

25 years of ZOO, ZOOS PRINT, ZOO ZEN

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Editors' Note :

Some of our oldest and most faithful readers, contributors, editors, collaborators, and friends responded with good wishes to our announcement of ZOO's birthday. We rewarded some of them by asking them to contribute Anniversary "Testorials" to ZOO & ZOOS' PRINT this year. And what is a Testorial? It is a combination of a testimonial, a memorial and editorial, in this instant, to celebrate the anniversary of ZOO and its activities.

Other readers are welcome also to write a testorial for ZOO, etc. on this occasion of our 25th year. And you don't have to say all nice things...you can also say mean or petty things that perhaps you have thought but not expressed over the years.

We would like to know from these contributions what ZOO has done right and also wrong. People tell us that ZOO has had an impact ... I would like to know precisely what we do that brings about positive change. We could do more of it maybe. We welcome comments on what we do that is useless and what we don't do that you think an organisation such as ZOO should do. That doesn't mean we will change, but at least we will know !

We have also asked our staff also to contribute an testorial, essay or article about what its like to work for ZOO.

Manoj Misra, who is first to contribute, has been a reader, editor, writer, advisor and friend to ZOO and ZOOS' PRINT almost since inception. Sanjay Molur has written the first employee testorial.

It was still the days of postman, typewriter, safe roads, trains as the preferred mode of long distance travel and bliss of the ignorant. Computers were something that scientists used; 'web' meant spider, 'mouse' was raptors' prey, the 'Illustrated Weekly' was still around, telephone at home was a status symbol and the 'internet' a good decade away. To cut a long story short it was the year 1985.

I had just returned from my field trip into the Madhav National Park in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh, of which I was then the newly appointed Director. As I entered my office, a packet in the official dak (mail) caught my eye. A Mysore-based organisation called the Zoo Outreach Organisation, ZOO had started a monthly magazine called ZOOS' PRINT and had sent a complimentary copy. A lady by the name of Sally Walker (for some strange reason, the name appeared very familiar) was its Editor. The magazine had Zoos as its prime target then but was inclusive enough to cater to the needs of wildlife conservation. Soon ZOOS' PRINT became a regular and welcome reading material. To a park manager in a small town (where getting even the national newspaper was a luxury) it afforded news and views from all over as well as some food for thought from an editor who used simple but very sensible language. I felt comfortable to contribute my own material to this magazine. When I lost a young hyena to a python, I was tempted to share the news along with pictures with others. What could be a better medium than ZOOS PRINT for it.

Thus began my association first with ZOOS PRINT and much later (it was almost 6 years before one actually met Sally in person) with its dynamic and indomitable editor. In the meantime there had been a personal shift on an official transfer to Chandrapur in Maharashtra. ZOO also had relocated itself from Mysore in Karnataka to Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu. I began to share on a regular basis, my experiences from nature watching in general and bird watching in particular. ZOOS PRINT was always there to carry it under a column called 'Nature Tales'. ZOO ZEN, a compendium of published material serving as a sister publication to ZOOS PRINT, was providing extremely useful and otherwise unavailable material on wildlife science, animal health, captive animal care, environmental enrichment in Zoos etc. Sally was travelling all over India and the globe and sharing her experiences from various zoos, wildlife facilities and like through many articles in newspapers, magazines and of course ZOOS PRINT and ZOO ZEN. Her pioneering surveys on Musk Deer, Sangai, Lesser cats, Vultures and Barasingha in Indian Zoos brought much needed attention to these species.

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Studbooks on Asiatic Lion (supporting P.P. Raval's efforts), Indian Rhino (supporting Kanpur Zoo vet's efforts), Musk Deer, etc. and "studbook like" listings such as Sangai in Indian Zoos were much valued publications as first attempts at studbooks for India. Sally's advocacy for improved zoos in the country resulted (to a great extent) in the creation of the much needed Central Zoo Authority (CZA) and appropriate Zoo specific amendments in the national Wildlife Protection Act.

