

Marketing in Indian Zoos -- Indian Zoos on their way to Market

Editor's Note:

When I was associated with the Friends of Mysore Zoo (FMZ) as Founder/Secretary, I was interested in adding as many public or visitor activities as possible to the zoo. Then, there was not much going on in an interactive way between the zoo and the public. Of course, people came and saw the animals, but mostly visitors did not get involved with the zoo or donate money and materials, or even think to ask what problems the zoo might be having. Founding the Friends of Mysore Zoo (FMZ) was an excellent way to gather the more "proactive" Mysoreans and put them to work! FMZ conducted many projects which had not been done or even contemplated in other Indian zoos and some of these were charming. But gathering the public in a fragile environment like a zoo often creates more problems than are solved. Add to this an ambitious and pushy foreign woman, an American spy in the opinion of many, and problems are not just likely ... they are inevitable. Ironically, despite the problems, the officials in the then Department of Environment when it was under the Ministry of Agriculture, paid no mind to the problems, but invited me to start a national version of FMZ, funded by the Department, that would include all the zoos in India. I agreed and so came along the Zoo Outreach Organisation, funded by the DoE, GoI.

But before all this happened, the Friends of Mysore Zoo organised an Animal Adoption Scheme at Mysore Zoo. Being American I had heard about zoos creating these programmes or schemes and understood how they worked. I did not, however, understand how alien such a scheme would seem in India. There was a lot of enthusiasm for the scheme by some of our members, but soon it emerged that their enthusiasm stemmed from a very wrong idea that if they "adopted" an animal, they had some rights. Some thought that they could go into the cage with the animal. Others thought that they could even take the animal home. It was not just the donors who didn't understand Animal Adoption. The zoo director and his associates could not understand that the donors had to be given attention and "get something" to acknowledge their donation aside from a small sign on the cage. I tried to explain ... in other countries, zoos with adoption programmes stayed in touch with the donors. They send donors news of the animal they adopted and encourage them to come to the zoo often and see "their" animal. These are small things but they mean a lot to the donors. The administration didn't get it and after some time, with no reinforcement forthcoming, the donors lost interest and when it was time to donate the next year, they just ignored the request. A few more zoos attempted animal adoption but seemed to have a similar experience.

After 3 decades of Indian zoos flailing around when they tried to engage with the public, now there is a big difference...there is progress! Much of this difference must have to do with the training in Marketing provided by Central Zoo Authority, and the visits to other countries training, etc. Also, now there is a powerful impetus by CZA which relatively recently brought out guidelines for corporate support which would supplement the management of Indian zoos. The entire document of Guidelines is incorporated in this article.

Recently a spate of articles appeared about zoos attempting to engage the public in order to raise funds for the zoos but also to create more interest in the zoo and perhaps a feeling of "ownership" or participation by the public. A few of these articles have been summarised next:

Bored of dogs? Now, you can adopt a lion-Chatbir Zoo

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/pets/Bored-of-dogs-Now-you-can-adopt-a-lion/articleshow/5916643.cms>

For animal lovers seeking a new type of pet than a domestic dog or cat can avail the scheme put up by Government of Punjab to adopt a zoo animal. The animal has to stay in the zoo of course so the "adoption" is only in name and gives the adoptive parent a chance to help the zoo financially. All major zoos in Punjab are included like Mohindra Chaudhury Zoological Park at Chhatbir and even the three small zoos in Ludhiana, Bathinda and Patiala as well as a deer park at Neelonand an aviary at Patiala.

"All these zoos and deer parks are keeping wild animals for education and recreation purposes" said Punjab's Chief Wildlife Conservator R.K. Loona; "We have launched this scheme of adoption Oct 7 under which any individual, trust or organisation can adopt animals or birds from these places which will help government confront a severe financial crunch, a noble exercise." The Conservator went on to say that the adoption scheme is a means for busy citizens to show support for wildlife conservation, contributing toward feeding, maintaining enclosures and medicating the animal.

Wildlife authorities offer a range of privileges to reinforce the scheme. Adoptees can visit as special guest during celebrations and appointed ex-officio member of the zoos' development society. He will have his own name board display and free passes for family and friends to visit the zoo several times a year. Naturally this plan is showing a good response as it is a two-way bargain. The adoptive family can check on the living conditions of the animal and ask anything about its habits.

The cost of an adoption varies according to the size and cost of maintenance of the animals, ranging from Rs. 400 to Rs. 209,200. The scheme has caught the attention of environmentalists and residents of Punjab.

One can adopt an animal either for a whole year or for a few months. Charges vary from Rs. 400 to Rs. 209,200. Environmentalists and residents are quite enthusiastic about the move.

"We have planned to adopt two Asian lions for one year at a cost of around Rs. 200,000. We should understand that these animals are not only for entertainment," Rohit Ruhella, an environmentalist who is running an NGO said.

