

## Anniversary Editorial -- Kabul Zoo, Afghanistan

Sally Walker

Ever since the war calmed down in Afghanistan, I wanted to visit Kabul to see the zoo. The zoo had taken a terrible beating and mercilessly bombing. However, my very elderly parents were nervous enough about my zoo avocation even in peaceful India, and I was afraid Afghanistan would be too much for them. So my colleagues at ZOO and I, with financial help from US Fish and Wildlife Service and North Carolina Zoo Emergency Fund helped by generating in-kind support and hosting Kabul Zoo staff to India for training or to attend SAZARC. We also spread news of Kabul zoo often in ZOOS' PRINT and kept up with their progress as much as possible. After my father's passing there was no obstacle, so I planned a visit.

I'd hoped to give a summary history of Kabul Zoo in this feature but I gave up that idea when I realised that I had much information that was questionable at best. So, short version, suffice it to say that a zoo was started by an Afghan ruler with lots of help from the faculty of the university and it was almost 100% destroyed by the war. In the year 2000 word about the difficulties the zoo was facing flew around via press and email. The international zoo community plus over 6000 individual private donors together contributed a substantial sum of money which was used for repairing animal enclosures, feeding animals, paying staff salaries, occasional travel, training, etc.

Now, ten years later, almost any write up could be wrong considering who's telling the story and the important and often coveted activities that have taken place there. So this write up is just my personal experience with some people who have been directly involved with the zoo. Zoo Outreach Organisation played a very minor role in the



*Welcoming committee meets guests in Education and Meeting Room*



*Entrance to Kabul Zoo. First view for visitors after purchasing their ticket is a statue of Marjan, the blind lion who lived through the war.*

Kabul Zoo, but the same cannot be said of the role of Kabul Zoo in Zoo Outreach. Every small thing we were allowed to participate in was heart-felt and these and the people played a very large role in our view of the world. We at ZOO are far richer in spirit

because of our interaction with people helping and working there last decade.

I learned a lot by visiting Kabul. I learned that if you make the mistake of telling friends you are going to Afghanistan, they either advise against it, get quiet



***Sunday at the monkey enclosure which attracts most viewer any day. Kabulians flock to the zoo on Sunday. They are busy rebuilding their city and getting on with life. The Zoo is a great break for them.***

(clearly thinking of your demise or kidnapping) or change the subject. Only my neighbor in USA with a military history in Kabul was enthusiastic, as were my colleagues in the "Kabul Zoo email group" that looks after certain needs of the zoo and showered me with lists of things to do and find out, so I stuck with them as confidants. The media seems to like to projects Kabul as a chaotic war zone with shells falling, bombs going off and everyone living in fear. Actually the Kabulians I met were an upbeat and busy lot, happily building back the city, talking, laughing, shopping and living life again. I took advice and didn't leave the city. I also covered my head and arms etc. while in public and generally just did what I went there to do ... see the zoo and hang out with staff to get an



***Kabul Zoo staff under map of the zoo to the left of the entrance.***

idea of what other training would be appropriate next time.

Mr. Azizgul, Director of the zoo and Mr. Ahmadi met me at the airport and hustled me through immigration and drove directly to the zoo. There I met the admin and management staff and whatever keepers were around the entrance and enclosures when we toured the facility.

Kabul Zoo is a small zoo but, aside from the areas where new construction or renovation, or plumbing, it was very clean and tidy despite the very large Sunday crowd. There was an eclectic collection of animals, Kabul Zoo having lost their excellent collection of mostly native fauna during the bombing. There were enrichment devices and "furniture" in almost every enclosure. They had a small but very well built and excellently maintained aquarium which might be one of the nicest small aquariums I've seen. The aquarist must have been a professional as I spotted no sick fish and there were tiny hatchlings in at least one of the tanks. The keepers were all very polite and well spoken and seemed busy every day I was there taking short rounds of different parts of the zoo randomly.

I had some photos of the zoo from a few years ago when Brendan Jones had made his second visit there and, comparing them to the present, could see improvements. Not all the changes were necessarily improvements ... it depends on one's point of view. The bear enclosure which Brendan had fixed up with broken pieces of concrete and rocks deliberately designing an uneven surface, with dirt for digging which is more exciting for the bears, had been paved over flat with a water moat surrounding it. I commented particularly about the lack of dirt for digging and Aziz assured me that there was a plan to block off part of the moat where it was safe to leave some



*Staff & Marjan statue; background new fountain & education center*



*One of several wolves in new naturalistic Kabul zoo enclosure.*



*Black bear in his new spacious enclosure.*

dirt and branches. I had the same comment about the porcupine exhibit which was concreted over without potential for burrowing but an "app" was found for that too, with Najib, the education officer pointing out an unoccupied exhibit with a good-sized earth area which could make a fine burrowing area.

