

## Zoo and Wildlife News

### **Nepal's first female mahout leads elephant safaris (AFP) Kathmandu**

Nepal's first female mahout, one of only a handful of women across Asia to be selected to drive elephants, spoke Tuesday of her pride at breaking into the all-male profession. Meena Chaudhary, 33, was selected for the highly-specialised role after being picked from a female-only shortlist of 15 candidates as part of a government scheme to get more women working in the public sector.

"Women are flying aircraft. So, driving an elephant is peanuts," she said. "I wanted to prove that we're equal to men. I showed it by being an elephant driver." Mahouts take tourists on elephant-back safaris in southern Nepal's Chitwan National Park, home to the endangered Royal Bengal tiger, the rare one-horned rhino and other exotic animals and birds. The job has traditionally been a men-only preserve because women are often considered weak in the conservative, Hindu-majority Himalayan nation. Chaudhary, who has led up to half a dozen drives a day since taking on the role two months ago, said she was proud to be breaking that stereotype. "We were trained for three days on how to treat elephants and how to drive them towards the jungle," she told AFP.

"We were also asked to climb trees and swim," she said, adding that another woman had now been selected to join her. But she told AFP she was full of anxiety on her first day in the job. "I was not used to dealing with so many people. I was also afraid that something might go wrong. But everything was all right," said Chaudhary, who receives a monthly pay of 10,000 Rupees (\$120). Mahouts are often introduced to their elephants as children and stay with one animal for decades. They drive their mounts using oral commands and pressure from their feet on the elephant's ears.

There are around 100 mahouts in Nepal, with a handful paid by the government and the rest employed by the hotel industry in Chitwan. Every year thousands of people visit the park, a haven for wildlife and one of Nepal's biggest tourist attractions. [http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5ggCyOwBIOiJp8hY\\_Z3pKSdLL\\_KDQdocId=CNG.eff73da2b45bbfc2b8da6637d1800503.a1](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5ggCyOwBIOiJp8hY_Z3pKSdLL_KDQdocId=CNG.eff73da2b45bbfc2b8da6637d1800503.a1)

### **Tripoli Zoo Animals Recovering After War, Kristina Chew, January 4, 2012**

The Tripoli Zoo in Libya had already been closed for some time for renovations when the Libya uprising that would lead to the overthrow of Muammar el-Gaddafi broke out at the start of 2011. The animals in the zoo, which was located near the late Libyan dictator's Bab al-Aziziya compound — and therefore near some of the heaviest fighting — were simply left where they were as Gaddafi supporters and the rebels who have now become part of the interim government, the National Transitional Council (NTC), clashed in the streets. Missiles were fired over the zoo grounds and Kalashnikovs strafed the mammal house; the hippos' enclosure was hit by a NATO rocket which, fortunately, did not explode. Fifteen zoo staff managed to feed and water the animals, who otherwise might have died after three or four days.

After Tripoli came under the NTC's control, a team of animal-welfare experts from Austria's Four Paws International arrived. At least one animal, a Siberian tiger, Osama, did not survive. Osama was 21 years old and his age and stress contributed to his death, according to Dr. Amir Khalil, a doctor from Vienna. Hippos, traumatized by the near-destruction of their enclosure and constant gunfire, initially hid when people approached and refused food; they are reportedly recovering from the stress. A Bengal tiger bit its own tail so hard during the unrest that zoo staff had to amputate. In September, the NTC had pledged that it would support the zoo and a BBC report from last week says that the zoo will open in a few months.

The Tripoli Zoo opened in 1986 and is the largest in North Africa; at its height, it housed 1,000 animals including 22 lions, nine of which belonged to Gaddafi's son, Saadi (who is currently a guest of the country of Niger, after a plot to smuggle him and his family to Mexico was discovered). The zoo houses a liger (a hybrid of a lion and a tiger); 33 baboons; pelicans; a chimpanzee named Bosco who the late Congolese president Mobutu Sese Seko once gave to Gaddafi.

A Tripoli brigade has assumed control of the zoo and still patrols it for security purposes. A national security force will eventually be responsible for these duties.

The funding that has been provided to the zoo by charities will end at the start of 2012; the IFAW says that it costs about \$2,000 a day to feed the animals. But Tripoli Zoo Director Anas Ali al-Aghab is hopeful. As he told The Toronto Star in November:

"... when we open our doors again, they will be open as never before. After so many years of isolation, now we hope to share and to learn the best care and technical standards possible. Things may still be unsettled. But we see a very bright future ahead."

Indeed, on the last day of October, one of the African lions that belonged to Saadi Gaddafi gave birth to two cubs. A pair of white lions — 300 of whom are known to exist — will reach breeding age by 2012; they were owned by Saif al-Islam, Gaddafi's second and more prominent son who is being held in the city of Zintan after his capture last month. <http://www.care2.com/causes/tripoli-zoo-animals-recovering-after-war-video.html#ixzz1ibwsrrmu>

### **IZE Conference 2012. Changing Hearts, Minds and Ultimately Behaviours, 28 Aug-1 Sept.**

Registration is now open for the 21st biennial conference of the International Zoo Educators Association hosted by Chester Zoo. This is the first time IZE has been in the UK since 1984. The links below should provide you with everything you need to know and more information will be added at regular intervals between now and the start of the conference.

Holiday Inn Express Racecourse hotel is reserved 80 twin/double rooms at a special delegate rate of £65 per room per night which is great value for money, especially if you're sharing!

The hotel is taking reservations now by phone or email and we would advise booking rooms as soon as possible. Payment will, of course, only be taken when you arrive in Chester. The conference fee is £265 for IZE Members and £310 for others. This includes a welcome reception and buffet, lunch, coffee and refreshments on each day of the conference, the farewell dinner and a complimentary ticket to the famous County Stand.

Please note abstracts are due on 27th January 2012.

<http://www.chesterzoo.org/education/ize-conference-2012>