

Last Indulgent Anniversary Editorial

My Mentor, Sri C.D. Krishne Gowda, Mysore Zoo – a "simply wonderful" zoo man
Sally Walker

This month is the last Anniversary Issue of ZOOS' PRINT in print version (it will continue on ZOOS' PRINT website), and the last of my "indulgent anniversary editorials". These indulgent anniversary editorials are distinguished from normal editorials by being personal in nature, actually personal in the extreme; NOT just one's personal opinion as would be a normal editorial about issues, but a personal experience. I have enjoyed being able to do this and will miss the fun and drama of sharing my life with our readership. Thank you for your indulgence, indeed (many of you) your appreciation via email of these unconventional contributions (unconventional for a zoo magazine anyway).

This month's contribution is appropriate for ZOOS' PRINT as it is about a zoo man, Mr. C.D. Krishne Gowda (CDK), my zoo mentor and former Director of the Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens (Mysore Zoo) for over a quarter century. There is a 1986 interview with Sri C.D. Krishne Gowda in this issue also about his trip to several zoos in USA. My admiration and affection for Mr. Krishne Gowda knew and still knows no bounds. I came to know him and his amazing facility for zoo management over the period of six years I volunteered in the Mysore Zoo. He was more than an ordinary Indian zoo director; he had both knowledge and knack or a "flair" for zoo and animal management. "Knack" is inborn talent ... if you have a "knack" for something, it doesn't all come from training or school or even experience. You just have it or not, and CDK had it. I witnessed this over and over again in the years I volunteered and sincerely tried to be of service to Mysore Zoo as well as to Krishne Gowda.

Our first interactions were not indicative of the friendship that would develop in course of time. Without telling my story, suffice it to say that a series of people and events came together and resulted in my starting a Friends of Mysore Zoo that was very popular but also very controversial. Mr. M. B. Prakash, Divisional Commissioner and Chairman of the Karnataka Zoo Authority, got it registered in a day which annoyed people who had requests for Society Registration languishing in the Societies office. Krishne Gowda, being an experienced zoo director, was not completely happy with this development as he could envision some of the potential difficulties. In fact, he was spot-on right. There were difficulties that sprung from either FMZ itself or me and my good intentions that vastly dwarfed his fears.

Nonetheless the idea of FMZ was well intentioned and led to some good things in public education, control of teasing and feeding by the public, tree planting, teacher training, keeper training, zoo

mobile, volunteer help with various things, a magazine, the first zoo magazine in whole Asia, the GNU's Letter, and many other firsts for Indian zoos. But this editorial is about Krishne Gowda so let's get to it.

Well the way CDK and I became friends is a story. Mr. Krishne Gowda got in some trouble unrelated to the zoo and he was really in the doghouse with Mr. M.B. Prakash, and even the Minister of State for Environment Mr. B.A. Jivijaya. I had some minor link with Mr. Jivijaya who was from Coorg: I knew him and was not afraid to approach him. So I made an appointment and met him in his office with Krishne Gowda in tow and I pled his case, praising Krishne Gowda's unique insight into wildlife and zoo management and requesting Mr. Jivijaya to overlook the unfortunate incident for the sake of the zoo. He agreed and that "rescue" created a strong bond of friendship. It was not long before CDK was doing the same thing for me! Over those years, I, CDK and even a Divisional Commissioner we liked got into trouble and we bailed each other out, or tried our best. We (CDK and I) got one another into amazing trouble ... all with best of intent.

Krishne Gowda graduated university with a specialty in Botany. He was fascinated with anything that qualified as nature. He joined government in the Department of Horticulture. He came to the zoo at the recommendation Dr. M.H. Marigowda, Director of Horticulture who was in charge of the zoo which was well known even then, thanks to Dr. Marigowda, for its marvelous landscaping and plants. It was the Palace Zoo at one time, covering just 10 acres. By the time I landed at Mysore Zoo, Dr. MHMG and CDK had acquired surrounding land of about 240 acres which includes a large, man-made but no less beautiful tank like a lake...with islands across a road dividing it from the zoo proper.

