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Trips for "TRYPS" - Memories of a Zoo Vet in India

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Being a fresh Zoo Veterinarian I was like a fish, not exactly out-of-water but more like a fish thrown into a new pond. The environment of which was quite embarrassing, in the sense that the Zoo inmates were not like domestic dogs and "Pussy Cats", nor did they look to me as familiar as my cows and buffaloes. Hence the simple act of sneezing of "MADHU" the male chimpanzee put me into fits of shivers and the regurgitation of undigested pieces of beef of my "RAMU" the Royal Bengal Tiger was as alarming as a child suffering from infectious gastroenteritis. Hence in this state of anxiety and tension the suggestions made by my colleagues working in different hospitals were warmly welcomed as there are no other Zoo Veterinarians in my State.

When one day I saw a tall thin man in his late forties introducing himself as a Zoo Vet I could not believe it and rubbed my eyes several times. But when I heard his deep voice I was sure of his presence and then jumped off my chair, rushed towards him, grasped his hand, made him sit by my side and showered upon him a volley of questions. Among his anecdotes the infection of TRYPANOSOMIASIS in a tiger was the most valuable information. He told me that one of his tigers remained "off feed" with high fever for several days. He kept the tiger alive on glucose saline. One fine morning he could find TRYPS in the blood smears and then the wonder drug ANTRYCIDEPROSALT played the magic role and the tiger returned to its normal appetite and health, of course after a long period of convalescence. This was the first tale of a "Tailed Protozoa" carried to me by a Zoo Vet.

Trypanosomiasis (*T. evansi*) is the most common infection in my zoo felines, next to feline distemper. Tigers, Puma, Lions, Panthers and Jackals have suffered from Surra and have been treated successfully with Antrycideprosalt, with the addition of Belamyl, and Egludox (in the initial stages). The symptoms are high fever, off-feed, dullness and shaggy coat. In one tiger and jackal there was opacity of cornea of both the eyes and the vision was impaired.

After one and a half decade, in the early seventies I had a sojourn in Bangalore City for a short period. My niece had invited me the "TASMIAQUANI" ceremony of her first son. The journey was very tiresome. Huddling for sixteen hours in a bus made my knees stiffer and these were aching badly. When I got down at the bus station nobody was there to receive me. As I had her home address with me, to search for her palacious bungalow would not be a problem, I thought. After having a

wash and a hot cup of "Mysore Coffee" I left the station. To my surprise right in front of me Bombay Circus was camping. Its dome shaped tent and the colourful buntings attracted me and I decided to call upon the manager whom I know very well. He was much pleased to see me and took me round the animals. When we were passing through the carnivorous section he took me to the two lions suffering from opacity of cornea. He complained, "Doctor, though the city Vets are attending the lions regularly and evincing great interest in the treatment, there is no response. The lions are still dull, lethargic and off feed". I handed over the prescription of Antrycideprosalt and asked him to tell the city Vets that a Zoo Vet. from Hyderabad had examined the lions and diagnosed the disease to be Surra and had requested them to inject this drug. Wishing him best of luck and hope to see his lions walking on the rope before the cheering crowd once again at Hyderabad I left the circus arena.

A few years later, it was a pleasant surprise to meet the same circus manager at the zoo dispensary. He dragged me to his camp, not to look at his big cats but to treat his pet dogs. Oh God, I have to look again into my old and worn out notes of "Canine diseases", most of which by this time might have been eaten away by the vermins. A Zoo Vet now has to undergo a "Metamorphosis" before he could attempt to treat a domestic animal, I thought.

At the camp I saw a dozen Boxers tied up neatly to a long chain. Seeing an intruder they started jumping howling and barking, except two which were lying down quietly on the ground. I approached the poor creatures nearer to have a close look. Ah! the same Surra! I was overjoyed.

There was no lustre and sparkling in those two pairs of beautiful eyes. Instead it looked as if four dirty white small pieces of marble have been studded in the eye sockets. Triumphant after prescribing the same old drug I returned back to my zoo.

The author is one of the more dedicated and well-known zoo vets in India. He was vet at Hyderabad Zoo for years, now he is editing Wildlife Health, the journal of the Association of Indian Zoo Veterinary Doctors.