

Overview of the 9th Conference of the South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation - Sri Lanka, 2009

Organiser

Zoo Outreach Organisation

Hosts

National Zoological Gardens, Dehiwala & Ministry of Sports and Public Recreation, Government of Sri Lanka.

Local sponsors

Ministry of Sports and Public Recreation, Sri Lanka
Department of National Zoological Gardens, Sri Lanka.

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The Sixth Annual Joint CBSG / RSG South Asia Meeting and the 9th Annual SAZARC Conference

were held in Hotel Palm Beach, Mt. Lavinia and National Zoological Gardens, Dehiwala. Resource persons were from UK and USA, participants from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan (first time), and of course Sri Lanka.

A full Report of the CBSG/RSG meeting was published in April issue of ZOOS' PRINT. This is the Report of the SAZARC conference which took place from 11-15 February and was followed by a tour on 16-17 Feb.

A formal Inauguration of 9th SAZARC conference was conducted on 10th February evening, following on to CBSG RSG meeting, with Minister, Secretary and Addl. Secretary of the Ministry of Sports & Public Recreation, Director of National Zoological Gardens and Director, SAZARC on the dias. There were traditional Sri Lankan musicians and dancers to lead the dignitaries and perform during a lavish dinner. It was a grand beginning for the 9th SAZARC conference.

The theme of SAZARC for the second consecutive year was zoo legislation. Participants wondered what more there was to cover considering the extensive material presented in the last SAZARC conference Jan-Feb 2008 and they surely found out. We announced "fine tuning" of legislation, accreditation and inspection of zoos as the subject matter of this year. We had three resource persons, one of them, Mike Jordan of ATMOS who was with us last year, Miranda Stevenson of BIAZA who has been a resource person in two previous conferences, and Kris Vehrs of AZA. We spent mornings in a comfortable Hall at the Palm Beach Hotel having presentations and working groups

and afternoons at the zoo conducting inspections and discussion afterwards. We also heard a presentation about each of the National Zoological Garden's facilities over three days.

Day by Day activities

Working Group Reports, Technical Presentation summaries & participants /resource persons list follow this overview.

On Day 1, 11 February we gathered in the Assembly Hall where Mr. H.M.B.C. Herath, President of SAZARC and Additional Secretary to the Ministry of Sports and Public Recreation graciously welcomed resource persons and participants declared the conference open. Sally Walker, Director, SAZARC introduced the topics each morning and made announcements. On the first day Miranda Stevenson spoke on zoo legislation and standards. Kris Vehrs spoke on Animal Welfare Legislation, USA style and its relationship to the AZA's zoos. Mike Jordan gave a Curator's approach to zoo inspection.

After tea we split into country-based Working Groups to discuss the progress and benefits of zoo legislation to their institutions, and possible problems in implementation.

Afterwards, there was lunch at the zoo, after which participants were divided into three groups, each assigned to a different resource person and a different taxon group, e.g. 1. Birds/herptiles, 2. large mammals, 3. small mammals, 4. service areas (vet hospital, storage, kitchen, and with a plan of trading off every day until all participant groups had inspected all those areas of the zoo. This exercise was not so much to teach people how to be inspectors as in a formal exercise, but to sharpen the skills of all participants to see more of the various anomalies when they went around their own zoo. This was followed by a discussion and then a presentation on the National Zoological Gardens by Dammika Malsinghe, Dy. Director of the zoo and wrapping up the day. Participants returned to the hotel for a time and then proceeded by bus to the Grand Oriental Hotel, Colombo Fort.

On Day 2, 12 February covered possible impediments of legislation & Zoo Ethics by Kris Vehrs and Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare by Miranda Stevenson. Lunch and inspections followed the pattern set the previous day followed by a presentation on the well-known Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage. After this there was a planned shopping visit followed by Dinner at Global Tower, Bambalapitiya.

On Day 3, 13 February we had Reports of country Zoo Legislation Working Groups of the previous day, with Development of Standards and Accreditation by Kris Vehrs. Lunch and practice inspections of animal

enclosures again followed by a presentation by Renuka about the two new zoos which will be constructed in the next two years. Afterwards there was a demonstration of the Human Elephant Conflict educator packet by B.A. Daniel and Marimuthu and Dinner at Dampe Village, Piliyandala.

On Day 4, 14 February, presentations covering Conservation, Education and Research by Miranda and Accreditation, Part 2 by Kris Vehrs followed by excellent presentations by officers of Dhaka Zoo, Lahore Zoo and Van Vihar National Park Bhopal. Zoo inspections covered behind the scenes with two groups followed by a detailed discussion of inspections. Dammika gave an interesting presentation on the design of the upcoming Safari Park at Ridyagama, Hambanthota. Our group went shopping again and then to dinner at a Thai restaurant, called the Ceynor.

