

## **This month-that age: ZOO INTERVIEW 1986 with C. D. Krishne Gowda, (now retd) Director, Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens, Mysore**

Mr C. D. Krishne Gowda, Director of Mysore Zoo had returned in October 1986 from a five-week tour of zoos, museums and national parks in America and the United Kingdom where he was invited to give a presentation at the Indo-US at the National Museum of Natural History in New York City. He visited western countries after a 22 year gap when he visited West Germany as the guest of a West German zoo. Earlier he had six month training in Sri Lanka's National Zoo with (late) Lyn de Alwis. At the time of German visit, Mr. Gowda was at that time the youngest person to be in charge of a zoo in the world. He returned to Mysore after Germany to make Mysore Zoo known throughout the world for breeding large mammals such as Black African Rhino, Indian Rhino, Asian Elephant, Hippo, Giraffe, etc.

Having been a Zoo Man for nearly 25 years Mr. Gowda is one of the half dozen Indian zoo directors who have been in the zoo for more than two decades. We requested him to give his impressions of the United States and United Kingdom Zoos which he visited in the light of his long experience in the zoo world.

*ZOO: Mr. Gowda, you had visited Germany some years ago and that was your last foreign tour before this.*

CDK: Yes, I visited Germany, also on zoo work, over twenty years ago. I accompanied Mr. Albert Meems, a famous animal specialist who traded animals all over the world. In those days there seemed to be still plenty of forests and plenty of animals. There were no restrictions. Mr. Meems and I transported ten baby elephants to Germany by ship. I had agreed to be completely in charge of the elephants- feeding, medicating, training, even cleaning for the entire long voyage. I can say that I learned a great deal about captive elephant behaviour, believe me!

*ZOO: How long did you spend in Germany and what did you do there?*

CDK: I spent 7 weeks in Germany and Mr. Meems helped me see many zoos and study under the German directors and animal keepers. I also visited zoos in Switzerland, Holland and Belgium.

*ZOO: Was that your only training to become a Zoo Man?*

CDK: Not exactly. In those days the government sometimes sent new zoo people around to established zoos in India and Sri Lanka. I spent 3

months as an apprentice in the Colombo Zoo and also in the Trivandrum Zoo under those Directors before I came to be the Curator of Mysore Zoo. At that time the Zoo was under the Department of Horticulture and Dr. M. H. Marigowda, who was the Director of Horticulture, singled me out as an animal man and sent me to study zoo keeping at those zoos. Those compared favourably with western zoos in those days.

*ZOO: Now, this trip to America. How did that come about?*

CDK: I was invited to participate in the Workshop sponsored every other year by the Indo-US commission. I highlighted works being carried on by Indian Zoos and the Wildlife Department, such as translocation and rehabilitation of animals, modern surgical techniques and breeding endangered species. I distributed your literature from Friends of Mysore Zoo and Zoo Outreach Organization also and the American participants were very happy to see so much educational material coming from India.

*ZOO: Would you tell us which zoos you visited and some of your impressions?*

CDK: I was particular about three major subjects and I chose zoos which were known for at least one or two of these things. First I wanted to find a male gorilla for Mysore Zoo and study the best gorilla breeding centers. Second, we want to modernize our hospital at Mysore Zoo and so I was eager for see some of the best hospitals. Third, our Zoo Authority has approved a Nocturnal House for Mysore Zoo and I wanted to see what other zoos have done in that line. I visited National Zoo, Washington, Bronx Zoo, Lincoln Park Zoo, Brookfield Zoo, Milwaukee Zoo, San Francisco Zoo, Albuquerque Zoo, Sea World, New York in USA and Whipsnade Wild Animal Park in U.K.

*ZOO: Were you successful?*

CDK: Well, we have not confirmed it yet but three zoos which I visited had surplus male gorillas which they were theoretically willing to spare on breeding loan or in exchange for some Indian animals. I can't say anything definite as they have to get approval from their governing council and we also have to discuss it with our Zoo Authority, but we have hopes to get one male gorilla for our single female. Regarding veterinary hospitals, they had very modern hospitals the likes of which we do not have even for human beings here with all specialized equipment. Sanitation is excellent.

