

My Turn

S. Paulraj*

At last it is my turn to write my experience with ZOO for its final hard copy print edition after my first ever visit to the ZOO office at Coimbatore on November 11, 2010. Although Ms. Sally was not in the country on that day, I don't find any difference in the work culture of her office. I immediately recollect the famous sentence in a poem about the perennial river: "men may come and men may go.. but, I go on forever." Sally developed such a team and office set-up that it will go on in the same tempo and with same commitment in a self-controlled system for the long term.

I often wonder how this 'tiny colony', that is Zoo Outreach Organisation, ZOO, is so active and prompt in organizing meetings, workshops, etc., and publishing the magazine so systematically in a time-bound manner without any delay! I have the answer as a Zoologist: this is the way of working of ants! The teamwork spirit there is not about competition but cooperation.

Twenty-five years back... where was I ? Yes ... I can recollect my days both in Vandalur Zoo and Zoo Outreach Organization (ZOO). My association with both started simultaneously. If I remember correctly (most probably not correct due to my old age memory loss!!) I had an opportunity of meeting Ms. Sally at Mysore Zoo in a workshop on sterilizing Lions for population control. At that point of time Sally was engaged in some education and awareness creation activity at Mysore under the banner "Friends of Mysore Zoo". During the late eighties Sally made several visits to Vandalur Zoo (Arignar Anna Zoological Park), and my association with ZOO and Sally started growing.

Although I was a forest officer and a government servant, I have more liking and aptitude for research than for administration as a typical government officer. Entry into the government officer's domain for others (especially foreigners like Sally) is always tough, and this was true at that point of time also. I was acting as a buffer between Sally and the Forest Department's zoo administration. When Sally wanted to extend her zoo education and extension activities to include Vandalur Zoo, it was not immediately accepted (a typical bureaucratic attitude – what they know more than us!). Sally might have experienced and may be able to recollect volumes about her 'struggles' with bureaucrats! But, her persistent efforts, commitment and tolerance of any type of hardship and humiliation helped her to develop immunity and thereby able to run the show successfully and systematically all through the years.

My thirst and aptitude for research was always there all through my service. Sally's ZOO magazine

made me contribute more and more during my Zoo service years. I was a regular contributor to ZOO's magazine during 1985 to 1990. Both ZOO and I were growing. As more and more scientific articles poured in, there was a necessity for starting a separate Journal by ZOO. ZOO's PRINT Journal was born, a child of Sanjay Molur, and the service of the ZOO was also expanded. Sanjay has now started an independent Journal of Threatened Taxa JoTT which is doing well.

Also I had two opportunities to visit abroad during my zoo tenure. That was mainly due to Sally's sincere efforts and encouragement.

When I was transferred from the Vandalur Zoo during 1990, I almost stopped contributing articles to ZOO's PRINT due to change of my official priority. Although I was not able to contribute to wildlife conservation directly by writing articles, I always made it a point to engage one wildlife biologist wherever I was working, a practice I started when working in the Vandalur zoo.

I also introduced a few interested and motivated wildlife biologist to Sally and two among them (Dr. B.A. Daniel and R. Marimuthu) are now still working with ZOO. There are four biologist permanently absorbed in Vandalur Zoo. All of them are having continuous contact with ZOO by contributing articles and participating in seminars / workshops organized by ZOO. I am very proud of telling that all the zoo biologists are continuously molded by ZOO's activities to become refined zoo biologists. They have no better organization other than ZOO in India for improving and enriching their zoo management skill.

As a Life Member of ZOO till today I am getting the ZOO's PRINT Magazine regularly wherever I was transferred. I sometimes wonder how these ZOO people know my whereabouts and send the magazine and other communications regularly. Whenever I receive ZOOS' PRINT, which comes along with my routine office tapals, I quickly browse all the pages and read only when something is of interest to me. That may take hardly two minutes my interest on zoo matters not the priority at that time. However, I was happy to recollect my days in the Zoo once in a month whenever I receive the ZOO's magazine. All these ZOO magazines will be sent to cold storage for future reference. I strongly believe that at some point of time I will have interest and time to go through.

*No. 164, 6th Street, Kambar Nagar, Jawahar Nagar (post). Chennai – 600 082. E-mail: paulrajifs@gmail.com

I am reaching my age of superannuation soon (31 Jan 2011) after about 30 years in Government Forest service. When I recollect my entire service only my experience with the zoo is as fresh as the latest ones although it is the oldest and earliest part of my entire service. Of all my subordinate officers and staff with whom I worked during the past 30 years, only the staff and officers of Vandalur zoo still remember and recollect my service with them more than any other staff. This is mainly due to my association with ZOO and Sally. But for my association with Zoo Outreach and Vandalur Zoo I would not have developed such love for wildlife and its conservation. My interest might have been diverted to some other areas but for my association with ZOO.

I feel that, I lack some perfection in my duties even after my 30 years of service with government (maybe due to Govt. service syndrome!). This deficiency may be rectified to some extent if I happen to work in ZOO for some time. How this monkey is going to become an ant in the ZOO ant's colony is a thought provoking question!!!! A better option for this monkey is to contribute some fruits to the ant's colony and rectify his deficiency than joining the ant's colony and disturb them?!!!!

With everlasting and ever green memories of ZOO
Dr. S. Paulraj, IFS.

This December 2010 issue of ZOO's PRINT is the last hard copy or printed version marking 25 years of regular monthly production of this zoo magazine. It was the first zoo & monthly magazine in Asia and one of the first monthly zoo magazines in the world.

As most of our readers have access the internet, from Jan. 1, 2011, ZOO'S PRINT will be on line monthly around the same date. We stopped taking subscriptions long ago so that we don't "owe" anyone a hard copy I think. LIFE Members may remember that we always said "LIFE membership means OUR life, not yours!" Well the time has come that we have to simplify our life at ZOO and this is an example. In any case, that much less paper and ink will be used, and that much less trash for landfills and white ants.

I am the person who spends hours on ZOOS' PRINT. My office staff takes care of proofreading, some typesetting, administration. I'd like some HELP ! from our readers and members. If you all try to just send some feature articles or your impressions of conservation and zoos, etc., it would help me a lot and also be good for the publication.

Best wishes,
Sally Walker, Editor Emeritus, ZP Magazine
(Emeritus in name but not in fact!)

ZOO & WILD Websites



**www.zooreach.org
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E-mail: zooreach@zooreach.org**