I first met Sally in Bhopal in 1991 in my official capacity as the Director of Bhopal Zoo. I met Sanjay Molur also who had by then joined ZOO. My admiration for Sally as a facilitator and educator par excellence was firmed up at the Asiatic Lion PHVA held in Baroda in 1993. Sally had found in Dr. Ulie Seal a professional guru.

Almost immediately after this, I was one of the three selected from India for an International Zoo Educator Course hosted by the world famous Jersey Zoo in Channel Islands, where Sally was an instructor. (Sally had a role to play in even in arranging gratis international travel for the three of us from India). This course proved useful in ways more than one. Exposure to Jersey Zoo, with the course helping me imbibe educational and facilitation skills and later travelling for a month across UK to visit different Zoos and environmental education facilities made me realise the immense potential and necessity of appropriate EE in our Zoos and PAs. More so the trip instilled in me a confidence to interact meaningfully in a multi cultural and lingual atmosphere, which later proved to be of much help when I headed TRAFFIC India in WWF India and even beyond now when I am part of a national NGO.

ZOOS' PRINT and ZOO ZEN continued to inform and educate and in 1991 Sally started to experiment (with active encouragement from Ullie Seal) with national and regional clones of the IUCN's Captive (since renamed Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG)). CBSG India was followed by CBSG, Sri Lanka and CBSG Nepal which were amalgamated after a few years into CBSG, South Asia. A large number of professional and enthusiastic specialists became eager members of these hugely successful but entirely informal groups. ZOOS PRINT of course remained the vehicle for dissemination of news and views about zoos, CBSG networks, field reports, educational activities and material that the ZOO promoted. ZOO's Journal, a brain child of Sanjay, appeared which soon became a much respected peer referred journal of its kind and has now morphed into an international web based journal

called Journal of Threatened Taxa, JoTT, also celebrating one year of publication in January.

Inter alia somewhere along the line Sally attended a couple of Ulie Seal's CAMP (Conservation Assessment and Management Plan) workshops and saw its utility as a participatory tool for Red Listing to prioritise species and actions. ZOO/CBSG, India used them first on medicinal plants in collaboration with Vinay Tandon of Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions. Ulie Seal and Mike Maunder came over and led three workshops after which Sanjay proved very adept in assessing species with amazing perception, depth and integrity, suggesting changes in the CAMP process and even in the Red List which are used even today by IUCN. A tool that had primarily been prepared for prioritising species for captive breeding came to be used with much success on Sally's and Sanjay's initiatives for all kinds of wild flora and fauna including medicinal plants, invertebrates, frogs, bats, etc.

When Sally realised that ZOO had defaulted on provisions of the FCRA she not only made good the default with alacrity but ensured that for almost a year ZOOS PRINT continued to educate all its readers on the requirements of the FCRA.

Its not surprising at all to note that ZOO, ZOOS PRINT and ZOO ZEN have entered the silver jubilee of their unenviable service to nature conservation under the seemingly effortless guidance of its founder secretary (for some reason Sally never called herself either the Director or the Chief Executive of ZOO until very recently).

Sally is an amazing yet self-effacing individual. Her biggest contribution to conservation may be perfecting the art of promoting the neglected but deserving through her personal credo of the 3Cs of Conservation (Communication, Cooperation and Collaboration) and the 3Es of Extinction (Ego, Envy and Elitism). May her tribe increase!

What Sally, Sanjay (and the ZOO crew) has proved over quarter of a century now is that it doesn't really require lot of money or patronage or even a prime location (like Delhi or Mumbai) for an organisation to make a real difference on the ground. Dedication, sincerity of purpose, hard work, original thinking and making the best of opportunities that come by is often more than enough!

Wishing a HAPPY 25th Anniversary to ZOO, ZOOS PRINT and ZOO ZEN. And looking forward to the 50th one.....