

Ex-situ Wildlife Conservation and Zoos in India

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"Lack of planning" has been identified to be the main problem with Indian zoos. Planned development and planned breeding are the main issues. Master Plans have been made mandatory for all the zoos and Central Zoo Authority has already received 88 Master Plans out of the 173 recognized zoos in the country. The rest are expected soon, in next 3-6 months. Plans are being scrutinized in the Authority and it is hoped that this exercise will be completed within a year's time.

That takes us to planned breeding. The Central Zoo Authority and Indian zoos have identified 70 Critically Endangered wild animal species for planned coordinated conservation breeding in Indian zoos. Species with fewer than 2500 (approx.) animals left in the wild and fewer than 100 individuals in captivity in Indian zoos have been taken up under the program.

Off-display conservation breeding centers for Mouse deer (*Tragulus meminna*) at Hyderabad; Himalayan monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*) at Manali; Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) at Bhubaneswar; Shaheen falcon at Chhatbir; Hangul (*Cervus elaphus hanglu*) at Shikargah; Grey jungle fowl (*Gallus sonnerati*) at Tirupati; Cheer pheasant (*Catreus wallichii*) at Chail; Brow antlered deer (*Cervus eldi*) at Imphal; Hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock leuconedys*) at Itanagar; King cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) at Pilikula; Binturong (*Arctictis binturong*) at Sepahijala and Vultures at Junagarh, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar and Ranchi have been created or under construction in the last 10-12 months.

Coordination meetings (27 identified species) between coordinating and participating zoos for different identified species have been organized mainly in the coordinating zoos.

Special efforts for marking of founders has been undertaken in all the coordinating and participating zoos for planned conservation breeding of different species. The Authority has also supplied the marking materials like micro chips, ear tags and leg tags to the zoos. Animal history sheets of all the animals marked have also been prepared.

The Central Zoo Authority with assistance from Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun is in process of compiling the animal profiles, a prototype of the national studbooks for all these marked founders. The first publication is already out and second is expected soon.

All the major Indian zoos (57 Nos.) and related organizations (4 Nos.), Central Zoo Authority, Wildlife Institute of India, National Referral Centre (IVRI) and Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species have joined ISIS/ ZIMS from 1 January 2009. Training programs for the record keepers to deal with ARKS software have already been completed, whereas short-term training programs to deal with SPARKS and MedARKS have been finalized between November 2009 to February 2010. Trainings for ZIMS have been kept for winters of 2010.

The Central Zoo Authority and Indian zoos have decided to have more cooperation and communication with other zoos in neighbouring countries (South Asia) for making the breeding program more coordinated and successful. The Central Zoo Authority has prepared a document "ex-situ wildlife conservation and zoos – Vision 2020" for overall development of Indian zoos in next 10 years. The Authority has also approved "Vision 2020" in its last meeting. The total financial involvement is expected to be in tune of Rs. 800 crores (about 8000 million rupees).

So, in India, we are at threshold of major change and complete overhauling of Indian zoos and their functioning.

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