

Your Turn! Growing with ZOO: an institution that moulded my passion for wildlife

S. Mamatha*

I distinctly remember hearing Sally Walker's name for the first time in my life when I was a college student in mid '80s. The person who introduced Sally to me was none other than my mom, Mrs. Bhagyamma. She was one of the participants of a teacher's workshop conducted by 'Friends of Mysore Zoo' and my mom was very much impressed by the resource person who was Sally. My mom says "I made great changes in my teaching approach soon after this workshop that was conducted at ZOO. It made me believe the statements of NC Gage who said "Teaching is a form of interpersonal influence, aimed at changing the behaviour potential of another person."

Time passed but I never knew that I would have professional links with Sally who changed the behaviour potential of many people in the field of wildlife and conservation. When I started my teaching career in the early '90s I got associated with ZOO indirectly by accessing some simple education tools produced by ZOO as a volunteer at Mysore Zoo and also at the Regional Museum of Natural History, Mysore.

In July 2003, I was selected and invited to take part in the 'Teachers for Tigers' workshop conducted by ZOO and WCS. This gave me a platform to meet Ms. Sally R. Walker, and her ZOO team who were all trainers. This workshop brought a revolutionary change in my teaching methods and motivated me to take up education programs with the new, innovative learning approaches taught there. Until then I was just an ordinary class-room teacher, teaching Environmental education and Biology. I never realised my hidden teaching potential, but it was the ZOO family that identified my talents and tapped me at the right time to give a new dimension to my career and molded me to be a better human being/teacher.

In October 2005, the ZOO, as the follow up activity of 'Teachers for Tigers' organised an orientation programme. The experiences that people shared and that I gained from it encouraged me take up CBSE text books survey and tried to link our school curriculum with Zoo. I also started networking activities among schools and Nature clubs of Mysore. From there on, I became a regular user of the products of ZOO's educational materials on threatened species like bats, rodents, amphibians, tiger, Elephant, primates, daily life wildlife etc., and thousands of education tool kits, colouring books, and manuals. The most important point that encouraged me to use all of them is the simplicity of the tools produced by the ZOO. Also the programs and activities given in the tool kits were always liked by students, parents, teachers and the community. The reason is that the Zoo Education

tool kits follow a "playing way" method. ZOO supports all educators by providing such tool kits made by ZOO and other materials free of cost. Every time ZOO encouraged me to take up a responsibility a level higher it was a booster for me to continue my interest in wildlife education. I realised that the best educator is always a good learner.

In April 2006, I was invited by ZOO and WCS to attend an assessment workshop on Habitat Ecology Learning and Teachers for Tigers Assessment Workshop. This workshop helped me share my teaching experience with other south Asian Educators and to learn new strategies from them. I became a member of the South Asian Network of International Zoo Educator Association (SANIZE) that helped me to expand my contacts and interaction at the South Asian level. ZOO identifies and provides opportunities to any young, dynamic, skilled, potential students, research fellows, and educators to grow in the best possible way. Thanks to the monthly publication, ZOOS' PRINT, I recorded all my activities in the monthly magazine and it helped to gain confidence in doing programmes. My growth in wildlife education was evidenced and it was established through my own students who have won several prizes, awards and appreciation certificates from various institutes at national and international platform. It also has brought laurels to the their institution and as well to their own self. Few students like Spoorti and Akil Scaria, Madhavi have chosen forestry as their university course and are aiming at IFS. For thriving learners, ZOO always provides ample opportunities to explore and promotes them to undergo periodic fellowship programs.

In April 2007, ZOO nominated my name to Wildlife Conservation Society International Education Unit to attend the International Environmental Educators training programme at Bronx Zoo, New York. In July 2007, ZOO gave me an opportunity to be one of the trainers in the in-house training programmes for teachers of Coimbatore along with Dr. B.A. Daniel and Mr. R. Marimuthu. It was a wonderful experience to share what I learned with the same community without any language barrier! ZOO evaluates educator capacity, performance and their productive work and carries out the constant follow up and carefully records the program data to ensure effectiveness leading to successful stories...