I tell these things not to criticize because no zoo can escape a few comments from visiting firemen, but to point out the lack of defensiveness of the senior staff, their willingness to listen and their interest in new ideas.

In fact, if I had money, I would love to bring batches of zoo personnel from other nearby countries to Kabul and show them what a war-torn city is doing to rebuild their zoo.

Another thing that impressed me was the camaraderie and closeness of the entire staff. There were no salutes and heel clicks, just polite discussion and listening. The keepers didn't seem to be afraid of the bosses like in other countries in my adopted region. Probably this is a combination of culture plus the fact that Kabul was never under British bureaucracy like the other countries. Love them as I do, the British left behind a terrible legacy for the Indian civil service and administrations to live with ... and not just India ... all the countries that used to be India!

The zoo had a reasonable-sized education room to teach school classes and older people about the zoo. The Education Officer, Najibullah Nazary, was apologetic for the size, explaining that the current room was temporary until they got their new Education Centre inaugurated. He mourned that there was only room for about 30 students now. When the new building is ready it will be an Environmental Education Centre according to the fancy sign on the door of the temporary room. Even now, the education programme keeps Najib busy with visits to schools and school visits to the zoo.



Visitor behaviour is a problem in Kabul Zoo also. Micky Mouse enjoins visitors not to tease or feed animals in Dari, local language.



Neat standardised educational boards in English Dari and Pushtu with a bit about habitat, diet, gestation and status.



A curriculum for the Education Department published in local language for teacher to take with them and Posters of birds, mammals and protected areas of Afghanistan were given by WCS and USAID

People of all ages come in groups for lectures and programmes and special training and work-shop are arranged for veterinarians, or college students from the university, etc. Many organisations have helped Kabul Zoo with their education programme surprisingly soon after the zoo reopened and they have been supplied with brochures and handouts all along. Now they have a curriculum nicely published in a English and Dari booklets and handouts on laminated sheets for kids to use in their activities. Another nice education feature is the graphics around the zoo. They are simple painted metal boards but in three lanuages (Dari, Pushtu and English) with an attractive charcoal drawing of the animal and all basic information.



***Najib and teacher for hearing impaired cooperate in teaching in zoo classroom***

There are other great people at the Kabul Zoo managing important departments and service .. security, construction, etc. we will write about them all eventually. Their story includes the hardships they endured as the war took their animals, one by one and endangered their own lives as well.

There is much more to be said about Kabul Zoo but a part that should be stressed is the fact that it has been a global project to get it back on its feet. There are some amazing people who



***Above, Dr. Kadhar, Zoo Vet, addresses adult vety class and hands out Dari version of Mammals of India, by Kushal Habibi, published by Zoo Outreach and sponsored by US Fish & Wildlife.***



***Lion keeper and Dr. Qader check on the lion which had been recently operated. The new squeeze cage was an output of Mysore training, where the Kabul Zoo staff were given a blueprint of a squeeze cage. Everywhere they visited in India didn't stint in handing over literature and helpful advice.***

have been involved with the zoo quietly working behind the scenes, such as David Jones of NC Zoo, James Hogan of Mayhew Animal Hospital-UK, Nick Lindsay, ZSL-UK and Brendan Jones, to name a few. Hopefully all of them will all put their memories together on paper for us. The story of Kabul Zoo is still in its infancy however. There are plans, designs, opinions, ideas, disagreements, hopes and dreams ... we'll try to keep up and report.

Thanks to NC Zoo Fund for sponsoring my air travel from India to Kabul. **Sally Walker**



**Discussion with Mayor, administrators and staff. Left to right: Education Officer Najibullah Nazary, Director Zoo Aziz Gul Saqib, Eng. Mrs. Director, Culture Depart., Rahela Kohistani, (oversees Zoo); SRW,ZOO; , Mayor of Kabul, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Eng. M.Y. Nawandish, Advisor to the Mayor, Mahabuddin Amadhi.**



**Earlier, the Certificate of Kabul Zoo membership in SAZARC was presented to Zoo Director.**



**Presenting copy of SAZARC membership in WAZA certificate to Mayor. Kabul Zoo is a member of SAZARC & SAZARC is a member of WAZA It is expected of SAZARC member zoos to follow the ethics and welfare principles of WAZA.**



