

# An Outsider's Look at ZOO

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This is sort of a "for whatever its worth" kind of observation from someone who was around when the Zoo Outreach Organization (ZOO) began, watched it grow and subsequently, supported many of its activities.

As a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) it was my good fortune in the late 1970's to be selected for a position in a newly created office focusing on international conservation. My job was to develop programs benefiting threatened and endangered species and their habitats, specifically with the countries of Egypt, Pakistan and India (this specification of countries had to do with the availability of unique funding emanating from the sale of U.S. excess agricultural products). All projects qualifying for funding under this program were for either research, management or education activities and endorsed by the local government conservation agencies.

Starting from scratch in late 1976, entreaties were made to the three countries' governmental agencies responsible for conservation. Feelers were also extended to local in-country non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and contact was made with international support groups - all with the intent to identify potential ideas for support, qualified personnel, potential working cooperators, and potential sources of auxiliary funding.

At that time, India's nascent conservation movement was beginning to show results with new and strengthened legislation, emergence of NGOs concerned with the environment and recognition by the international community.

Our first major cooperative successes were with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) - (one NGO and one Government of India agency) resulting in multi-year ecological studies and surveys on key areas and species. While these projects were in the process of negotiation and approval, we sought out other opportunities that could be short term with quick turn-arounds, resulting in benefits to biodiversity conservation. One of the first of these ventures was on environmental education with a small NGO in New Delhi to produce educational materials on the environment for school children. We also engaged with the National Zoo in New Delhi on another series of small short-term activities.

In our search for new cooperators we heard about an American woman named Sally Walker who was working as a volunteer at the Mysore Zoo, was very active, innovative, dedicated and had initiated a program called "Friends of the Zoo". This seemed like a good lead until we also learned that Sally had

to leave Mysore due to some sort of unclear controversy and had left the state relocating to Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

As a U.S. governmental agency working in India during a time when certain political factions that opposed cooperation with the U.S. federal government on negative and perceived negative information to distort and inflame incidents to make the U.S. look bad, we initially kept our distance from Sally. She, in the meantime, had quickly reestablished herself and regenerated her programs and ideas which included the creation of the Zoo Outreach Organization which was swiftly re-registered in Coimbatore.

Her interest in the welfare of India's zoos had drawn the attention of Dr. T. N. Khoshoo, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests who recruited her as a member of the National Zoo Advisory Board, and after some meetings and conversations, asked her via the DoE finance officers to make a sort of "national friends of mysore zoo" with DoE funding. Later, when as a result of Sally's lobbying with numerous newspaper articles, reading of old government reports and documents about zoos, visits to Ministry officials of all levels, an earlier idea which had been buried in files and resuscitated by Sally saw the light of day again. This was the idea of developing a National Zoo Policy for India which ultimately morphed into the Zoo Act, 1991, which formed the Central Zoo Authority and in 1992 which created the Zoo Norm and Standards.

One of the many initiatives Zoo Outreach Organisation was a monthly magazine free to zoo directors and selected other personal and on public subscription providing articles or stories about zoo management, animal care, educational activities and anything else that might be of interest to zoo administrators or zoo and wildlife inclined public. Indian zoo personnel found the newsletter interesting and useful and more relevant to their situations and began to contribute news and articles shortly. The bulk of articles had to be generated which was done by a combination of interviewing zoo and wildlife personages every issue (Y.D. Singh, Fatesingh Gaekwad, Billy Arjun Singh, etc.), reporting on Indian conferences and printing (or re-printing) the presentations, reprinting chapters from R.B. Sanyal's book and Heini Heidiggers classic, Man and Animal in the Zoo, articles Sally wrote about zoos and related activities, from Indian and foreign publications and by begging Indian zoo and wildlife personnel for them.

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Using ingenuity and expanding contacts, Sally bargained with zoo personnel first in the U.S. and subsequently from around the world for literature, equipment, technical assistance, training opportunities for Indian zoo personnel and whatever else she thought would help India's zoo movement to advance. A primary concern, following modern animal management, breeding and welfare was conservation education, not only for zoo personnel but also for the state and central Forest Departments, colleges and universities, other NGOs and the general public. She enticed U.S. and European zoo experts with opportunities for new experiences and working with India's "exotic" wildlife bringing equipment, training, financial support, literature, information about the most recent trends in zoos of the world, etc. to augment the growing movement in India.

All of this positive action was not lost on us at USFWS, but certain lingering doubt and skepticism made us cautious of seeking cooperation despite having by that time made contact with Sally. Subsequently, a meeting of international zoo associations and individuals, organized by Dr. Chris Wemmer, Director, Front Royal, Virginia in April 1990 provided an opportunity to meet personally. The occasion broke the ice and soon afterward we agreed (first a small project) to assist in forwarding educational materials from the Jacksonville Zoo in Florida, to Sally in India. This was followed soon after with transfers of documents and forms developed for standardized inventory of zoo's animal numbers with details on their sex, age, condition and derivation. The idea behind this approach (then called the International Species Inventory (now Information) System or ISIS) was to try and stimulate more efficient and effective management of animals for the world's zoos India's adoption of ISIS did not materialize for some time but seniors in the Central Zoo Authority would have remembered Sally trucking around on trains to demonstrate how to fill the (then) paper forms. Perhaps that helped a bit in promoting CZA's agreement under Dr. B.R. Sharma, Member Secretary to join 60 zoos to ISIS and pay for their first 3 years.

The following two decades have seen the continual growth and success of the Zoo Outreach Organization. ZOO benefits from a dedicated and efficient staff that has grown with the organization with staff contributing from their own expertise, ideas and energy to the expansion of activities and professional quality. The orientation of ZOO has also expanded its activities from zoo-focused to inclusion of wildlife and biodiversity. In other words, zoos are important in giving us opportunities to see, learn and interact with live animals that we might never see in the wild. Also, zoos are now teaching us about the more complex wildlife conservation and biodiversity issues that sustain our environment and how we can interact constructively with natural systems.

