

Report on the Kabul Zoo officers Training Visit to India

Rengasamy Marimuthu and Sally Walker

After a long period of planning, described in the previous pages, three senior officers of Kabul Zoo, Afghanistan underwent a 10 day training on a wide range of topics in zoo management, hosted by Zoo Outreach Organisation and 7 South Indian Zoos. This training tour was fully sponsored by an emergency fund set up several years ago by David Jones at the North Carolina Zoo to meet some of the urgent daily and long range expenses of the then war-torn zoo. Their visit took place from 20-30 December 2009 with training being initiated in the ZOO office on 21st morning.

Of the three officers, Mr. Aziz Gul Saqib, Director of Kabul Zoo, was the most experienced in the Kabul Zoo and also spoke English and translated for the others. Aziz had been to India before, on a visit to New Delhi. Dr. Abdul Qadir Bahawi, Zoo Veterinarian and Mr. Najibullah Nazary, Zoo Educator had not. They were visiting outside their native country for the first time. None were strangers to training, however, as Wildlife Conservation Society had conducted a workshop 18-21, November 2006, and also Ms. Kara Stevens had helped the zoo officials create a three year education curriculum. The purpose of this training, based in India, was to be able to see a variety of other zoos in their own region of South Asia, obtain some didactic technical training on a few topics and interact with other zoo personnel in different settings. Because the three of them each hold a different job but were dependent on Aziz for translation, they all shared time and learned much about zoo management generally.

Monday, 21 Dec 09 - ZOO office - Basic veterinary management and zoo education

They reached Coimbatore on 20th evening after a close call in transferring from their International to domestic flight. Their flight from Kabul was an hour late and but for our friends from P.E.A.C.E. Institute,



Zoo education session with Zoo Outreach staff, Coimbatore

Mrs. Sudha and Mr. Bhim who had agreed to meet their flight and helped they, they would have missed the short connection.

Training began immediately on the following morning with Dr. N. S. Manoharan, Forest Veterinary Officer, of Tamil Nadu cadre, who served several years as Veterinarian in Arignar Anna Zoological Park, Chennai and Director of the VOC Park Zoo in Coimbatore. He was invited to give them primarily



Sessions on basic veterinary care were provided by Dr. Manoharan at ZOO office

didactic training on basic animal health care. Dr. Manoharan interacted with them extensively, introducing all topics first by describing the daily routine of the veterinarian at the zoo, the importance of carefully observing the animals on a daily basis, prophylactic measures, including vaccinations, and treatments. This session took up the whole morning. They liked the session very much because Dr. Manoharan entirely covered zoo veterinarian's role in this session and replied queries from all three of them.

In the afternoon Daniel and Marimuthu from ZOO office taught them how to conduct active-learning programme in zoo education using various education materials and manuals developed by Zoo Outreach Organisation. They stressed the importance of the educator making thematic material come alive with games and drama which actively involved their target audience. They were supplied with the samples of all ZOO's education materials to take back to Kabul Zoo and adapt for their use. They showed very much interest upon seeing the materials. It was the first time they had seen educational material developed specifically for use in South Asia and much impressed with the packet items. They opened up all the packets and went through the contents such as booklets, mask placard, rakhi, stickers while the ZOO trainers explained how they could be used. They went through the manuals with the help of Aziz, who read

them some of the active learning methods therein. Some of the things could be adopted for their species at the Kabul zoo, they said. The education session took up the rest of the day.

Tuesday, 22 Dec 09 - Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park and more veterinary training

In the morning they were taken into Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park where Mr. Rathinasabapathy and other staff at the facility gave a brief introduction about the Coimbatore Zoological Park Society and the Nature Park with the help of maps. Then they were taken to the aquarium, where they observed some



Director, Kabul Zoo, translating information on Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park to colleagues

fishes of Western Ghats and also some insects such as scorpion, centipede, etc., which will be displayed in the terrariums in the future. Saba explained the culturing of crickets which can be used to feed a variety of animals. Afterwards they moved to the Pollinator Garden where they learned about some of the host and nectar plants and observed the variety of butterfly species. The Pollinator Garden was something unique for them and they have shown very much interest to know about all different plant and butterfly species. Especially on that day, most of



Looking at one of the host plant of butterfly at NBNP, Anaikatti

the plants had bloomed and attracted several different species of butterflies.

