

ZOO and Us – What ZOO means to Us

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From C. Srinivasulu

First Exposure: My first exposure to ZOO was at Department of Zoology, Osmania University, Hyderabad which I and my wife, Bhargavi, visited as graduate students to interact with Prof. J. V. Ramana Rao and Dr. V. Nagulu, who were responsible for the wildlife research conducted in the University. We saw three stickers of the Zoo Outreach Organization that registered in my head for the innovative depiction of a leaping cheetah and deep in my heart I was hit by its significance.

Further visits ended up in reading the Zoos'Print magazine. My appreciation grew deeper as I thumbed through the editorials and articles. Ms. Sally Walker's dedication and conviction were inspiring and in very little time I fell in love and admiration with this foreigner who I felt is doing a great job by leading a movement to establish conservation as science and practice in India. In 1993, I joined M.Sc. Zoology course at Osmania University and between 1993 and 1995, I devoured the publications of ZOO and the information that I was getting through these readings were subliminally changing my understanding about nature studies and conservation science. I happen to study the PHVA reports on Lion-tailed Macaque and Asiatic Lion. When I started my Ph.D. research a component that dealt with small populations, loss of heterozygosity and other related aspects, I wrote to ZOO to request a copy of VORTEX computer programme. The 3¼ floppy disk arrived in time and I could use the programme to do the analysis and got accolades from adjudicators and examiners.

Personal Contact: Somewhere in 1997, an extremely tall gentleman visited the Wildlife Biology Lab where I was pursuing my Ph.D. research. When he introduced himself to Dr. Nagulu the research head and my supervisor, I went like "Oh my God, Mr. Sanjay Molur, the Editor of the ZPJ!!". Sanjay was asked to interact with me and I was both surprised and awed at this opportunity. We spoke about many things including our (along with Bhargavi) project on writing a book on Mammals of India. On that note, he reached in to his bag and offered Nameer's Checklist that was published a few days earlier and offered his advice and help for the said project. Sanjay invited us to visit ZOO office which we could not do that year.

Training & CAMP Workshops: I got to interact with members of the ZOO Team when I first attended the Practical Workshop on Field Techniques & Conservation of Bats of India and South Asia at Madurai Kamaraja University, Madurai in July, 2000. It is here that I first met Ms. Sally Walker and other bat workers from India and Sri Lanka. During the course of the Workshop, I got inspired to take up my post doctoral research on bat taxonomy and I

vowed myself to take taxonomy seriously. I am presently involved with taxonomic studies of small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and spiders. I participated in series of training workshops, CAMP & PHVA workshops. I also got benefitted with PHVA training that Sanjay & I got at Copenhagen, Denmark in 2003. Further in 2003 and 2005 I participated in PHVA workshops and other training and conservation workshops in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, respectively.

Professional growth: ZOO has played an equal role in my professional development as my parent organization, Osmania University. ZOO provided me with opportunities through which I, along with Bhargavi, could contribute to and participate in the growing conservation movement with special focus on all living organisms that are not considered charismatic. ZOO provided platform for interaction with like-minded people and also freedom of expression which helped me in my profession. It was after attending the workshops aimed at training people in conservation education, Bhargavi & I, decided to take conservation education seriously and had been since conducting conservation education activities using Education Material provided by ZOO. The different workshops provided me with an opportunity to meet and interact and later start collaborative research works with national and international scientists and conservation biologists. Ms. Sally Walker and Mr. Sanjay Molur encouraged whole-heartedly different projects that we have undertaken ranging from database preparation to report writing. ZOO also helped us in contributing to and editing books and also played a crucial role in nominating my membership to IUCN/SSC/CBSG.

On a personal front: ZOO has played a significant role in influencing my thoughts and decisions. Ms. Sally Walker has always been a role model. Mr. Sanjay Molur has been the pushing force, great friend and a towering devil with a smile and knack to know when to push what button to get targets met. These two have been great to know and be friends with. If not for ZOO I might have been denied the love, affection and friendship of wonderful individuals like Mrs. Sarojamma, Ms. Latha, Ms. Padma Priya, Ms. Binu Priya, Ms. Sheela, Ms. Geetha, Ms. Veni, Dr. Daniel, Dr. Marimuthu, Mr. Ravi, Mr. Arul and Mr. Praveen (and others whom I met and missing now). Furthermore, it is because of ZOO I met Dr. P.O. Nameer and Dr. Manju Siliwal whose friendship & scholarly collaborations I cherish deeply. Visiting ZOO office is like homecoming to me

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and I have never felt homesick being in Coimbatore or with any of the ZOO staff elsewhere.