**Director Azizgul Saqib congratulates temporary zookeeper on becoming permanent**

**Kabul Municipality officers view slides of modern zoos in preparation for selecting designs for their new zoo. Left to right : Mahtabudin Ahmadi, Advisor to Mayor; Engineer for Kabul Municipality, Dr. Dr. Abdul Qadir Bahawi, Veterinary Officer, SRW, Rahela Kohistani, Director, Culture Dept. (Hostess), Contractor, Municipality of Kabul, Eng Mohammad Javid Zafari, Admin & Finance Officer, Caravanserai, Baghe Babur**



## Kabul Zoo Stock List, July 2010

Prepared and corrected by Najib Namery

### Mammals

Lion *Panthera leo* 0.1  
Brown bear *Ursus arctos isabellinus* 1.2  
Black bear *Ursus thibetanus* 2.1  
Goitered Gazelle *Gazella subgullurosa* 5.4  
Rhesus macaque *Macaca mulatta* 15.2  
Wolf, *Canis lupus* 8.3  
Jackal, *Canis aureus* 3.1  
Red fox, *Vulpes vulpes* 2.1  
Crested porcupine, *Hystrix indica* 5.2  
Long tailed marmot, *Marmot acaudata* 1.0  
Domestic pig, *Sus scrofa domestica* 1.0

### Birds

Indian peafowl, *Pavo cristatus* 11.4.  
Domestic turkey *Meleagris gallopavo* 1.1  
Love bird *Agapornis SPP* 0.0.12  
Ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri* 0.0.8  
Helmeted guinea fowl *Numida meleagris* 2.0  
Demoiselle crane *Anthropoides virgo* 1.2  
Grey heron, *Ardea cinerea* 0.1  
Eagle owl, *Bubo Bubo* 0.0.6  
Great white pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* 1.0  
Common Domestic Duck 3.6  
Rock pigeon *Columba livia* 0.0.45  
Cockatiel *Nymphicus nollandicus* 0.0.4  
Domestic goose, *Anser SPP* 5.10  
Laughing Dove, *Streptopelia senegalensis* 0.0.12  
Eagle 0.0.2  
Griffon vulture, *Gyps fulvus* 2.1  
Black kite, *Milvus migrans* 0.0.3  
Bittern, *Botaurus stellaris* 0.0.1



**Demoiselle crane**

## Insider Perspective

Radhika\*

I am really happy to share my experiences with Zoo Outreach Organisation. After finishing my M.Com I started writing many bank exams and in the meantime I wanted to join some job to get work experience. I heard from Latha who is my relative that there was a job in ZOO and I can join if I was interested. Even though I finished M.Com I never had an official work experience until I joined ZOO. At ZOO the experience we get is really great as we get to work many different kinds of jobs. Mainly I help Latha with the administration and accounts-related jobs. I am really satisfied that I am now acquiring skills and knowledge in many disciplines, such as computer packages, accounts, income tax, administration etc. It gives me the satisfaction, which I won't get in any bank or government jobs that I was searching.

I would like to honour our Madam Sally Walker, who has dedicated herself to zoo and wildlife conservation for the last 30 years. I always admire her for the hard work she puts in. I always wonder how she manages all the works in spite of her official travels, personal work etc. The other thing I like in her is she always thinks about our future rather than her own. Next Sanjay Molur, our Deputy Director who is very knowledgeable in many subject areas. Anything we talk about, he will have quite a lot of information to share with us. I would say he is our ZOO encyclopedia and also he is very cool to work with due to his hinky sense of humour.

Latha, a powerful administrator, is very strict in training the staff better and she teaches us all the kinds of work that she does. She enjoys teaching everyone what she learnt from her experience. She has dedicated herself to Sally Madam and ZOO. Daniel, Scientific Officer, is an entomologist by education but he is equally interested in wildlife education. He is a very quiet person. Marimuthu our Education Officer is always cheerful and happy. Geetha is a very helpful person who works together with me like a sister. Ravichandran is also a hard worker as he works mostly for Sanjay now and very helpful. Pravin maintains the many databases of ZOO and is good at designing. Arul and Raveendran take care of the dispatch and outside work. They put in very hard work when we send education packets for special events and are always cheerful. It is fun to rag Arul as he is the youngest of us. Sarojamma is our office Mom who is very kind and helpful to everyone.

I tell others that our office is disciplined and strict but also very cheerful and joyful. I feel proud to be a part of ZOO. I hope ZOO will celebrate endless anniversaries. I am quiet by nature and hard to know if I am happy with my job, so I am thankful for this opportunity to share my happiness.

\*Zoo Outreach Organisation