

This month-That age. ZOOS' PRINT 25 years ago - June 1986

Interview with S.K. Patnaik, Director, Nandankanan Biological Park, Orissa

Sri Patnaik, I.F.S., is one of the more positive dynamic and creative officers in the Forest Service today. As Director of the Nandankanan Zoo he has added many new features to the zoo. He is very popular with his staff which works together like a family. He is also a member of the Govt. of India Committee for Exchange of Animals between Indian and Foreign Zoos and Secretary of the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Society of Orissa among his many other activities.

SW: Nandankanan is considered to be one of the best zoos. In your opinion what should be the characteristics of a good zoo?

SKP: The welfare of the animals and their display are most important. They should be as comfortable as possible and their surroundings should be as close to their habitat as can be. And also there should be freedom of movement. These are some of the most important items that are required of a good zoo.

SW: And in your opinion what are the qualities that make a good zooman?

SKP: Well, a good zooman always should be a receptive person. He should have an open mind to accept suggestions. In case we hear something bad about a particular aspect of the zoo, the zooman has to be graceful enough to accept it as a compliment, because he can change his administration accordingly and rectify his shortcomings.

SW: How does your training in forestry help you in becoming a good administrator in the zoo?

SKP: Well, Forestry includes general administration of the forests. Besides that we are taught to administer forest divisions and forest circles. This is a man management training which comes in very handy. The wildlife course that we had has enticed us into studying wildlife and given us the love for wildlife.

SW: Do you see the need for more specific training for directors and other persons, all levels of staff?

SKP: Its absolutely essential to have such training. In fact as far as most of the zoos in the country are concerned, because of the experience the zoo staff has had they have been able to manage and they are managing quite well. But it is necessary to impart some training so that they can handle emergencies, handle the animals well, know what they are doing and what type of action is needed and how it is going to affect the animals' behaviour. Also the animals are to be shown to the public. How will the public will accept it.... how well the enclosure and the animals generate an interest in

preservation of wildlife. These are things which have to be taught to a zooman, particularly the keepers. I feel that the Wildlife Institute of India which has become autonomous will do something about it and shortly they are going to have some courses ready.

SW: A number of people have suggested that some of the best zoos in India like Hyderabad zoo, Nandankanan zoo, Mysore Zoo which have established good breeding records be set up as "teaching zoos" like some hospitals are "teaching hospitals". What do you think of that idea?

SKP: As a matter of fact the directors decided in 1983 to have such courses. We identified particular zoos to conduct courses for zoo staff on different aspects of zoo management. It did not come through as yet but this need has been felt by most of the zoo directors.

SW: I remember reading that in a report and it was an excellent idea. Unfortunately it has been left in the hands of individual zoos to implement and zoo directors are just too busy. It would be nice if someone could be deputed to each of those zoos temporarily to assist in making the arrangements and then go on to the next one.

SKP: Nandankanan was interested in imparting training about captive breeding of felines. In fact we have already designed a course but somehow this was not used. But all the same, though we have not been able to do much for different zoos, we have in the meantime conducted courses. One for the foresters and another for the tourist guides. I think shortly we are going to have the other courses organised also.

SW: The course for the tourist guides is a good idea. Could you tell us how you organised that and what exactly was taught?

SKP: Well, the golden triangle in Orissa, (Konarak, Bhubaneswar and Puri) is a very well known tourist attraction. But the same guides then used to come to the zoo and the wildlife sanctuaries. They are not equipped at all to handle the wildlife queries. They were giving all wrong information to tourists and that's how and why we started. Both the Tourist Development Corporation of India and the Tourism Board sent six of our people as tour officers as well as some freelance guides. We have in all about 20 people here and teach them the distribution of animals in the Indian subcontinent, the different habitats of birds and animals, their breeding habits, their food habits, interdependence among species, the interaction between flora and fauna, what the "do's and don't's are in zoos and wildlife sanctuaries.

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These basics we taught them and gave them some exposure to zoology. Visits to the museums and lessons were done. It was a very good course and they liked it very much.

SW: That's excellent and it is really in line with the new role of zoos. Would you comment on the role of the modern zoo as opposed to the old fashioned concept as a stationary circus?