Subsequently USFWS has assisted and supported many of ZOO's programs. We have seen how relatively small inputs of support are expanded and supplemented to hold technical workshops and training sessions, and produce informative and useful technical reports and educational material, all in a synergistic way to enhance the knowledge and understanding of conservation, population dynamics, environment both *in situ* and *ex situ*. We have seen how the training helps zoo personnel not only do their jobs more effectively but builds confidence and better working relationships in zoos. We have seen the effectiveness of providing improved health care and the strength of having current and up-to-date literature available. And we have seen the effect educational opportunities have on the general public especially children.

Somewhere in the latter growth of ZOO and its activities (~ 1999), there was an effort to reach beyond the political boundaries of India and connect with other zoos and cooperators in neighboring countries. This was because Sally felt she had done all she could for Indian zoos after successfully lobbying for a Zoo Act and serving on the Central Zoo Authority for six years. She thought that India had done so well with zoo legislation, that other countries also might benefit. It was thought that issues and problems unique to various regions could be more effectively addressed at a regional level. Thus, ZOO embarked on a new outreach effort to connect adjacent countries with a regional zoo association which is called the South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation SAZARC. The first meeting of which was held in Nepal in 2000 to which several zoos and our department contributed some funds for this first meeting. Through their work with the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, ZOO had managed to involve many of the South Asian countries in CAMP and PHVA workshops so organizing a regional zoo association by an NGO, although unusual, was welcome by most of the countries.

The last project I was involved in with ZOO before my retirement in 2005 was the production, printing and distribution of the English version of a field guide to Afghanistan's mammals entitled "Mammals of Afghanistan" by Dr. Khushal Habibi and subsequently of the distribution of a Dari translation. The original manuscript had languished for years for want of a publisher. But ZOO saw the utility of such a venture and agreed to handle the printing as well as to providing an artist to render line drawings of most species described in the book filling a glaring absence in the original manuscript. With the success of the English version, Dr. Habibi completed a Dari translation with the help of The World Bank and the Aga Khan Foundation. ZOO arranged for the printing this time with support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the USFWS arranged the distribution through the assistance of the U.S Embassies in India and Afghanistan. Sally

tells me that this project was ZOO's first introduction to Afghanistan which turned in a 7 or 8 year stint in doing small projects for the Kabul Zoo and has become a relationship. ZOO relatively recently (December 2009) provided training in India for three Kabul Zoo officials (Dr. Azizgul, Dr. Qadeir, and N. Nazary) at Madras Crocodile Bank, Coimbatore VOC Park Zoo, Mysore Zoo, Bhanerghatta Zoo, SOS Wildlife, and Arignar Anna Zoo with assistance from the "Kabul Zoo Email Group" (funds devolved from the small remains of N.C. Zoo's Emergency Fund for Kabul Zoo). Sally visited Kabul Zoo in July for the first time and in November 5 officers from the zoo, Mayor's office and Dept. of Culture will attend the SAZARC 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference in Nepal.

Though not directly involved in active support of ZOO's activities since 2005, I continue to stay in contact with the organization as a Life Member of ZOO and with Sally personally. I also get reports from time to time from my former office. It is refreshing to know that ZOO continues to rely on its vibrant and experienced cadre to constantly come up with new ideas and proposals to connect their various constituents with the zoos, wildlife and environment around us.

*Dave Ferguson, September 2010*

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## Insider Perspective

### J. Arul\*

I do not know any kind of work till I join in ZOO. I joined ZOO in 2001 as a screen-printing (SP) assistant. Six years I was working in SP unit, I used to help with T-shirt printing, educational packet printing, collating, packing and sending out for workshops and events such as Wildlife Week, Animal Welfare Fortnightly etc. I used to go with our Screen Printing colleagues Veni & Ravi to Tirupur for purchasing and printing T-shirts and when I am about to learn something I had to resign the job due to personal reasons. I suffered a lot when I was at home and I had re-joined twice. It is my luck that Latha and Ravi helped me to re-join second time even though Madam and Sanjay was uncertain as I quit without any information. I thank Latha and Ravi for the faith they had on me.

I continued my work in SP unit and after some years I became an office assistant, and my new position involved outside works such as postal, banking works, purchasing, etc. I also started working in computers during my leisure time. Latha and Ravi taught me MS office and my ex-colleagues Jothi & Sudha taught me to work on the Intercom (daily phone entries) etc. Currently my nature of jobs are printing, scanning, maintaining stocks, and coordinating with Latha for educational printing and distribution. I have learned confident to try any kind of job from ZOO particularly due to the encouragement I get from Sally Madam, Sanjay, and Latha.

I never had a chance to thank Sally Madam for her continued support to all my work due to my language. I take this opportunity to thank her from my heart. Sanjay always ask me to learn new things and he would say as a young boy I can learn stuff easily. My sincere thanks to all the staff Latha, Geetha, Radhika, Daniel, Marimuthu, Pravin, Ravichandran, Sarojamma and last but not least

Mr. Raveendran who is sharing my work. Sometimes my behaviour might have hurt some of the staff, I take this opportunity to ask apology to them. I would like to continue my work more efficiently and effectively in future. I would not have come to this stage without the help & support from Latha and Ravi, they are my well wishers and I thank them once again. More than me my parents like my job as they always say that I am behaving well and self-disciplined when I am with ZOO. I love to ride bikes and I got my first bike after joining in ZOO using my own salary.

My wish is that I have to work with ZOO, when it celebrates Golden Jubilee.

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