

Insider perspective on Zoo Outreach Organisation

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During my schooling, I was very much interested in wildlife and used to watch videos and refer books from the library whenever I had spare time apart from my academic studies. However, for my career, I opted for computer science and as soon as I finished my graduation in computer science, I worked for a few companies and developed an interest in designing. Therefore, I learned Desk Top Publishing from Auto Print, a prestigious company in manufacturing offset printing machines. On completing the course successfully, Mr. Subramanian of Auto Print asked me whether I was interested to work with Zoo Outreach Organisation.

In June 1996 for the first time, I visited the ZOO office and met Sanjay and Latha who described my duties. The next day I met Madam Sally Walker from USA and started my career with ZOO. Initially Sanjay taught me techniques of typesetting ZOOS' PRINT, the monthly magazine of ZOO and how to coordinate with the authors and the reviewers for their article to publish in ZPM. In a short span, apart from typesetting, I learned office administration from Latha as she was going on a maternity leave, so I could help Madam in her absence.

Later ZOO started a new section, a Screen Printing Unit at the office, which was more interesting, and an opportunity to learn more on printing techniques and process. Gradually the screen-printing unit began making visiting cards, brochures and leaflets with special handmade paper that many people loved so we had orders from outside too. Finally, we tried making T-shirts which were also very popular; many people came to purchase at our office.

ZOO has conducted several Population and Habitat Viability (PHVA) and Conservation Assessment and Management Plan (CAMP) workshops and one of the very early CAMPs, held in 1997 was a series of seven CAMP workshops under the Biodiversity Conservation Prioritisation Project. The BCPP CAMP was to assess species of Indian plants, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and fresh water fishes, using the most recent version of the IUCN categories.

This series of workshops were held in India and I got the opportunity to learn and work on the Taxon data sheet, and printing CAMP materials. During the project, we assessed around 1700 species by more than 250 specialists from over 100 scientific institutions. In addition, I had an opportunity to attend two workshops one at Coimbatore and the other at Bangalore. In addition, Madam gave me an opportunity to attend a Leadership Programme on Education & Training in Nature Conservation & Eco-development at Anglade Institute of Natural History, Kodaikanal.

I had to take a break from ZOO in 1999 for various personal reasons and during the time with the help of my parents, I got a computer, started learning with designing software, and did printing with my cousin.

Later I met Madam and ZOO crew at the marriage reception of Sheela, one of our colleagues from the office. The next day I received a call from Latha that Madam wanted to meet me and asked if I could join ZOO again. I accepted the invitation and started my second stint at ZOO as Database Manager.

My first project was to compile the CAMP workshop Taxon Data sheets for a new website of ZOO www.southasianntaxa.org. The website is dedicated to South Asian Taxa and this included the Taxon Data Sheet literature we compiled from scientists/field biologist/foresters provided at the BCCP CAMP workshop. The next assignment was to work on the many and various Networks of ZOO, in creating a database, making a directory of different networks and regularly updating it on the web and sending circular to the network members.

During CAMPs, workshops and the current project on Human Elephant Co-existence HECx, I got the opportunity to design different materials in our education department for those who love wildlife. It is interesting and challenging to work with Madam on her education packet designs and ideas for different age groups and some of the highlights are mask, rakhi, head band, placard etc., where some of them are produced in-house, as she knows to bring out the best from the ZOO crew.

I thank Madam Sally Walker for giving me this wonderful opportunity to work for Zoo Outreach Organisation during its silver jubilee year and my colleagues Latha, Geetha, Radhika, Arul, Raveendran, Ravi, Sanjay, Sarojamma, Marimuthu and Daniel for their support, help and cooperation.

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