Later in November 2008, I was invited by ZOO to be a trainer at West Bengal and be a part in one of the USFWS projects called 'Getting along with

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Elephants'. The subject, although it is very sensitive and tough to handle, was made easy through the manual developed by ZOO. In June 2009, I took part as a trainer in Getting along with Elephants workshops at Bangladesh. This was my first programme outside India which I could do without any hitch.

This time I was taken by surprise when ZOO subscribed for me to become a member of International Zoo Educators. After all these, Sally Walker asked my interest to apply for an individual project and thus with the guidance and support of ZOO I got the Chester Zoo Richard Hughes Scholarship Award 2009. I preferred to address the issue of human-elephant conflict since my state, Karnataka, is experiencing severe human animal conflicts. In this project, utilizing the resources of ZOO I promoted human elephant coexistence, which we call HECx, and thus reached about 40 community leaders through community programmes on human elephant coexistence, 50 teachers by providing trainers training on HECx and 1500 children all live in elephant range areas. Now very recently I received a communication from the President of IZE announcing my success in the application for sponsorshi to attend the IZE annual meeting in Disney World, Florida.

I was a regular teacher when I met Sally and entered ZOO. Now, I could grow up to the level to present before an international audience of

experts on Zoo Education. It is very obvious that I grew with ZOO. I am also thankful to my school authorities, particularly Dr. Jose Aikara for his constant support.

My words are simple to express my gratitude to ZOO crew. I have built a homey attachment with ZOO and I thank each and every one who is working behind the scenes and contributing their valuable service to promote conservation education. I should thank for the hospitality of Sarojamma and for her pretty smile and delicious food which served me whenever I halted at Zoo.... she is my Tamil teacher too. I remember how hard it will be to pack up all the thousands of pieces of education material and dispatch them to all requests including me! I thank Arul and Raveendran for their support. I should thank Radhika and Geetha for making my communication smooth. I thank Pravin for doing all graphic works, I thank Latha Ravikumar for right time decisions, I thank Sanjay for his brilliant photographs, I thank Marimuthu for his kind guidelines in my education programs and finally I thank B.A. Daniel who has been instrumental in all events and a superb guide. Dear Sally jee you are the Captain of this crew and my hat is off to you. I hope in the following days Zoo shelters many more educators to spread the conservation message across the globe and make earth a better place to live. On this Silver Jubilee occasion I feel as if I am part of ZOO team.

S. Mamatha

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

Advertisement in ZOOS' PRINT, August 1986

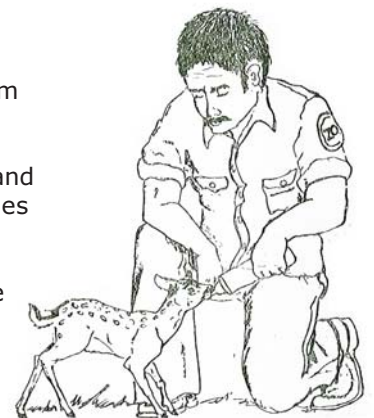
Wanted: Saints to Assist with Indian Zookeepers own bulletin

Zoo Outreach Organisation intends bringing out an occasional publication for zookeepers. This will consist of basic articles on animal care by zookeepers from around the translated into Hindi.

If there is anyone up North who is really good in translating English into Hindi and preferably with a zoo background who would volunteer to translate some articles you would be doing a great service!

And anyone with access to a good Hindi typewriter who could volunteer to type the articles would be doing an equally great service.

Zoo people who want to write simple articles in Hindi for zookeepers will also be designated as saints. People of any background who want to contribute money toward this worthy cause will be conferred super-sainthood.



Unfortunately this winning advert got no volunteers, hence, no Hindi newsletter for zookeepers till date.
S. Walker