They are very systematic and of course with their tranquillizing equipment they can treat the animals very efficiently and effectively without disturbing them much. Also their hospitals are very well staffed, some of them with three or four veterinary doctors and lab technicians plus several keepers. The keepers there are educated persons and take tremendous interest in their work. I obtained plans from some zoo hospitals which we can adapt.

ZOO: *What other things impressed you ?*

CDK: Many of the zoos I visited were breeding Snow Leopards in good numbers. They had made such nice enclosures for them with artificial cliffs and pools. And many of the places were quite warm, like New Mexico and New York City, certainly as warm as Mysore, and they had not made any special arrangement for keeping the animals in air conditioning. Nevertheless they were thriving, with beautiful coats and healthy cubs. It made me think that we should take up breeding of this beautiful animal in Mysore Zoo. Of course we will try and get the initial pair from an American zoo as Snow Leopards are not available in Indian zoos and are so very rare in the wild.

ZOO: *What about teasing and feeding animals in the US zoos ?*

CDK: You know, I did not see a single instance of teasing in any zoo in America or U.K., not a single time. But there is a good reason for that the zoos in these countries put tremendous emphasis on education. Not just the zoos, but also the national parks, the nature reserves, the natural history museums, and even amusement parks like Disney World all have made educating the people about the value of wildlife and animals life in general their primary aim.

Each and every zoo has an education department with its own office and building for showing films and slides and giving animal demonstrations. They have brought out so many very excellent printed materials. They also have these "outreach" programmes where they go out to schools and rural areas with vans and live animals and give a programme.

It is mainly the zoos which are educating the people about conservation. And the awareness is tremendous. Once I was travelling by car with a friend down a seven-lane highway at the rush hour. There were literally thousands of cars and going very fast. Suddenly all the cars came to a complete stop right in the middle of the highway. I asked my friend why they stopped and he pointed to a spot way up the road where some wild geese were crossing. Later we saw a board which said "Wild Goose Crossing" and the people are all happy to stop and wait for the geese to cross the road. We must create such respect, love and compassion and

awareness here. Our education programmes do not compare at all and we must do it.

ZOO: *How do you think Indian ZOOS can come up to that standard in education as well as some of the other things which you mentioned ?*

CDK: Indian Zoos are scattered. There is no separate government organization to bring all the zoos in one fold and give them proper incentives to work together, to assemble together from time to time and to exchange their ideas. There is little mutual understanding. And there is no organization to work for the zoos alone. Instead the attention and even financial resources have been dissipated, scattered. The zoos have been virtually ignored. A zoo is a complex institution one must focus ones attention completely on that subject. There must be specialization.

Zoos can be wonderful centers to highlight the wildlife, in India as everywhere, but they have been neglected here. They have been tagged to some other thing. Our bureaucrats must take note of this and see that something is done to bring all the zoos under one organization in the country, a department or commission, or any official organization solely devoted to zoos and nothing else.

In the United States and in U. K. also they are having such fine associations the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, the American Association of Zookeepers, even the International Association of Zoo Educators. They are given a lot of encouragement by the city, by the people, even the government has laid out some nice policies so that they can work effectively for the benefit of the wildlife and man's knowledge of it. Our administration must try to do something to uplift the administrative setup of the zoos. They must give importance to their activities.

ZOO: *You mentioned how Zoo Societies and Friends of Zoos help with various activities in the West. In India two such societies have come up in different parts of the country but there has been friction with some aspects of the administration. One such society up, north just stopped functioning altogether. How can you overcome this?*

CDK: Maybe in the minds of some people Friends of Zoos has been taken as being competitive with the zoo or some other department. It is not that way in the U.S. and it works well. In the west these societies are given great importance and allowed to do many things and they free the zoo administration to concentrate on the details of keeping and breeding animals. A Friends of Mysore Zoo was started here. For me, I was proud of that Friends of Mysore Zoo although I too had some confusion about their role and activities in the beginning. But after some days of observing the

activities I found a lot of constructive work turned out by this organization. It has done a marvellous job particularly of creating awareness of the importance of zoo in people of all ages.