We took our visitors on trekking paths into the site and showed different eco-zones of the park. They were very curious to know about the plants and animals found in the site as they were very different from local flora and fauna found in Kabul. At the end of the trek they toured the medicinal plants garden, a cactus garden and other features of this nature facility with NBNP and ZOO staff both explaining. ZOO has been involved in the NBNP project for a long time through several iterations. Ultimately they spent most of the day at the park asking many questions and taking photos. This type of facility was something entirely new for them.

After a break in the evening, Dr. Manoharan continued his teaching with them. They had requested him to bring his dart gun and other darting equipment, such as blow pipes and medicines which are used for darting animals. He



Demonstration of darting gun by Dr. Manoharan at ZOO office



Kabul zoo vet practised using a blowpipe at the veterinary session in ZOO office

demonstrated all of the steps for all equipment and on which animals it could be used. Dr. Manoharan provided hands-on training so they could get familiar with the equipment. Even the veterinarian

of Kabul Zoo for the first time in his service saw a dart gun. Manoharan provided details of brand names and addresses of the equipment and photocopy of the instruction manual.

Wednesday, 23 Dec 09- V.O.C. Park Zoo

In the morning we took them to the V.O.C. Park Mini Zoo in Coimbatore, a Municipal Zoo as is the Kabul zoo. Dr. Perumalsamy the present Director and Dr. Thirukumaran, former Director briefed them about the zoo such as the area, number of staff, management of the zoo, inventory of animals, food



Signage at VOC Park Zoo was discussed by Kabul zoo trainees



Enclosure design and enrichment techniques at the V.O.C. Park zoo aviary

chart etc. Afterwards they took a round of the zoo, visiting every enclosure. The VOC Park Zoo is probably the most like Kabul Zoo in terms of area and level of enclosures and care. The trainees admired the water bird enclosure and also some of the signage and enjoyed the toy train ride especially arranged for them. The doctors explained the use of blow pipes for tranquilizing the animals. The Kabul Zoo vet also was able to experiment with this instrument.



Kabul Zoo education officer studies signage at V.O.C. Park Zoo, Coimbatore

In the afternoon a long session on zoo visitor behaviour was provided at Zoo Outreach hq as this topic had been particularly recommended for Kabul Zoo staff. Zoo Outreach Organisation has extensive experience in developing material to combat this behavioural scourge which is present in most South Asian zoos. Using ZOO's educational materials and one of Sally Walker's Power Point presentations on the topic, ZOO staff told many ways to curb this problem. The related literature



Education session for Kabul Zoo officers at Z.O.O. office

was given in soft copy as well as hard copy. Since Kabul zoo has this problem the trainees found this session very useful. They said some of the ZOO materials could be adapted or replicated in their zoo to help curb the menace.

Thursday, 24 Dec 09- Mysore via Western Ghats

Morning we left from Coimbatore to Mysore via Kotagiri, Ooty, Mudumalai and Bandipur, all of which are tourist sites, the latter two being wildlife sanctuaries. Our visitors had a good view of the famous Western Ghats and saw several "camp elephants" in Mudumalai Sanctuary. Evening by

4.30 pm we reached Mysore Zoo and met Mr. Shivanna, Administrative Assistant of the zoo. He had arranged a quick tour around the zoo by battery car to give our visitors an orientation of the 250 acre facility. The visitor circulation path had been revamped recently and it was possible to see all the animals in a single round. Mr. Somashekar, Education Officer of the Zoo accompanied us, explained details of the zoo and answered the trainees' queries.

