

Your Turn

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I'm happy to have an opportunity to write about Zoo Outreach Organisation in the final month of their 25th Anniversary Year. Although my association with Z.O.O., Sally, Sanjay and their most efficient staff has not been very long, I have ample experience with their projects to supply a concluding anniversary commentary.

Z.O.O. first came to my attention when Z.O.O. and one of their regional networks, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, CBSG, proposed that they conduct a Conservation Assessment and Management Plan (CAMP) workshop for all South Asian Primates. A CAMP is a product of CBSG which uses the IUCN Red List Criteria and Categories as a means of collecting and organizing information for a particular taxon group. I could not attend this but some of our PSG members and my colleagues did so and reported a very productive workshop.

Although impressive, the CAMP was not the action that impressed me ... it was the follow-up of the workshop, which began immediately, even before the workshop was over, with participants going back to their station with a hard copy of the CAMP output.

Afterwards, a range of simple but very creative children's educational material featuring South Asian primates began to flow in an almost continuous stream of packets, posters, stickers, etc. This was followed by a 432-page report of the South Asian Primate CAMP Workshop with Red List assessments for all 43 primate taxa and an extensive account of discussions and decisions of the 40+ primate biologists participating in the workshop. Some time after that, a workshop Summary was produced that targeted every age and social groups, children, teachers and laypersons. A few months after that, ZOO/CBSG South Asia organized a Population and Habitat Viability Assessment for Hoolock Gibbon, a species of great concern in the CAMP, and later a series of six teacher training workshop in northeastern India and Bangladesh.

What I was witnessing was an organization systematically implementing all the recommendations of the workshops they organized. More recently ZOO organized two translocation training scoping workshop in Guwahati, Assam, again an activity related to recommendations from the Hoolock Gibbon PHVA.

After the Hoolock Gibbon PHVA in 2005, I met Sally at an International Primatological Society meeting in Entebbe, Uganda and asked her how their small organization of about one dozen or less people could do so many things and at such a low cost. She brushed it off as being "easy" with the right level of organization. She described the many

virtues and convenience of setting up and utilizing taxon and thematic networks similar to IUCN SSC Specialist Groups. ZOO, in fact, represented several IUCN Specialist Groups and so far the global Chairs were mightily pleased with the arrangement. She even was so bold as to tell me I should do it for Primate Specialist Group, which I chair.

Sally and Sanjay nominated Hoolock Gibbon for one of PSG's Bi-Annual list of World's Twenty-five most Endangered Primates. ZOO/PSG South Asia Network has used this mechanism most creatively to promote a highly threatened species with a combination of activities and attractive printed material, always working intensively with the northeastern Indian primate researchers.

Most recently ZOO released a Special Cover featuring Western Hoolock Gibbon under the auspices of the Indian Post in Coimbatore in a sort of finale for the two continuous terms of occupying the 25 Most Endangered Primate list. The letter in the Special cover, sent to hundreds of officials and primate specialists and well wishers used information from the PHVA combined by recent experience to document succinct reasons why chances of saving this unique species in India are limited. Success is most likely if Government of India Ministry of Environment sets up a Project Hoolock Gibbon along the lines of similar highly focused and funded projects, such as Project Tiger, Project Elephant, etc. Such a project would provide funds for all seven Hoolock states to conduct the research and salvage the individuals and habitat for survival of the species.

ZOO's ability to successfully field so many regional networks of specialist groups of SSC IUCN (Primate SG, Amphibian SG, Small Mammal SG, Conservation Breeding SG, Re-introduction SG and the newly formed South Asian Invertebrate SG) virtually is very useful to these individual specialist group chairs. I am also impressed with ZOO's involvement in global conservation issues and activities such as the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE), Journal of Threatened Taxa (JoTT) and policies. I wish ZOO and its team the very best and my full support to its endeavors for a continued active presence in conservation.

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