important to understand mode of operation of the education program. A number of activities presented during the conference were very similar to our Education Program and some were different but very useful to our case if replicated. I am now discussing with my team here at the central zoo to see possibilities to incorporate new innovative activities.

Realizing a need for a zoo education plan, particularly after the conference we are now working with the national professional and NTNC's senior technical team to draft Central Zoo's "Five Year Education Plan". This document will be shared with Asia Zoo network to get feedback before bringing into its implementation.

The Conference greatly helped to learn different approaches adopted by various zoos for the promotion of Zoo Educational Program.

Achievements of the Conference are outlined below:

- In depth knowledge on Zoo Education Program adopted by a range of Zoos across the Asia.
- Sharing and exchange of knowledge on education activities.
- Knowledge on skill to handle various issues pertaining to educating zoo visitors.
- Rapport building among zoo education experts.
- Exposure to an oceanic biome in general.
- Capacity build-up to develop new and innovative approaches in Zoo education program.

Thanks to Sally Walker and organisers of this conference.

**Latha Tampi**, Zoo Watch, India

Seriously, what I can say is that the theme was extremely apt for today's world. What could have been a real problem, i.e., language seldom was because the organizers had arranged for translators. I found the conference to be well organized and systematic also the tours arranged were very informative and a pleasure. Finally the fun part was not neglected with dinners, music and laughter.

**Meena Nareshwar**, CEE, India

The conference titled 'Saving Melting Earth with Limited Resources but Immense Ideas' gave a good perspective on the Zoos, Climate change and the importance and need of educating visitors to zoos, about climate change and sustainable development. It was an excellent forum to understand and appreciate issues and their commonality in the South Asian region.

The presentations were very good and relevant and there were many learning from these- on how to adapt and adopt programmes and projects, with diverse zoo audiences. Funds are not always to be viewed as constraints and limitations for programmes- if there are ideas and the will to do creative and innovative programmes....one can work wonders.

**Ishrat Jahan**, Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh  
I represented the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTB) at the conference as a sponsored delegate. I felt honoured to get this opportunity. This is my first time to attend such conference. It was a chance to communicate with Asian Zoo Educators and also to exchange ideas and experiences with one another. AZEC is a great platform to build up networks and exchange thoughts between different zoos. This conference gave me an opportunity to learn how to make connections between wildlife, plants and human lifestyle.

The conference itself was superbly organized. I was very impressed. All the presentations were great indeed. There were also interactive sessions, which gave the opportunity for the participants to ask questions and exchange ideas. I must say that I have gathered a lot of experience by taking part in this conference. It is indeed a great opportunity and privilege that I have been able to learn a lot from distinguished delegates, honorable chairperson, and education manager of this conference. This conference has enriched me in many branches of my knowledge which will enable me to contribute in my country, Bangladesh. I feel proud of meeting with all these dignified personalities. The outputs at the conference would go a long way in raising the performance levels of zoo educators in Bangladesh.

It was fascinating to learn how conservation education is linked up with every step of our lives. It is very important to deliver the correct messages to the students. The conference helped me to develop a network with other Zoo Educators. I hope this would help me in many ways to serve WTB. On behalf of the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh I would like to share my conference experience with the students, teachers and zoo educators and also to design a nationwide long-term conservation education programme that would help us to dream for a sustainably developed Bangladesh.