Friday, 25 Dec 09- Mysore Zoo

In the morning we returned to the Mysore Zoo to learn about enclosure design of different animals, environmental enrichment, and animal signage including species information, interactive signage, visitor behavior and directional signage, from Mysore Zoo staff. After that we met Shivanna who described the activities of the Mysore Zoo Youth Club which is one of very good education programmes run by the Mysore Zoo. Following this there was a tour of the zoo veterinary hospital, food store, animal quarantine area and lab. Dr. C. Suresh Kumar, Assistant Director and Veterinary Officer spent a lot of time with them, explaining the animal



Sanitation and hygiene were on training agenda. Trainees examine a disinfectant mat at Mysore Zoo

inventory system, daily report, food chart, deworming and vaccination schedule for various animals. He photocopied all of the charts and printed items and gave this valuable reference to the Kabul Zoo veterinarian. Then they toured the food store, laboratory, incubator, quarantine area, operation theatre and tranquillizer equipment. The Mysore zoo has an electronic database of the all the animals they treated which Dr. Kumar used then to show some of the treatments they had given the animals.

In the evening we met the Executive Director of Mysore Zoo Mr. Vijay Ranjan Singh, IFS. He discussed some zoo management issues with them, and gave a brief talk about Mysore Zoo, its organizational structure and the Zoo Authority of Karnataka. Mysore Zoo's official name is



Looking at the environmental enrichment at Jungle fowl enclosure at Mysore Zoo

Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens. It was founded on 10 acres of Palace land by the Mysore Maharaja. Gradually big chunks of land were added to the zoo making up 250 acres, including a 100 acre site adjacent to the zoo where a water body was constructed with man-made islands which today attracts dozens of species of migratory birds. Mysore Zoo is the only old Indian zoo which has been able to completely modernize on the same site. The Mysore Zoo is the zoo which inspired the founding of Zoo Outreach Organisation after government officers in the Environment Department came to know of the Friends of Mysore Zoo. They wanted a similar organisation for all Indian zoos together and requested FOMZ founder to register a new Society.

Saturday, 26 Dec 09-Mysore

On Saturday morning a Council meeting of the Zoo Authority of Karnataka was scheduled there. The Kabul Zoo visitors were invited for that meeting by



Kabul Zoo officers visit Council of Zoo Authority of Karnataka, Mysore Zoo

the Executive Director. In this meeting very senior officials such as the Forest Secretary and Addl. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden attended along with the Chairman, Member Secretary and Executive Director. They welcomed the Kabul Zoo trainees and invited them for lunch. This was an unplanned and unexpected

opportunity. The Kabul Zoo trainees also had a rare opportunity to see a giraffe delivery also on that day, for which they felt very lucky. The Zoo Director was very kind to arrange accommodation for the visitors as well. In the afternoon we left for Bannerghatta Biological Park, nearby to Bangalore, Karnataka. On the way we stopped at Srirangapatnam so the Afghans could visit the famous tourist site there which includes the Tomb of the Islamic warrior, Tipu Sultan in Gombaz. As part of the history of their religion, the visitors liked seeing the monuments very much and were thrilled to find some of the words inscribed there in Dhari, which is their main Afghan language.

Sunday, 27 Dec 09-Bannerghatta Biological Park

The Executive Director of Bannerghatta Biological Park had tasked Dr. Basavarajappa, Veterinary Officer of the Park to host our Afghan guests. First thing he took us to their various safaris such as lion,



Kabul Zoo Vet gets first opportunity to inject a tiger at Bannerghatta Rescue Centre



Trainees practise operating the squeeze cage in Bannerghatta Rescue Centre

tiger, bison, bear, lion and tiger and also to the Wildlife SOS Bear Rescue Centre as well as to the Butterfly Park. Dr. Basavarajappa explained the facilities in detail.

At the tiger safari, a tiger was suffering from diarrhea which he treated the animal by giving some

injections. Dr. Basavarajappa asked the Kabul Zoo Vet to give an injection to the tiger. He did so and commented that it was one of the memorable events in his life!

At the Wildlife S.O.S Bear Rescue Centre, Dr. Arun A. Sha, Veterinary Officer and "In Charge" of the centre, explained the background of India's "dancing bears", the community of people who do this for a living, and the rehabilitation process which involves both human beings and bears in India. He explained the care they give the confiscated bears when they come into the facility and their routine care, food, veterinary care etc.