ZOO: *In Friends of Mysore Zoo one problem has been that some members were looking for benefits for themselves instead of focusing on the zoo. They wanted (free) trips to different places, functions, privileges with animals far more than for opportunities to help the zoo. The concept of selfless service didn't get through members although FOZ stated that clearly in the Preamble and Bylaws. FOZ Preamble states that our credo is "selfless service and positive action. "Friends of National Zoo in Washington had a principle that any money taken into the Society would be used only for visitor education or other benefit to the zoo. FOZ put an annexure like that in their Bylaws so no group in future can finance some tour for themselves by making money off the zoo. It is better that every such societies have that as part of their code of ethics.*

CDK: The workshop I attended and the zoos I visited were most appreciative to hear that such organizations were coming up in India. One interesting thing which I noticed in America is that everything is separate. The Zoos are separate, the National Parks Service is separate, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is separate, the Friends of the Zoo separate. So they do not interfere with one another but they are all there to help each other they cooperate. They try to educate the people in their own particular field. It is excellent. And everyone then can specialize in one particular thing. It is working very well. In India we need to adopt more of specialization. In zoo administration one must have a free hand to work for the animals. People particularly interested in animals and animal care must be encouraged. Zoos are getting a sort of step motherly treatment and it shouldn't thought to be that way.

ZOO: *What about animal care in particular in U.S.A. ?*

CDK: There is a vast gap. The keepers there are highly devoted. And they are trained and specialized keepers in their own field, for example an elephant man he knows everything about the elephants, not just the daily care but also the ecology, history, habits, habitat, etc. Mostly they are qualified people, not only educationally but also trained in the management of animals. It is a specialized profession in America. All the keepers are specialists in their own field birds, mammals, fish, etc. Like that, all trained, well qualified people are being entertained in American zoos. They want only some highly technical information given by the Director or Curator they know everything else. They don't require any supervision or guidance or anything unless there is a particular new problem they know their job and they do it.

ZOO: *Do you have any ideas for bringing such educated young Indian people into the Indian zoos? Of course when I talk about this everyone says it won't work here, that educated people won't do the keepers job in India. What do you think ?*

CDK: To tell you the fact as soon as I returned to India even a few days back I instructed my office people to contact the employment exchange to send some qualified people to work as probationary zookeepers here. When the period of probation is over if they are suitable they will be absorbed as keepers to look after the animals. Of course during the probationary period they will be observed for having a love for the work, etc. I am taking up that matter very seriously. We are going to try and implement it and see how many people will come forward. I have fixed the basic minimum qualification as P.U.C and maximum qualification as B.Sc. in Natural Science. Let us see how it works. I hope many people like this, will come to work as keepers in Mysore Zoo. Another interesting thing is that I found ladies working along with gents with large animals, even gorilla, elephant, rhino. We have to give chance for ladies who are interested also.

ZOO: *What about the administrative set up there — directors, curators, etc ?*

CDK: Yes, they have specialized curators for every type of animal, a Curator of Mammals, Curator of Birds, Curator of Reptiles, etc. All are specialized and highly educated. The Director is the senior most man and he is over all of it. Most of these people have really done a lot of work on wild animals, both in the wild and in captivity. They are good in field work as well as in zoo and many of them regularly go on research trips to other continents to study the different species in the wild status. We could employ the same method here. There are so many unemployed graduates in zoology.

ZOO: *So in general how do you feel about Indian Zoos now ?*

CDK: Indian Zoos have done a good job with very small resources and attention. But we need to work quite a lot and we must be given the facilities and freedom to improve. Recently the government has been providing more financial assistance through Centrally sponsored schemes which is good. We have added a number of things to our zoos with those funds. But mainly we must concentrate on educating the people. If we do that, more people will come forward to work for the zoos and then the standard of animal care will automatically come up.