Rajiv Gandhi Zoo, Pune

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/Katraj-zoo-to-pair-up-endangered-species/articleshow/11261546.cms>

The Rajiv Gandhi Zoological Park in Pune was already promoting an animal adoption scheme when CZA released Guidelines for same. Any individual, organisation or corporate sector was permitted to participate in bearing the cost of food, upkeep, etc. either for all the animals, a group a single animal or an enclosure. The zoo will also raise its entry fee to meet expenditures and improve the zoo. Most of the zoos are maintained by government which always has strict rules on raising and using funds and the guidelines show how these zoos can deal with the current financial situation by registering a charitable society or foundation which would enable them to collect funds to improve management and also provide individuals and corporations to support the zoo and show their interest in nature conservation. The Pune public has responded well to this

appeal and many animals including leopard, tiger, bear, spotted deer, peacock and tortoise have been adopted. The funds provided help in guaranteeing good care, nutritious food and veterinary treatment. The new guidelines of the Ministry permits zoos to use the revenue from ticketing to run the zoo better. This has been a very silly situation in years past that all ticket and other funds generation should be given to government which would then mete out amounts which did not meet expenses.

The new scheme has perhaps led to an increase in visitation. The zoos reports and satisfactory income but it is not enough to support the infrastructure in a suitable manner, so they are increasing the fee for entry. This has been another thorn in the flesh of the zoological institutions in the country whose politicians insisted on keeping the entry fee very low to please all income groups.

The master plan of Rajiv Gandhi Zoo was submitted to the Central Zoo Authority of India two years ago with proposals for new enclosures for lions, lesser cats, hyena, wild dog, raptor and an aquatic bird aviary, Leopard, Nilgai, Barking Deer, among others.

Animal adoption flourishes at Mysore zoo

Mysore zoo has had an adoption scheme for some time with almost 400 individuals and businesses adopting an animal or several last year. Celebrities adopting animals are a "win-win" for everyone. They can easily afford it and the fact of their celebrity lends a cache to the act which thrills the public. Some of the celebrity adoptions are.

Cricketer Anil Kumble has adopted a giraffe calf at Mysore zoo. The popularity of the adoption scheme at Mysore zoo is such that many more cricketers, film stars, politicians and industrialists have adopted animals. The scheme did not receive the a good response earlier there has been a gradual rise in adoptions, with a record number of animals and birds being adopted in last three years. Adoptions rose from 7 in 2001-02 to 394 in 2010-11 with Rs. 30.2 lakh as adoption revenue in 2010-11.

B.Y. Raghavendra, MP, and Jungle Lodges and Resorts Ltd. (JLR) adopted a lion and a tiger respectively from the park for one year, from September 2009 and have been urged to continue.

The former Indian cricketers Anil Kumble and Javagal Srinath helped make the scheme popular in Mysore. Kumble adopted a giraffe calf and an Asiatic lion; Srinath adopted a jaguar. Speedster Zaheer Khan paid Rs. 1 lakh for a tiger.

The Ex. Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa adopted Amulya, a tiger, for the third consecutive year. Congress leader D.K. Shivakumar adopted a gorilla and two king cobras for Rs. 1 lakh. Kannada actor Darshan renewed his adoption of an elephant calf for another year.

The zoo officials believe the enhanced care offered the animals has influenced more wildlife lovers to take up the programme. Now, Mysore Zoo has upgraded its website permitting online adoption of animals.

The new website offers maps depicting different routes to the zoo. Students and wildlife enthusiasts can access the details of educative programmes organized by the zoo on conservation, workshops, competitions, and others. The website offers information about all species in the zoo. Director B P Ravi believes the website will help the animal exchange programmes as authorities of other zoos will get all the details on it and visitors can also post their feedbacks about their experience at the zoo. The avante garde zoo plans to introduce e-ticketing facility on the website soon and update it frequently with zoo news.

The Tyavarekoppa Safari which badly need such help reported that details of their adoption scheme would be displayed on the safari park premises as well as at Jog. It has been modified by reducing the adoption period and keeping the fee affordable. Animals can be adopted even for a week.

Guidelines for Developing Framework Mechanism for Mobilizing Corporate Financial Support for Supplementing Management of Zoos

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Introduction

The Zoos in India are mainly under the control of state Government, however few zoos are managed by Municipal and private organisations. The Zoos are mainly located in the city suburbs with relatively large green areas with a natural ambience. Zoos have transformed over the years from small menageries to Zoological park/ biological park where animals are exhibited in large naturalistic eco-system based enclosures. The zoos regularly attract large number of visitors as they exhibit animals not easily seen in the wild.

Zoos are conservation centres with a large potential to educate visitor and develop understanding and empathy for wildlife. They serve as institution of knowledge and learning about the life history of captive animals.

The zoos need to make their operations sustainable through judicious use of available resources, using various marketing tools to raise funds for attaining financial stability without compromising on the welfare of animals in their collections and conservation goals.

Corporate and individuals with a strong sense of responsibility towards nature and ecosystem integrity are keen to associate and donate funds for the development and growth of zoos. As most of the zoos are operated by governments, certain restriction on raising and utilization of such funds exists hence guidelines, procedures and mechanism may help the zoos in raising funds. The zoos run by trusts and private sector may also use these guidelines for availing benefits. It is true that unless zoos have best marketing strategy they cannot tap the financial resources from the corporate sector and from private individuals. Zoos can be self sustaining and financially stable if they can raise funds through innovative marketing. A workshop on marketing, fund raising, and resource management was organized by the Central Zoo Authority at Kolkata from 27th -30th April 2009 in collaboration with Zoological Garden, Alipore to discuss the marketing and fund raising opportunities for the zoos in India. More than 27 zoo directors and 2 International

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