He also demonstrated the tranquilizer equipment. The visitors were interested to buy a blow pipe. Dr. Arun gave them the contact details of the manufacturer. Later we visited the veterinary hospital of Bannerghatta Biological Park and examined the medical equipment used in the zoo. The veterinary doctor explained the other type of blow pipe, using air blow from the pump as



Dr. Basavarajappa explaining about the pneumatic blowpipe gun at Bannerghatta Biological Park

projectile. After this, the Kabul Zoo staff visited all the enclosures of the zoo in order to know more about designs, enrichment and education signage. After the visit, we took a night bus to Chennai where there were several animal facilities to be seen.

Monday, 28 Dec 09-Arignar Anna Zoological Park, Vandalur, Chennai

The Arignar Anna Zoo covers 1500 acres of land about 30 km from the city, Chennai. It was founded as a replacement for the old Madras Zoo founded in 1857, considered to be the first zoo in the country since it was a government zoo but that is not the case.

Mr. Ananthasamy, I.F.S., and Director of the Zoo, had tasked Dr. Manimozhi, Biologist of the zoo in with the care of our Afghan visitors. At first in the auditorium, Manimozhi gave a very detailed ppt

presentation about the Arignar Anna Zoological Park. It included enclosure design, enrichment, signage, education/zoo school, day to day management, organogram and other details. After



Looking at the teasing signage near Chimp enclosure at Arignar Anna Zoo, Chennai

his presentation they were taken around the whole zoo to observe what they heard about in the presentation. Mr. Sekar, Biologist, also accompanied our visitors. They were taken to the Otteri Lake which is located inside the zoo with an area of 7 hectares which attracts many migratory birds, also appreciated very much by our trainees. They also visited the bioresource centre which is an upcoming facility for terrestrial birds. This is a huge space covered with net with good landscaping and waterfalls. All our guests liked the Arignar Anna Zoo very much for its spacious enclosures and also for its many education activities.

Tuesday, 29 Dec 09-Madras Crocodile Bank Trust

We spent the whole day at the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust where the staff had planned a real crash course. Dr. Patrick Aust the Director, Dr. Gowri Mallapur, the Office Manager and Vet, Nikhil Whitaker, the Curator Soham Mukherjee, Assistant Curator and Akansha Mukherjee, Education officer took us around the park and told much about the animals, the enclosure designs, environmental enrichment and signage and low cost water treatment systems to clean the pool water.

They also visited the well-known Irula Snake Catchers Society snake venom milking centre which is located adjacent to the Madras Croc Bank. There they were informed about the Society and saw a demonstration of live snake venom extraction from viper and krait snakes.

The staff explained reptile egg hatching using incubators. They also explained x-ray filming used for reptiles. They also gave a demonstration how to handle live crocodiles and poisonous snakes, snakes and turtles and also how to know sexing of reptiles with live demonstration of young python



Romulus Whitaker, Founder, MCBT, speaking with Afghan visitors



Gharial hatchlings at MCBT were fascinating to Kabul Zoo visitors



Kabul Zoo team got an opportunity to handle animals at Croc Bank



Records maintenance for Gharial hatchlings demonstrated by Nikhil at MCBT

using props. The veterinary doctor described and demonstrated all the equipment used in the veterinary hospital, including how transponders work in animal identification, how to inject chips in the animal, etc. She also told about some veterinary books on reptiles one of which is Exotic Animal Formulary by James Carpenter. She also promised to send some literature to Zoo Outreach Organisation to copy and pass on them future. The education officer spoke to them about the education and awareness activities run by the Trust. She took them to the Education Centre and explained what they do there. Also she took them to some enclosures and explained the signage and also how she explain about each animal in a interesting way to make an impact on the school groups and others. Our Afghan friends liked this facility very much for their low cost enclosure designs, enrichment, veterinary care, education activities and conservation initiatives for reptiles. They also admired the home-made incubators which they feel they can make in their zoo. They very much enjoyed the animal handling sessions of crocodiles and cobra. They handled animals such as gharial young ones, rat snakes, young pythons, and turtles and went inside the pools to see crocodile nesting sites. They also appreciated the various education activities run by the Trust which they called "an excellent facility".