SKP: With the idea of conservation spreading and people getting more concerned zoos have a vital role to play and for this it has to be something very different from a circus. That's why they must exhibit their animals well in more open areas and as I told you in the beginning, their habitat should be made as natural as possible. Besides that, informing the public about the animals habits and their role in conservation is most important. And towards this end we have started a tourist information centre at this park where we are handing out literature and also giving information. All the animal enclosures have now got pictures of the animals with a brief description of the animal in English and in Oriya.

SW: Your signage is about the best that I have seen in India. Sometimes people don't mind even if the animal is in the back of the cage if they can see a picture of it. Then they leave it alone. But if they cannot see anything they get upset and start throwing stones and yelling.

SKP: Exactly. You know, people in higher levels like postgraduate level in zoology or Ph.D. come and spend a long time before the signboard and take down notes, even though it is very brief and elementary. This has encouraged us to put more and more good signage.

SW: I guess the public really feels that the zoo knows and they expect to get the correct information. If you are careless about your signage you lose a lot of the advantage. Your illustrations are so detailed and nice; you can almost tell more from them than from the animals themselves.

SKP: We have a very good artist and who's doing good work in animal painting. Besides that we have just built an open air gallery near the lake front, which is meant for schools and others. Their teachers can take them there and give a talk and show pictures and so on. So you see we are really trying to do something to encourage interaction between the public and the management.

SW: What do you think the public can directly do to promote conservation of wildlife and forests?

SKP: Actually the public is in a better position to complain to authorities. A handful of foresters and wildlifers cannot do much unless the public supports them. So it is our task, particularly the non-governmental organisations like the one you have in Mysore and other societies to make the public aware of the fact that nature and wildlife

mean a lot. If that message reaches the masses than I think that 90% of our job is done.

SW: Do you think that more educated people have a role in the zoos like in the West? They tend to employ mostly college graduates even in zookeeper positions. Is there a possibility of that in India?

SKP: That will gradually come, because in other fields more and more educated people are coming in to do lower jobs. There is so much spread of education and so little employment. So similarly zoos will also attract educated people. Most of the zoo jobs are cleaning cages and attending to the animals physically. That's why zoos have not attracted many educated people to work as zookeepers. But the day is not far off when we start getting them. And then the management and the keeper will be able to communicate better. Besides the interaction between the keepers and the public will be much better too. Now the present keepers cannot explain to visitors properly.

SW: Another aspect that's different in Indian zoos as compared to Western zoos is that in the latter the public gets involved very much. They contribute money and time, not just in educational programmes or animal care but volunteer to help out in office work, in fund-raising and so many other things. Why has it not happened here?

SKP: Well, most of the zoos have been Government zoos so far. The Government has not expected much from the public because the ideas of conservation didn't spread much until some years back. Now in this decade it has become very popular and I think soon the response will be there from the public. And once it comes from the public, public undertakings, business houses and industrialists then there will be a relaxation of government rules and the government will look for this help. Zoos are growing so fast that in a few years the government will find it difficult to fund them from their budget. So they will go to the public. And here in Orissa we are one step forward. We are planning for a Wildlife Welfare Fund and the Wildlife Advisory Board has already recommended a lottery for that purpose.

SW: That's a good idea, a lottery. They have it for so many things, why not for wildlife. I read in the press that this year many new zoos are coming up in this country. Do you think this is a good idea or do you feel that we should work on improving the ones that we have already got-How do you see the future of our zoos?

SKP: There is nothing wrong in starting new zoos. We can't expect a man from Darjeeling to always come here to see a zoo. But the present funding position is not adequate. Sometimes the zoo comes into being because some person is very interested but after he goes away, for whatever reason, the zoo gets neglected and the animals suffer. We must

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have new zoos but before we start them we must make sure that the finances are sustained and adequate.

SW: Nandankanan is famous for its white tiger breeding programme. Do you have any long range plans for the white tiger breeding programme here?

SKP: We have already completed 5 years in white tiger breeding and today we have white tigers from three gene pools; one is the Rewa pool. Second is Nandankanan's own pool and the third is the Rewa-Nandankanan mixed. We have got central assistance for new enclosures and later we will be in a position to give white tigers to all zoos in the country. They are in great demand.