From Bhargavi Srinivasulu

I mirror the thoughts expressed above by Srini. Further I would like to join a few points that Srini left. The first time I met Sanjay at our Department I was seated behind Srini half concealed by an almirah and speaking through Srini, Sanjay seemed larger than life (he was towering over us!) and he was the editor of Zoos Print (so better be careful and speak thru Srini as the message would get filtered and polished and reach him!). When we got comfortable with him as he always makes everyone so it was fun to know him and talk to him.

Srini was invited to attend the Bat Taxonomy Workshop in Madurai in the year 2000. Must say he was a changed man when he came back. ZOO does that to you. He would speak endlessly and was filled with happiness as he learnt some new things and also made great and new friends. Sanjay and his telephonic conversations became a regular in our lives and whenever he called he would invariably brighten our days.

I happened to get an opportunity to meet Sanjay again in person and Sally whom Srini would never get tired of talking about. The first meeting I was awed and a bit fearful of Sally especially so because I was accompanied by my four-year old son, Aditya, to the bat techniques workshop held at Thrissur, Kerala. Whenever he would squirm in his seat during the lectures I would secretly glance toward Sally, hoping we did not disturb her. When we came back from the workshop we could meet the ZOO family at Coimbatore. It was and is indeed a very

happy family, never felt away from home, very comfortable and all the family members including the family matriarch Sally very loving. I have got benefitted both professionally and personally through our relationship with ZOO. It has been a great learning experience to be associated with ZOO.

From Aditya Srinivasulu

Hi! I am Aditya Srinivasulu. Let me tell you my experience with ZOO. When I was about four, my parents took me to Thrissur to participate in the Bat Conservation Techniques Workshop. I was very lucky to be there at that time. I met many people there. I met Prof. Paul Racey, and after five years since then, I realized that he was a big man in the field of zoologists and professors. I was really happy to be in such a place and more so when Mrs. Sally Walker declared me the mascot of that workshop. Only problem was that I kept getting sick, But Sally ma'am offered me two slices of bread and a banana. She asked me to eat it and to my astonishment, the sickness went away in a few hours. At that time I was carrying a cute little stuffed toy, which I still have now. He is a bipedal leopard, which I got when I was a baby. I call it Lepu. One day, Sally ma'am said that she had many toys in her office, excepting a leopard. So she asked me for my toy. I straightaway said no. I wish to give her a leopard soft toy when I visit ZOO office next. At the workshop I also met Mr. Sanjay Molur, Mr. B.A. Daniel and Dr. Nameer. Then after the workshop ended, we went to the head office of ZOO in Coimbatore. There I met Mrs. Latha Ravikumar and many more. I am still in contact with them. Overall, it was a very wonderful experience and I am inspired by all of them.

Letter to Editor

Dear Editor:

I appreciated the obituaries and tributes to Devra in ZOOS' PRINT Magazine last month. What none has said however is that her career started at The Zoological Society of London where she worked first on bats - describing birth and mother-young relationships in three British species, in the summer of 1966. I arrived to work on reproduction on bats in November 1966 at the Wellcome Institute of Comparative Physiology (one of two research institutes in the zoo). Devra was attached to Desmond Morris' ethology research group (he was curator of mammals), but we worked very closely and published a joint paper on bat husbandry.

I think Devra's paper on her mother-young work was the first on captive bats in the UK. Devra then worked on the behaviour of hystricomorphs for her PhD, and also on the behaviour of bush dogs. I lost contact with her when she returned to the US, but caught up with her when she was in London for a while in the nineties, and more recently in Washington, D.C. Latterly she included me in her Christmas circular.

She was great fun, a valued colleague and I regret her passing.

Paul Racey, Chair, Bat Specialist Group, SSC, IUCN