

Obituary for Malcolm Whitehead

Malcolm Whitehead was one of the well-known zoo-philic extreme edition of Great Britain. Malcolm had visited India and Sri Lanka several times to conduct excellent zoo educator training workshops. He worked for many years as Zoo Education Officer at Twycross Zoo, at Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, and finally London Zoo, the latter being his "dream job" which he had applied for more than once. In fact the way I met him was by running into him (literally) in the elevator at the Admin Building at ZSL.

Malcolm was a brilliant but "mondo bizarro" individual ... in a good way, just the kind of eccentric genius that many of us find charming and humorous. Malcolm's sense of humor was legendary and it was usually at his own expense, which made him charming. He and I had much in common but primarily these things, from A to Z, e.g. Alcoholism, Education, Conservation, Wildlife, and Zoos. Malcolm lived to a ripe old age of 56. I say "ripe old age" because it was a miracle that he live so long as a practicing alcoholic. I mention his alcoholism despite criticism I may get because it was part of his personality. It was also his nemesis and that of his friends and bosses. It ruined our friendship finally because I could not restrain myself from talking to him about it and he disliked that a lot. All alcoholics do. I know, because I am one. I tried my best to convince Malcolm to attend the meetings where I got help for this but he (like me for some time) ridiculed the meetings and the people who attended them. I was so lucky to have selected life over alcohol and I hope I always make that decision, because an alcoholic is always under risk of recidivism. His drinking led to MRSA Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus which is a serious bacterial infection that is drug resistant and this is what took his life.

There were some humorous incidents if you appreciate black humor which Malcolm did. During his years at Twycross Zoo, the dignified and genteel elderly ladies who owned and ran the zoo did their best to tolerate Malcolm's antics but it must have been extremely difficult. In one of many "incidents" Malcolm was severely inebriated and driving, I think, without a license. He'd been pulled over so drunk he failed the breath-test and his drivers license was pulled. This particular night Malcolm outdid himself by crashing into the car of a highway patrolman, or whatever they call them in UK. I don't remember the punishment for that but there was undoubtedly something ... it might have led to his getting the sack from his job there. Not sure. I do remember however that Malcolm was particularly proud of this "dis-achievement". He could always see the humor in his own revolting behavior and this incident was a classic.

Malcolm's contributions can be related by colleagues and friends better than me as I spent very little time with him, all told. I used to drop in at Twycross Zoo for a day or two at any excuse and Malcolm came to India at least twice. I regret his loss to the zoo world and as a friend. We all cared about him but no one could tolerate watching his self-destruction for too long at a time. God bless his long-suffering family, who he loved very much but was helpless to give them the thing they wanted more than anything, a sober Malcolm.

Sally Walker, Zoo Outreach Organisation

This is a self-portrait of Malcolm (side view). "Talking Ed" means "Talking Education." Not sure what that meant ... maybe he saw himself as the essence of education. And he was, in a way.



It is with the utmost sadness and real personal loss, that I regret to let you all know that one of the greatest brains and best innovators in zoo education, Malcolm Whitehead, died in London yesterday, Friday August 12th at the age of 56. Malcolm gave me my first job in Zoo Education at Twycross Zoo in 1987 and remained a friend, supporter and encourager and someone who was always clever, funny and an inspiration, and a huge personality too. I will miss him loads.

For those of you who never knew Malcolm, you have sadly missed the opportunity to share with a great clever mind, capable of bringing humor to any situation but also thinking 'outside the box' and creating innovative solutions while being inspiring, engaging and challenging. There is no denying Malcolm had his problems too, and he was well aware of them, but he would not have been the man he was if that part of him had been taken away. Malcolm obtained his BSc in Zoology from Royal Holloway College and was also involved in work in Africa and elsewhere and moved into zoo education in 1980. He wrote many articles, was heavily involved in the International Zoo Educators Association, and served as Journal Editor on two editions in 1986 and 1988. He was

- Head of Education at Twycross Zoo 1980-1993
- Training Manager, International Centre for Conservation Education 1993-1996
- Curator/Director, Ardastra Gardens, Bahamas 1996-1998
- Head of Learning, and Coordinator Wetland Link International, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (based at The Wetland Centre in London) 1999-2008
- Head of Discovery and Learning, Zoological Society of London, 2008-2010
- Member of the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication (his last article encouraging zoo educators and CEC members to join forces was published in April this year: <http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/cec/?7358/Zoos-and-CEC>)

As a flavor of Malcolm's great and humorous writing style I quote an article he wrote back in 1989 in IZN (no. 217) on a week in the life of the education department at Twycross Zoo - its still good to read today and demonstrates some of what Malcolm enabled and inspired a team of people to achieve on a weekly basis:

"There are no typical days in this department. There are no typical people. We are a disparate bunch of characters who all dance to different drumbeats. Communication of conservation ethics unites us in zealous fervor... There are fewer pandas in China than calories in the ZIP (Zoo Interpretation Programme) Squad's Monday morning breakfast. Serious egg and sausage sandwiches from the local truckers caravan are earnestly consumed as we plan the working week... [In teaching] we may employ artistic, observational, questioning or acrobatic techniques. We may use specimens, live animals, environmental games, audio-visual equipment or, most important, the zoo itself. Sometimes we lead; often we follow. If it works, we'll use it...."