SW: What about research in the zoo. I understand that you publish a lot of articles in journals in India and abroad. But what about from outside. Have college students come to take up project work here? Do you encourage that?

SKP: So far students from undergraduate and postgraduate levels have not done much here, but Ph.D. research workers do utilise the facilities at the zoo and sometimes use our animals. Of course, veterinary science students make much more use of the zoo, particularly care of wildlife and treatment.

SW: That's an important aspect of the zoo, research. In relation to the wildlife situation, do you think that the tide has turned and wildlife is safe if present policies are continued and at the same rate or are we still in danger?

SKP: A lot of effort is being made to preserve wildlife, and the policies followed are good. We have to wait for a few more years to see if the wildlife stabilizes in the vulnerable areas. With public awareness growing there is no reason why we should be as worried as we were in the late 70's. I would say that we are fairly safe and some of the endangered animals are already staging a comeback.

SW: What about reintroduction programmes such as the rhino reintroduction programme. That seems to have been a success, What do you think of such programmes and will you say a few words about the reintroduction of the cheetah?

SKP: I am very interested in that and I came up with a proposal to the Cat Specialist Group for the reintroduction of cheetah in the Chalka elephant reserve. Its a very nice area but before we can take up reintroduction of any species in any particular area we have to have a very detailed study about its habits and its old habitat so once we get them into the new area we know what they require.

SW: Do you think it will be sufficient to get a few from Iran or Africa or do you think we will need a back up population through captive breeding. Nobody in India has bred the cheetah.

SKP: Both are necessary. We must have a back up population in some good zoos. It is always good to have insurance.

SW: I read an article recently which stated that the world population of cheetahs has characteristics that indicate a very low gene pool. That may be why even in the wild the cheetah has not bred that well and in captivity the breeding success has been very poor. They noticed characteristics like poor blood-clotting and slow healing. You had mentioned that you may be getting some cheetahs from Africa. Do you plan to add this to supplement your gene pool for captive breeding?

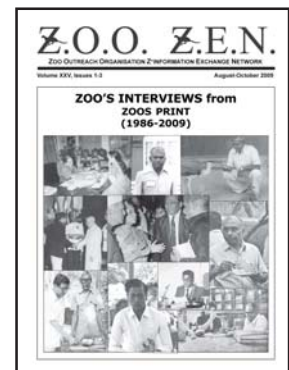
SKP: Yes, that's exactly our plan. We are getting a pair from Tanzania and we will start breeding them. Maybe if more are available we may increase that number in a year or two. We want to take up captive breeding of cheetahs. Because Nandankanan has done so well in the captive breeding of all the larger cats we are hopeful of achieving success with the cheetah also. We have to watch and see what happens.

SW: Do you see any reason why African cheetahs should not be introduced to India. There was some controversy over whether there is a difference between the African and Asian cheetah. Do you think there is a difference?

SKP: Outwardly there is not much difference. But possibly they feel that the Iranian one will be more adapted to our country because it has lived here in the past. So they are taking all possible precautions. I don't think there is anything wrong in introducing the African cheetah. But if the Iranian species is available than that's the better choice.

SW: Thank you for your time. ■

Note about ZOOS' PRINT interviews. As a special anniversary feature, Zoo Outreach Organisation has brought out an issue of ZOO ZEN which is devoted entirely to the interviews of well-known zoo and wildlife experts published in ZOOS' PRINT since 1986, a total of **42 interviews and 140 pages**. We will send you a hard copy of this issue for Rs. 200.00 and a soft copy in PDF on request. Please send requests to Marimuthu and pay in advance by check (adding Rs. 50 check charges), charge, or money order. **Editor.**



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Bird Diets from Calcutta Zoo (provided by A.K. Das*, former Suptt, Alipore Zoo)

The Calcutta Zoo has long been famous for its bird collection. Even today, although the zoo is small (40 acres), old (125 years) and right in the heart of crowded Calcutta with sometimes one lakh visitors per day, Calcutta Zoo maintains the best collection of captive avifauna in India with the best breeding record.

Some of the birds currently breeding on a sustained basis in Calcutta are the Nicobar Pigeon, Bhutan Grey Peacock Pheasant, Purple Moorhens, Whistling Teals, Imperial Pigeon, Spoonbills, Muskovy Duck, Chinese Geese, Gargany Teals, Demoiselle Cranes, Sarus Crane, Black and White Necked Storks and a number of others.