On Day 5, 15 February, delegates were still enthusiastic despite a tight schedule. Sally began with an exercise listing potential topics for training for the 10th anniversary SAZARC conference. This will be held at the Central Zoo, Kathmandu where the first meeting of SAZARC was convened. Mike Jordan gave an extensive lecture on Marking and Individual Identification of animals (this was by request of National Zoo Dy. Director, Dammika, followed by definitions of key words for legislation and policy and a separate presentation on CITES by Kris which was well received, despite being the last of five days of lectures. After lunch a holiday from inspection was declared and the group went from lunch directly to the city for last day purchases.

A gala dinner had been organized at a nearby restaurant right on the beach. The valedictory ceremony, including speeches, thanks, distribution of certificates, awarding of a gift of a stone elephant from the Minister's own hands, handing over of the SAZARC banner from current President (Mr. Herath of Sri Lanka) to new President (Ms. Sarita Jnawali of Nepal) was followed by a lovely dinner.

SAZARC Tour

Traditionally there is a SAZARC tour at the end and so it was this year. SAZARC participants got on a bus and drove south down the coast alongside the ocean, visiting Hikkaduwa Marine Sanctuary by Hambanthota which included a ride in a glass bottom boat to see corals, brightly coloured fish and marine turtles. A visit to Ft. Galle and the quaint little town broke up the journey to Bundala National Park at Hambanthota where we saw wild elephants, crocodiles, and many Sri Lankan birds. That night we were taken to the beach in Bundala NP to watch 3 species of tiny marine turtles hatch, make way through the sand and to the sea. Wildlife staff had to help the baby turtles as they could not dig their way out of the sand dunes before suffocating. Five species of marine turtles lay eggs on that single beach. Special thanks to the Wildlife Department at Hambanthota who went all out to show us their wildlife and provide a truly unique

experience. We reached our hotel and at dinner after midnight! The following day we drove to Ratnapura where we visited a gem river, a gem mine before purchasing gems at a nearby shop. Making our way back to Colombo we had a lot of laughs and reached the hotel for dinner and departure for home country.

We are very grateful to our sponsors from abroad and to Sri Lankan government for contributing financially to this conference and tour, to our Resource Persons for contributing academically, to our hosts for contributing their time to make everything enjoyable for us and to our participants and members for attending.

Sally Walker, Director, SAZARC

Addendum :

Training topics

Topics suggested included Zoo animal management (sexing, nutrition, breeding tools, carrying capacity), Conservation education / awareness (signages), Health management / disinfectants, Animal handling / transportation, Upgradation of zoo with present constraints, Population management, Environmental Enrichment, How to train zoo keepers, Disposition of conflict animals, Zoo designing, Behavioural change of visitors and Visitor management, WAZA membership, Record keeping, Vaccination, Communication skills with particular reference to media, PHVAs, and Management of politicians and bureaucrats!

SAZARC Kabul Zoo-help project

Also discussed was a project to be taken up by SAZARC working under advice and direction of the Kabul Zoo Email Advisory Group to help and mentor the Kabul Zoo in Afghanistan in whatever way could be done. Already the Lahore Zoo, Pakistan has given a very generous donation of Pak Rs. 4,50,000 for purchase of medicines. Central Zoo Authority of India has agreed to help with training, not only for Afghanistan but for all SAZARC countries. Kabul Zoo has participated in one SAZARC conference and Zoo Outreach Organisation training.

2010 Conference

Right after SAZARC, Daniel, Marimuthu and Sally went to Nepal to conduct our 2nd series of three educator training workshop in Human Elephant Coexistence HECx. The first two in the series were conducted at Chitwan National Park at the "public gathering"-friendly Camp of the National Trust for Nature Conservation NTNC. This Camp is right on the edge of the Park and also within walking distance to Chitwan township which is right on the bank of a river. Since the 7th CBSG RSG and 10th SAZARC meetings will be held in Nepal, we will very likely to conduct SAZARC (theme to be decided) in Kathmandu at the Clarion Hotel where SAZARC was born, in honour of our 10th Anniversary. After SAZARC we will move to Chitwan where we will have our CBSG RSG meeting which will cover one or two of the suggestions in our training brainstorm, e.g. PHVA and other technical topics interspersed with trips into the forest to see some animals and maybe have an actual PHVA on one species.