The well-known Romulus Whitaker, founder of the park and respected researcher on reptiles made a point of meeting the Afghans and speaking with them at length. Before they left, the Director extended for all possible help in the future, stating that if anyone wanted to come for a long period of study they were welcome and would be provided all facilities.

Before returning to our accomodation at the Arignar Anna Zoo, we visited Mahabalipuram which is about 15 kms from the Croc Bank. Our visitors saw 7th century stone temple, the rathas and scriptures on

the rock by Pallava kings which was a welcome cultural outing. They also had time and opportunity to purchase souvenirs at a bazaar in Chennai for their return home.

Wednesday, 30 Dec 09- Arignar Anna Zoological Park, Vandalur, Chennai

On the last day in the morning Manimozhi took us to the food store and showed us how all the foods were prepared for the day by the store staff. He also explained the food ration chart they use for individual animals. He showed us the rat



Learning about animal daily ration at the food store at Arignar Anna Zoo, Chennai

propagation area and explained in detail how they breed the rodents which are used to feed to the snakes.

Afterwards we were taken to the veterinary hospital where Dr. Thirumurugan demonstrated various



Watching the operation of amputation of lion tail at the rescue centre at Arignar Anna Zoo, Chennai

equipment and their function including the tranquilizer equipment and its medicines. Before we left the hospital Dr. Thirumurugan gave the visitors soft copies of the food chart, inventory form, daily

report, the deworming and vaccination schedules, and some of the veterinary books published by the Central Zoo Authority of India. These are valuable resources which they can use to improve their management.

They met the Zoo Director Mr. Ananthaswamy and he discussed about the Indian Wildlife Act and Zoo Rules and how the Indian zoos are managed by the Central Zoo Authority of India. He also talked about the Zoo Authority of Tamil Nadu which gives much needed powers to him for spending the gate collection money for the development and upkeep of the zoo. He said that he did so many development activities after the formation of Zoo Authority of Tamil Nadu and also he told about how his zoo has been managed. He gave a hard copy of recent Central Zoo Authority legislation, Zoo Rules 2009.

The last stop before flight time was to see the lion and deer safaris. These are huge 100 & 150 acre enclosures respectively, some of the best safari enclosures of any Indian Zoo. There was also time to see the rescue centre which housed lions and tigers confiscated from the circuses, where our visitors had an opportunity to see a surgery of the amputation of a lion's tail by Dr. Thirumurugan and his colleagues.

Summing up

Our Afghan visitors almost liked the all the facilities. They liked the V.O.C park mini zoo of Coimbatore for some of their enclosures and also education signage. And they said even though it was in the town like their Kabul Zoo, they maintain it very well.

At Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park they liked the Nilgiri Biosphere concept and very much appreciated the eco restoration project. Here they had very much interested to see each and everything such as the present animal displays of fishes, few insects and also other small animals and plants they saw during trekking. They admired the path laid inside the park.

At Mysore Zoo they admired the visitor circulation path, the enclosure design and various enrichment materials, the different signage, veterinary facilities, store, record keeping and education activities especially their youth club. They said it is an excellent zoo.

At the Bannerghatta Biological park, they very much enjoyed safari rides by a jeep and different safaris for different animals, all of which gave a new experience for them. They were impressed by the butterfly park and its signage. They were particularly happy to see many elephants, king cobras, water birds enclosure and leopard enclosure.

At Arignar Anna Zoological Park they liked the spacious enclosures, the upcoming bio resource centre, food store, veterinary facilities, education signage and the education activities. They were

impressed with certain primates new to them such as Nilgiri langur and Lion-tailed macaque. They admired the chimpanzee and also the lion and tiger enclosures. They said it is really a great facility. At the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust they appreciated all the enclosure designs and all their low cost mechanisms for running their facility. It is a simply superb facility for the reptiles, they said. At the end of the facilities visit our guests told it is very good training visit where they learnt so many things pertaining to good zoo management. The training will be useful for them to implement some new things at their zoo whether it be education, veterinary care or management practices, they said.

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more such opportunities to help out in some fashion.

I would personally like to thank my staff at ZOO for jumping into this very quickly arranged visit wholeheartedly, particularly Marimuthu.

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