Krishne Gowda was one of those now rare zoo directors who made rounds every day. In my zoo career of about 30 years now, I have never met another zoo director so loyal to this important duty. He loved the animals, the plants and the zoo. He took a complete round (it took about 45 minutes unless he found a real problem) in mid-morning and another one late evening, just before dusk. I spent the whole day at Mysore Zoo every day doing my volunteer work and I almost always accompanied CDK on these rounds. This was my zoo education: 2 times daily rounds with a "zoo man's zoo man" who would share any of his knowledge and experience with me.

Krishne Gowda knew all the animals personally. He often could spot an illness or a problem with an

animal before the keeper or Curator or even the vet could do. I witnessed this a number of times. He could tell when the animals were "off" or even about to go off. He was good at diagnosis and also at prescribing real medication if needed, or some natural remedy. He was very fond of all the animals and grieved terribly when there was a loss. He visited all the apes individually and patted them and they knew him. They also knew when he was on the way to see them and would start screeching from excitement. Their keeper always would have a banana or other fruit ready for CDK to give them, in case he didn't bring something. The rhinos and elephants and tigers also knew him and would have a "snort" or "prusten" for him.

He knew all the Indian and other wild animals and was so interested in their behaviour and habits. He would sometimes describe an animal's nature and was so obviously full of awe and wonder that it touched me to tears (even now). He would say to me about the species or individual – it is "simply wonderful, Sally Walker, ... simply wonderful". He loved large mammals but also any of the other small mammals, many of which I had never heard of.

Once he told, complete thrilled, that we were getting some Ratels. These are also called Honey Badgers, a very attractive and not so commonly seen animal indeed. CDK was raised in a village and probably saw a lot of these what I now call "neglected species" in his childhood. Excuse a small story involving me...when we got these Ratels, he wanted me to publish something about them in the Gnu's Letter, the FOZ quarterly rag and I wanted a photo to go with it. One of the keepers opened the enclosure for me. It was a well decorated cement pit but with landscaping, dirt and grass, trees, etc. Ratels dig ... AND climb...we used to see them in the tree at eye level. Not having a clue as to their behaviour, I went down the ladder with my camera to get a good photo and nearly lost my legs. Ratels are one of the most vicious animals in the world...they came running at me snarling and growling and I know not how I got out of that pit without injury. When Krishna Gowda heard about this, he was beside himself with anger ...at me, at the keeper, ... yikes! Imagine the publicity if those Ratels had eaten the American lady. Anyway, I didn't do that again.

One of the most memorable instances of my getting Krishna Gowda in trouble was the great "vasectomisation of lions" scandal. It all started when Krishna Gowda got a letter from the U.S. Embassy stating that Dr. Nan Schaeffer, a reproductive physiologist who worked for Chicago area zoos would be in India demonstrating semen collection on large carnivores, particularly lions. She was planning to take the semen back to USA where artificial insemination would be attempted with Asiatic lions. The Embassy wondered if Mysore Zoo would also like to host her and see the procedure,

and contribute semen. A.I. for wild animals was a new subject for India and both Krishna Gowda and I saw an opportunity, CDK contacted the Embassy with a letter welcoming Dr. Schaeffer to Mysore. We planned for Friends of Mysore Zoo to help organize a public lecture for members and interest persons in the evening, and for turning her visit and activities into a useful workshop for zoo and wildlife veterinarians in the area. This was first week of March, 1984.

The big day came and Krishna Gowda and I travelled to Bangalore together to meet her flight. The same morning one of the lionesses in the zoo gave birth to three cubs; she had even been impregnated by a previous cub who had matured very early, surprising zoo personnel. This was not welcome due to lack of space and also no interest in lions from other zoos. On the way to Bangalore, I casually commented that Dr. Schaeffer had probably performed vasectomy surgery on large mammals, as she was a reproductive physiologist, and could do so on some of the zoo's male lions. This would reduce risk of more births and more crowding, not to mention inbreeding, etc. As we talked this seemed a better and better idea and we decided to ask her if that was possible. On the way back we brought this up, explaining the problems and she agreed...despite the fact that vasectomies were not part of her official remit that trip. She was a bold lady however and this was obviously a crying need...so she agreed.

