

# Training for Sr. Staff, Kabul Zoo, Afghanistan

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Zoo Outreach Organisation staff and members were sympathetic in 2001 when news of Kabul Zoo's plight in the midst of war in Afghanistan became public. Through Dave Ferguson of USFWS and others, such as Dr. Kushal Habibi, an Afghan working in USA, we were able to draw on our specialities and make a few contributions in education and publications. We organised art work and a printer for a very nice book on Afghanistan mammals written by Kushal and sponsored by USFWS. We brokered a deal in which the Kabul Zoo got quite a few of the books to use in their education programme. Shortly after we were able to help out with a Dari translation.

We also managed to send some samples of educational materials through a young contact who lived in Kabul and Pakistan and develop a relationship with the Education Officer.

WAZA, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums raised some funds for the Kabul Zoo. So did BIAZA, the British Zoo Association, AZA, and others. At some point during these activities we learned about the efforts of Dr. David Jones, who raised half a million dollars from zoo supporters in USA, where he is director of the North Carolina zoo.

We learned about Brendan Whittington-Jones, a wildlife biologist from South Africa who just up and went to the Baghdad Zoo with his friend and helped bring order out of the chaos. Somehow Brendan was induced to spend time at Kabul also to see what help he could give.

At some point we (ZOO) got involved with some of the people working for the survival of Kabul Zoo and, over the internet with what I call the Kabul Zoo Egroup found ways to help through capacity building. We hosted the Kabul Zoo Education, Md. Abdul Fazal, Education Officer of Kabul Zoo, to one of our Teacher Training series in central and northern India.

Some months later we were able to invite the Fazil and his boss, Sha Noori, Director, to a combination of training workshops we were running in Pakistan, at Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore. Fazil and Sha Noori seemed to pick up a lot of ideas from seeing the zoos, some of which they did during the small mammal field techniques training. They also got lot out of zookeeper training which was actually a training of zoo managers and vets of how to train their keepers. Fazil was able to attend a SAZARC meeting in Lahore, Pakistan shortly afterwards.

The Kabul Zoo egroup (consisting of David Jones from NC zoo, James Hogan, from Mayhew Animal Welfare Society in UK, Nick Lindsay from ZSL in UK, Brendan Whittington-Jones who was still there monitoring daily life at the zoo, training and reporting events) had formed to discuss how funds should be spent and various problems of the zoo. After

some time it became obvious that much of the zoo had been adequately patched up so as not to be considered a crisis. The Municipality regained its ability to pay salaries without external help and the Kabul Zoo egroup began to think that whatever remained of the funds should be used for training. Donors appeared from other Asian countries who sponsored some big constructions in the Kabul Zoo. Brendan left and returned to give the zoo a checkup. Wildlife Conservation Society, working in the field in Afghanistan contributed Kara Stevens who taught a new education officer techniques from Bronx Zoo. (Fazil had since joined his wife in USA.) The zoo was healing but much still had to be done and it was then that we began to talk of more serious training. Senior staff also asked for training which was a good sign. For some two or three years, several options presented themselves or were presented by one or another of us, but somehow, they never materialised. Some of these options I had offered but withdrew because it just wasn't working. For some time it seemed that we could send some of the staff to Kamla Nehru Zoo, Ahmedabad where there is a very brilliant and personable director and veterinarian who welcomed them, but ran into a ton of red tape involved in a government/municipal zoo hosting visitors from the Middle East. A moment's hope rose when we contacted Al Ain zoo which, we learned, had zookeepers originally from Afghanistan so language wouldn't be a problem. The Al Ain Zoo would be happy to host but not now ...their zoo is under drastic renovation. We'll be back !

Finally, I asked if it would be sufficient if ZOO organised their training as we are an NGO and don't care about red tape formalities! We could have them at our office for a couple of days and import trainers in veterinary science while my staff provided training in public education. We could follow this with a tour to a number of very good zoos within South India. This plan had obvious merits since it was kind of a last ditch measure before the Kabul Zoo folks became discouraged.

The next part was easy ... we contacted our resource persons and zoos in India ... nobody said no. Everybody wanted to help. Latha found reasonable flights and schedule. Then we could declare a date for them to come and it was hard again while we waited for their visas. As the day grew near I obsessed over their having to transfer from international to national terminal in Delhi. The time wasn't so long and their English isn't great. Finally begged Manoj Misra to help -- he volunteered Bhim from his office. I continued to obsess until Sudha, Manoj's Assistant, said she would accompany Bhim. Their flight from Kabul was an hour late but Sudha and Bhim rushed them to domestic and pushed them in. Finally they were in Coimbatore where their training was to begin. ZOO's own Marimuthu took over and for the next ten days, our guests were immersed in zoo management training.