My thoughts are with his wife, and with all of you that knew and loved this talented man. Our mission must be to fill the void he leaves and engage with all we can in all ways at our disposal to further the goal of conservation and the crucial part education plays in it. We were indeed lucky to have him with us for 56 years, and of course a lot of us that really knew him are not surprised he has died young, it doesn't make it any less a loss, and indeed is more so given

he could have made so much more of an impact and contributed even more. I was going to meet up with him again next month and ask his help and advice on some interpretation work, but alas that is not to be. With sadness and fond memories. **Stephen Woolard, Education Mgr, Zool. Society of Scotland**

RIP Malcolm Whitehead I was deeply saddened to learn today of the passing of my friend and colleague Malcolm Whitehead. It is only a couple of months ago I caught up with him in London where he treated me to a meal in an Indian restaurant before touring a few London museums together. I first met Malcolm at Twycross Zoo back in, I think, 1982 though I was aware of his work before then.

Malcolm had always been a supporter of Zoo News Digest and I am sorry to lose that. Even more I will miss his emails. Often these were cryptic and left me puzzling till the humour dawned. Malcolm and I shared an interest in things other than zoos so I will miss too his pointing me towards the unmissable. When someone younger than me passes away...and I have lost many friends already I become so much more aware of my own temporary status.

The zoo world owes a lot to Malcolm, more than most will realise. His passing is a sad loss to us all. My condolences to his friends, colleagues and family.

Peter Dickinson, Zoo News Digest

Sad news indeed. Malcolm was one of the funniest and smartest blokes I have had the privilege to have worked with. I always looked forward to the workshops with him, which were never dull, and it always made me smile to watch the enjoyment on the faces of my team when he shared his great words of wisdom with them. His depth of knowledge, spontaneous wit and his robust humour captivated me and them on every visit to our studio. He taught us a great deal about primates and life in general and had us laughing endlessly whilst he did it.

He was a remarkable man, totally unique and I am truly saddened that I will never have the opportunity to work with him again. **Alan McQuaig, Education Officer, Twycross Zoo**

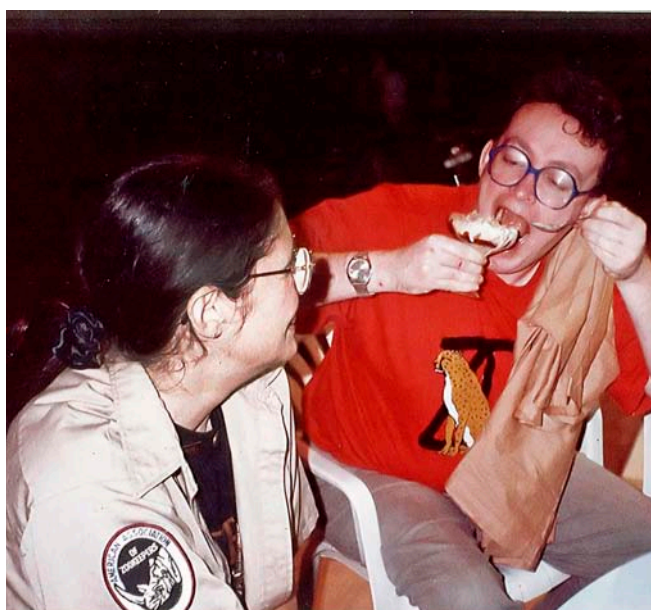
Malc was a big part of my zoo world in the 80's and 90's. It goes without saying that he will be missed by all his friends, he has left (literally) a large gap in the zoo education world. There are so many anecdotes from the years I worked with him at Twycross Zoo – many of which are not really suitable for print!

Malc had an encyclopaedic knowledge of zoos, zoology and zoo education – I really miss his library - his two roomed flat at Twycross was floor to ceiling books, even the fridge had books in it . I don't believe he ever cooked anything, which was probably a good thing as we used his kitchen area as a taxidermy space for a few weeks; boiling skulls is not the best use of a small kitchen area – there can't be many Heads of Department who would be up for that!