This event, both semen collection and vasectomy and slender attractive American lady handling such large animals was of great interest to the press so all of us – Nan and her project, Mysore Zoo and Friends of Mysore Zoo got good publicity. She gave a talk to the public, replied questions of public and press, and it was good all around. UNTIL, India Today magazine in Delhi published a long article about the procedure, Nan, lions generally, crowding, inbreeding, hybridization, etc. A young Raj Chengappa, who ultimately became Editor of India Today, had attended our event and made a two page spread in this popular news-magazine. New Delhi being where government sits, this was irresistible, and there was a Parliament question. "Why is the Mysore Zoo destroying our wildlife?" Oh my! Nightmare Day at the zoo! The Forest Department in Karnataka, no friend of CDK, pounced and had their own questions. Krishna Gowda was again in big trouble for not getting permission for the vasectomy and a host of other things. Nan Schaeffer was in trouble for not asking the US Embassy's permission to conduct this procedure. Maybe even the US Embassy was in trouble. I was most definitely in trouble because it was my well-intentioned idea. It blew over and even the Forest Department invited Nan back to "do" their lions the very next year, but it was hairy for awhile. Today population management is one of the major tasks in zoos and vasectomy is widely used.

One of CDK's "solutions" for "no win" local problems turned out to be a zoo conservation success. Village people often brought Pangolins they had caught to the zoo, thinking they would get a good price for such an oddity. Krishne Gowda just took them, giving the villager 10 rupees, not enough money to reinforce them to do it again, but saving the animal, which they would eat if the zoo didn't take it. CDK would call a keeper and tell him to release the animal in the more vegetated and less developed and travelled part of the zoo. I have no idea how many pangolins were let go in this situation but I do know that they thrived. One morning CDK was waiting for me at the front of the zoo and he looked like he had seen a polar bear at the Karanji Tank ... he was obviously so excited and pleased. He'd been called by night staff very early for some problem and in the very early morning he had seen a Pangolin mother crossing one of the less travelled pathways with baby pangolins trundling behind her. He described everything about it and even now, years later, I can see those pangolins so clearly in my mind that I almost believe I saw them for real. Pangolins had not, till then bred in our zoo or any Indian zoo. I don't know if this qualifies as captive breeding or not(!) but whatever it was, it worked.

Krishne Gowda was an excellent zoo enclosure designer as well as landscaper. He knew his animals and their behaviour, and designed for that, not caring for anything else as much as that they should have an enclosure suited to their comfort and natural behaviour. Once we had an opportunity to get some Nilgiri langurs, a gorgeous primate, all black and white with that long langur tail. Not many zoos had them at the time, well, maybe no zoo except the new zoo coming up in Vandalur, but they were interested to exchange them for some large animal that Mysore Zoo had. CDK deputed me to Vandalur outside Madras (still Madras then) to see them, a great honor really for a volunteer "zoo girl" with dubious experience. What is now a truly wonderful zoo in Vandalur was then almost like a desert with a few Eucalyptus trees and giant holes for moated enclosures. It was too far to go into Madras to a hotel so I stayed in Director Sri Subbarayalu Naidu's office when he was not working there as there was a cot in the room for the occasional visitor. The Nilgiri langurs were in large wire mesh cages which were the quarantine and holding area ... I took pictures (without going into the enclosure this time!) and with my new-found zoo wisdom adjudged them as healthy and perfect. I also got a picture of a gorgeous Malabar langur, which then was thought to be a valid langur subspecies but now is considered a hybrid.

I went back to Mysore and confirmed their general health and suitability. Krishne Gowda immediately wrote a letter to Sri. Subbarayalu Naidu agreeing to the exchange. That was how one communicated then ... letters ... phones didn't work even locally and

there was no email! So it was a few days before this was confirmed back. They wanted to send them immediately. The day Krishne Gowda learned this, I got to observe his amazing creativity and innovation in action. We went around the zoo looking for a place to put the Nilgiri langurs. Krishne Gowda spotted a nicely sized vegetated area with large and small trees, nearby the ape enclosure. Then we went around the zoo looking for wire mesh (!), poles (!), struts (!) and other elements one needs in order to put up an enclosure. Krishne Gowda literally disassembled some fencing before my eyes for the wire mesh, and found a pile of struts (the flat angles you build cages with if I haven't misnamed it), and a tall pole or two. He called his various people that worked on enclosures and next day it was ready to paint. It was a huge, tall circular enclosure which included big trees outside for shade and smaller trees inside for the Nilgiri langurs to destroy as is their wont. It was painted a nice dark forest green and blended in nicely with the surroundings. The Nilgiri langurs looked great in it when they finished their quarantine period and took residence there! That enclosure outlasted me at Mysore Zoo ... in the day it was as good any from an architect's desk...better mostly.