Even in the early days of Calcutta Zoo, birds were a major attraction. R. B. Sanyal, first Superintendent of Calcutta Zoo, lists over 400 species of birds including such interesting native species as the Crested Hawk Eagle and Pink Headed Duck as well as exotics including three species of cassowary and all the rest of the ratites. Unfortunately bird breeding was almost an unknown event in the zoo at that time. The only instances Sanyal can cite are those living free in the garden - the remainder never managed to reproduce. Although there were isolated instances of nest-building and egg laying there were no hatchings.

There are two possible reasons for Calcutta's later success in breeding and they are accommodation and diet.

Every year keepers provide two types of nest sites to the ground-dwelling birds, the broom stick design with a Bhutan Grey Peacock Pheasant and A-frame design. Female birds find these little houses most congenial and a great many of them lay eggs inside.

The other husbandry technique adopted by Calcutta is very very careful attention to diet. Dozens of different combinations are carefully prepared, many of them containing numerous finely chopped ingredients or a very expensive commodity like ants eggs (Rs. 34 per kg). In fact each bird gets a ration of ant's eggs and calcium powder in January before egg laying time.

A few diets are listed below for your interest. A complete list is available with us as compliments of Calcutta Zoo Director A. K. Das in case anyone is interested.

We would be interested in publishing your bird and other animal diets for the edification of other zoo men and enthusiasts.

Pheasants:

Indian Peacock, White Peafowl, Burmese Peafowl, Green Peafowl, Guinea Fowl, Silkie Fowl, Ceylon Jungle Fowl, Domestic Bantam and Mini Cochin

Bantam: a) Soaked Gram, b) Janera, c) Dry Wheat, d) Crushed Indian Corn, e) Chopped Pumpkin, Garlic & Onion, f) Cut Vegetables containing Spinach/Natia sakh (Green), g) Minced meat with powdered Gram, h) All the above food items are then mixed with boiled egg of fowl, i) Fried liver with powdered Gram.

Satyr Tragopan:

a) Cut fruits containing i) grapes, ii) papaya, iii) raisin and iv) orange. b) Cut vegetable containing lettuce, c) Wheat.

Parrots:

a) Soaked Grain, b) Soaked Indian corn, c) Groundnuts, d) Kusum seeds, e) Sunflower seeds, f) Sugarcane (cut into pieces), g) Guava & Green corn (seasonal).

Pigeons:

A) *Nilgiri Wood Pigeon*:- a) Soaked-Gram, b) Janera, c) Dry Wheat, d) Crushed Indian Corn, e) Minced meat with powdered Gram, f) All the above food items are then mixed with boiled egg of fowl, g) Fried liver with powdered Gram.

B) *Green Imperial Pigeon & Green Pigeon*:-

a) Chopped banana with powdered Gram.

C) *Nicobar Pigeon & Victoria Crown Pigeon*:-

a) Soaked Gram b) Soaked Indian corn, c) Crushed Indian corn, d) Dry Wheat, e) Chopped pumpkin, garlic & onion.

Mynas:

A) *Hill Mynah*: - a) Cut fruits containing i) apple, ii) grapes, iii) raisin, iv) papaya, v) orange & vi) banana, b) Bread soaked with milk & sugar, c) Powdered Gram.

B) *Bank Mynah*: - a) Cut fruits as are given to the Hill Mynah. b) Minced meat with powdered gram & ants eggs.

C) *Gold Crested Mynah*:- a) Cut fruits as are given to the Hill Mynah, b) Powdered gram with ants eggs.

Cape Crowned Crane: — a) Dry paddy, b) Soaked gram & Indian corn, c) Powdered gram mixed with fried liver & ants eggs.

Spoon bill:

a) Fish, b) Minced meat with powdered gram.

Purple Moorhen:

a) Minced meat with powdered gram & ants eggs, b) Maggots, c) Rice (boiled).

Lapwing:- a) Minced meat with powdered gram & ants eggs, b) Maggots. ■

*Retd. Superintendent, Alipore Zoo, Kolkata.

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