We always used to joke that he resembled a menopausal Dennis the Menace (Beano comics), and so the ed dept bought him a hand knitted black and red striped jumper. It was a tight fit but he wore it constantly for three weeks, only taking it off after he spilt a load of curry down the front, and only then after we all told him too! I will always remember Malc during his good years spending hours on his writing; he was an inspiration for me as a young zoo

educator in the 80's – so thank's Malcolm for all the memories and the "cause" lives on! **Denise Chorley, Head of Education, Knowsley Safari Park**

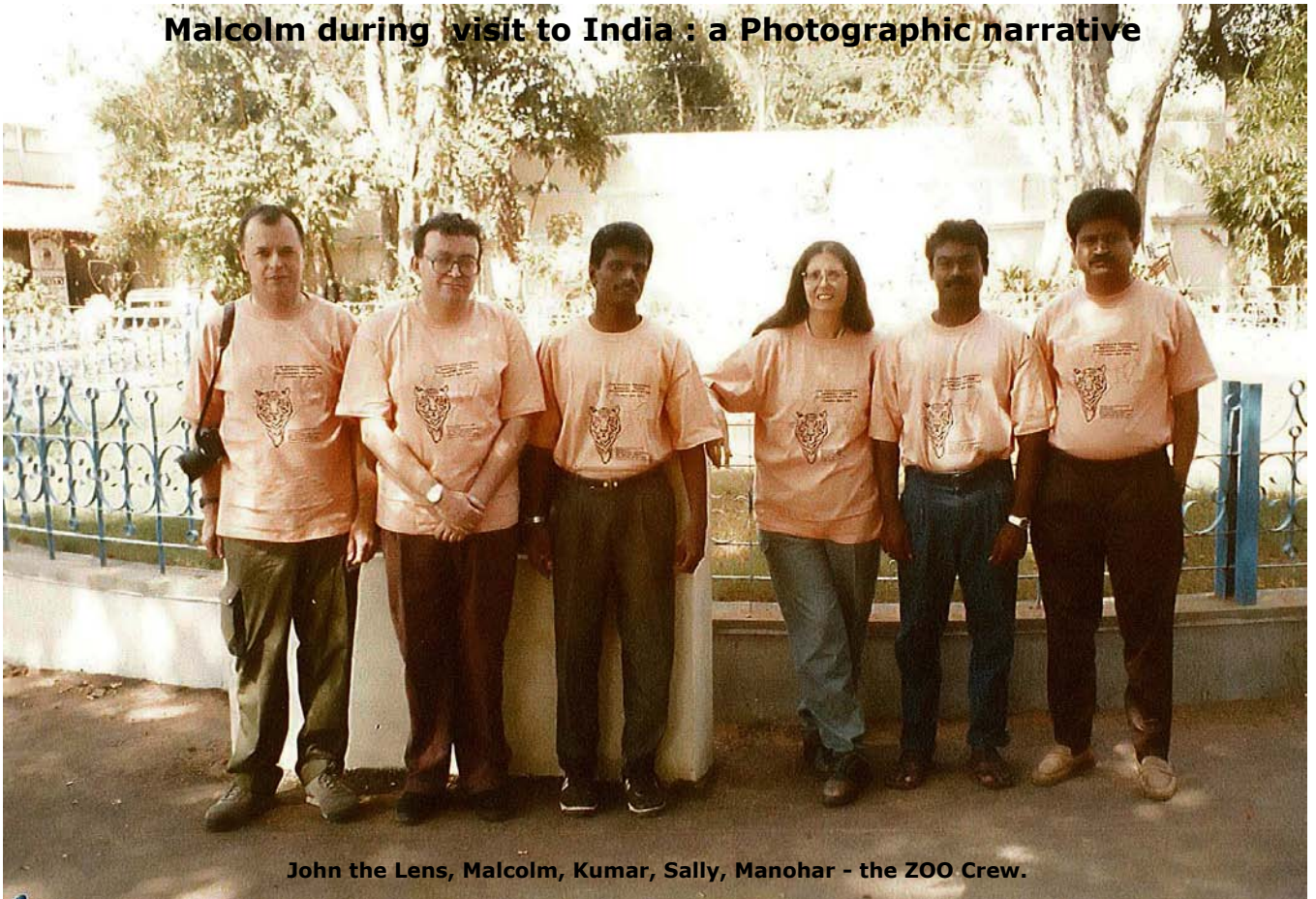
I have a fond memory of a time that went to Twycross and was staying with Malc in his zoo bungalow. Staying with Malc was a pleasure with witty conversation and his library to browse through. The cupboards in the kitchenette were full of food for thought - not to eat. When I got to the zoo to meet him in the early evening Molly rushed over to me (in my car) with a covered over plate of chicken and salad from the restaurant. I know you are staying with Malcolm – she said- and he never has any food in that place! As usual we had a lovely evening, in the local Indian – and had Mollie's salad for breakfast! Nice times to think back on. **Miranda Stevenson, Director, British and Irish Zoo Association.**



Malcolm indulging his favourite past-time (eating) while Sally (sympathetic but nonetheless disgusted, looks on. Photo ZOO.



Malcolm during visit to India : a Photographic narrative



John the Lens, Malcolm, Kumar, Sally, Manohar - the ZOO Crew.



Malcolm illustrated. Drawing by Malcolm.



Above: Malcolm giving a speech to ZOO and Coimbatore Zoo Curator. Photo ZOO.

Left : Malcolm demonstrating an exercise during one of the education workshops. Photo ZOO