Krishne Gowda had read all the past and current great books of zoo management. He used to send me over to the library or call the zoo librarian to get one of these to find something and then he would hand it over to me to read all of it. I cut my zoo teeth on Heini Hediger's Man and Animal at the Zoo and read his other books also. Nothing is as good for a zoo man (or woman) as Man and Animal at the Zoo though. I don't see how a person can even understand a zoo without reading this at least once or twice. He admired the book Zoo and Wild Animal Medicine by Murray Fowler and consulted it often, as well as the International Zoo Yearbook and AZA Zoo Management Fundamentals edited by Karen Sausman. He had collected all the books of all the old European zoo men some of whom he had known. All his suggestions were "simply wonderful."

Krishne Gowda had a "personality conflict" with the Karnataka Forest Department which was very unfortunate, as it had become the nodal Department looking after the greater administrative matters of the zoo, such as permissions, certain financial aspects, etc. I also had "issues" with many of the officials partly due to my association with CDK and partly because I displayed a lack of tact passed on to me from my friend, CDK. Krishne Gowda was punished by some of the enemies he had made who saw to it that he did not get an extension after his retirement date. Almost always if someone wants to continue and a big event is coming up, this will be granted. Not this time. It was a great pity as the 125th Anniversary of Mysore Zoo was pending and CDK was not part of it. I was punished by complaints to the state and local police perhaps by

the same people as went after CDK (we will never know) which led to my not getting a visa extension. I checked with the Home Department visa fellows whom I knew from Delhi. They checked with state and local authorities and said to me whena I called back "What did you **do** to them?!!!" The Home Department in Delhi had nothing against me and just advised I move to another state, which is why I moved to Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu. It was a great move, however.

I think that Mysore Zoo would never have achieved its past and even current quality without the hand, heart and mind of Krishne Gowda. He set the one and landscape which no one has destroyed till date. He created the beautiful Karanji Tank adding water, islands, trees, which attracted the prestigious National Museum of Natural History which was looking for a site for their Southern area Regional Museum of Natural History.

In the day, Krishne Gowda was well known in the whole zoo world for his breeding successes with various species of large mammals, such as two of our three species of rhino, elephant, tigers, lions, etc. and was invited abroad to discuss his methods. The older people in the global zoo community used to know who he was and what all he had done in this field of breeding large mammals.

It is my honour and good fortune to have been a student of Krishne Gowda. It's hard to put into words without writing a whole book. Suffice it to say now that his knowledge and good practice as a zoo man was "simply wonderful".

Insider Perspective

Tmt Sarojamma*

I am Sarojamma speaking through Latha Ravikumar. I came to work for Madam (Sally Walker) 31 years ago in Mysore. My aunt Pushpa was working with Madam as a cook but she became weak so she asked Madam if she could bring me to help with her duties and she agreed. At Mysore my primary work was cooking and cleaning but slowly I started doing some outside work such as bank, postal work, shopping, etc. for Sally, for Friends of Mysore Zoo and later ZOO. I don't know English but I learnt many words in English from Madam. Many people ask me how I understand her and I don't have a good answer but I never had much difficulty in doing things for her. I always enjoyed her love for animals and always take care of her beloved pets.

In Mysore I didn't have much problem in going out but when we shifted to Coimbatore everything was very new to me. Madam took me to all the places and introduced me like a relative, and then I started going alone to the bank, post office, travel company, etc. with written instructions. I got used to Coimbatore City but for the last 15 years I don't do outside work but help with posting, collating education materials, etc. Wherever we shifted in Coimbatore we had some good people around us to help and particularly the office staff who treat me as their mother.

Madam has adopted me as her Indian mother for last 31 years and I want to be with her always. She makes sure I visit my family in Mysore as often as I want, sometime insisting when am hesitant. She treats me as family, helping with children's marriages, my health, insuring that I have choices, and small but thoughtful things. She gets angry also but it is like family anger. She never treated me as a servant or disrespected me.

I am more than happy to be with her and Zoo Outreach Organisation. Everyone behaves like family and it has become my first home. I'm proud to work for ZOO.

***ZOO Helper, Housekeeper and Mom**