

Workshop to prepare *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation action plan for amphibians

Sanjay Molur*

A Workshop to prepare an *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation action plan for amphibians took place 7-8 January 2008 at the Hotel Regalis, Mysore. It was generously sponsored by the Central Zoo Authority, New Delhi and hosted by Mysore Zoo. The two day workshop began at 9.00am on the 7th January with an inaugural presided by the Principal Chief Conser-vator of Forests of Karnataka and was attended by the Secretary to the Zoo Authority of Karnataka, the Central Zoo Authority staff, Mysore Zoo staff, partici-pants from various zoos and resource persons.

The Agenda was set to address *in situ* conservation issues on day one and *ex situ* issues on day two. After the inaugural and general introductions, resource persons were called upon to talk on different conservation issues related to amphibians in the world, region and the country.

Dr. Sushil Dutta gave the first talk on amphibian diversity of India, the taxonomic issues, ambiguities, views and opinions on amphibian research in the country. This was followed by Sanjay Molur's talk on amphibian conservation issues and actions in South Asia, their status, activities of the Amphibian Network of South Asia, and needs and priorities identified for the region and the country. Karthikeyan Vasudevan spoke about diseases affecting amphibians around the world and his preliminary findings in southern India. In the afternoon there was another series of presentations by the three speakers at the end of which, around 3.30pm a discussion on *in situ* needs was chaired by Sushil Dutta and recorded by Karthikeyan Vasudevan.

The second day was on *ex situ* aspects of amphibian conservation and Karthik gave a talk on his experience of studying *Nasikabatrachus sahyadrensis* tadpoles in captivity and followed it by some videos of the behaviours of the tadpoles in the wild, which were simulated in captivity. Ranjit Daniels talked about his experience of keeping amphibians in captivity while he was at the Indian Institute of Science about 10 years ago and shared his thoughts about keeping versus breeding them.

Karthik spoke on principles of captive populations, demography, size and other aspects of consideration while starting a captive facility. He opened his session for discussion as there was very little he could relate about prioritizing amphibians for *ex situ* conservation, a subject he was asked to talk on. During the discussion Sanjay reiterated that Indian zoos should first learn captive management skills by keeping commonly found and non-threatened amphibians to practice husbandry, management, display and other basic aspects of keeping them in captivity.

Post lunch, directors and biologists from seven different zoos around India shared their experience in keeping amphibians (A.K. Jha on Himalayan Newts in Darjeeling Zoo, Rathinasabapathy on his and Brij Kishor's experience on breeding some common amphibians at Coimbatore Zoo, Manimozhi on a previous attempt at keeping amphibians and the enclosure built for the same at Arignar Anna Zoological Park are some examples).

Towards the end of the day's session, around 2.30pm, Mr. Brij Raj Sharma of the CZA opened a discussion on *ex situ* priorities for Indian amphibians and Brij Kishor Gupta recorded the minutes. In this session a strong suggestion was made by Ranjit Daniels and Sanjay Molur that although it was important for Indian zoos to keep and display amphibians in captivity, they should be of the common non-threatened species in and around the zoos, and with proper practices without resorting to continuous harvest from the wild. The group then listed for Darjeeling and Jharkhand a list of common species that could be tried by those zoos for practice for the next 3-5 years. However, during the course of the discussion, although it was argued by Ranjit and Sanjay that threatened amphibians should not be kept in captivity in Indian zoos as there was no expertise or experience, the CZA insisted that a few threatened species be listed for Indian zoos to 'save'.

The *ex situ* prioritization had to be undertaken quickly as time was over so there was no proper rationale for their selection. A list of 12 Critically Endangered amphibians were read out from the new book on "Threatened Amphibians of the World" and a couple more species that were thought to be of importance such as *Melanobatrachus indicus* and *Nasikabatrachus sahyadrensis*. Ranjit Daniels and Sanjay Molur insisted that amphibians be prioritized based on a set of criteria and not just picked out arbitrarily just because they were Critically Endangered. Both insisted that there was no Indian amphibian species known as of that day that required and Indian zoo to save it from extinction in the wild. Although a list has been drawn up, the CZA has agreed to consider a list to be proposed by Karthik, Sushil, Ranjit, Sanjay and Brij Kishor after email discussions and rationale in the next 7-10 days.

At the end of the first day of the meeting, participants got an opportunity to visit the vastly improved and a really beautiful looking Mysore Zoo after which everyone was treated to a wonderful evening of cocktails and dinner.

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