

Welcome Messages

Vision for Animal Welfare in SAZARC Zoos ... Message from President of WAZA

Dr. Gordon Reid

As the new President of WAZA, I was kindly invited to this your 2008 Annual Conference by Sally Walker, President of SAZARC. I very much regret that I am unable to attend this important conference in person, but I will undertake to visit the South Asia region later this year. In the meantime, I offer instead warm greetings and some thoughts to mark the occasion.

WAZA unites for shared conservation purposes more than 1,300 leading zoos and aquariums worldwide, either as individual institutional members or via 25 national or regional (continental or supra-continental) zoo associations. These bodies are host to more than 600 million visitors or guests each year (about 10% of the world population!) and employ some 100,000 staff with a correspondingly widespread economic impact across the globe.

WAZA in 2004, admitted and welcomed SAZARC as one of our several, highly-valued regional association members, each of which represents a large geographical area. Founded on the 4th of August 2000 with numerous actual and prospective members (potentially all zoos in South Asia).

SAZARC, like WAZA, naturally aspires to achieve conservation of wildlife. This involves, among other aspects, inter-zoo cooperation throughout the entire region. To assist in this community building exercise, SAZARC contributes to the WAZA Committee for Inter-regional Conservation Cooperation (CIRCC). SAZARC also seeks to have uniformly high standards of animal care and welfare in zoos and, in this respect, liaises closely with the WAZA Ethics & Welfare Committee.

Excellent animal welfare is, of course, a vital prerequisite for conservation programmes involving livestock husbandry, veterinary care, breeding, translocations and reintroductions back to the wild.

In addition, to continuously improving nutrition and veterinary management, we all now recognize the absolute need to provide generous amounts of space, interesting environments and behavioural enrichment - and to prevent undue stress through, for example, the public disturbing, teasing or tormenting animals or giving them inappropriate food. Non-invasive or minimally invasive techniques have now been developed for the scientific measurement of stress through, for example, the analysis of hormones in faeces, or in microscopic blood samples obtained via blood-sucking ticks.

Sadly, during the early to mid-20th century, zoos worldwide did not always meet the high welfare standards espoused today through both SAZARC and WAZA. It was only in the 1980's that zoos

everywhere really began to adequately address the welfare issue and worked together through community forums and governmental agencies to establish commonly agreed optimum standards. This was so that the new standards could be widely communicated and set into practice nationally and internationally, everybody exchanging information and learning from each others knowledge and experiences. Indeed, in many but not all countries, formal enforcing legislation or 'Zoo Licensing Acts' came into being as a result of action from within our community.

In some cases these standards were 'harmonized' between countries and then adopted across a wide region. This is, for example, the case for the European Zoo Directive. It applies to all countries in the European Union but, importantly, allows for national autonomy when interpreting the legal rules. Independent of statutory requirements, rigorous Standards of Accreditation have been developed by some Regional Associations to ensure that their applicants and established membership conform to best practice and remain under regular scrutiny.

I am pleased to note that SAZARC has encouraged the zoos of South Asia to seek better management by approaching their government in regard to zoo legislation. We all know how India with its Zoo Act, Zoo Policy and Central Zoo Authority with a rigorous review and amendment procedure has made great strides in developing and implementing standards for zoo animal welfare which can be emulated in South Asia and even the rest of the world to good effect.

In addition to this example there has been assistance to SAZARC from WAZA concerning identifying and supporting those zoos in need of substantial help in reaching and maintaining standards. There are certainly major challenges for the SAZARC region because it encompasses far more countries (and has in its membership a far higher degree of political, economic and cultural diversity) than, say, the North American (AZA) or Australasian (ARAZPA) regions.

Under the South Asia canopy comes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Each country has its own distinct governance and actual or potential difficulties. In some cases these difficulties sadly include poverty, political unrest, war, hurricanes, floods and famines. In such instances zoos (their conservation and welfare programmes and the zoos desire for international cooperation) can hardly be a national priority. In the face of such challenges SAZARC is to be congratulated on the unified

progress that has been made. It is remarkable and very encouraging to see how SAZARC zoos work together for the common good. This is true even in circumstances where there might be some political differences or other disparity between the countries where the cooperating institutions come from.

India, with large advantages in its scale of operation and in economic and scientific terms, has 150 or more regulated zoos. This substantial progress is a beacon for South Asia in terms of the welfare vision, strategy and legislative framework promoted by Dr. B.R. Sharma, Member Secretary of the Central Zoo Authority (a statutory body) and his predecessors. This vision was developed in close dialogue with the zoo community and the Ministry of Environment & Forests of the Government of India in New Delhi, currently presided over by Dr. Manmohan Singh. I recently read with great pleasure the Central Zoo Authority publication *Zoos in India: Legislation, Policy, Guidelines and Strategy*. This was first published as a landmark document in 1998 and has since been regularly updated (Jan 2001, Nov 2004 and Feb 2007). I am pleased to see that the most recent

edition incorporates sections from *Building A Future for Wildlife. The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy* [the 'WZACS' of WAZA, 2005, achieved with considerable input from SAZARC].

In particular, the CZA (2007) document promotes chapter nine of the WZACS concerning ethics and animal welfare. I thoroughly recommend that conference delegates should read and familiarize themselves with the CZA publication and apply it to their own particular circumstances; and also obtain a copy of the WZACS from SAZARC. For those delegates who prefer their reading to be brief or who wish to have a short summary to pass on to, say, a government minister then I suggest obtaining a copy of *Understanding Animals and Protecting Them* (WAZA, 2006, edited by CEO Dr Peter Dollinger). Also available through SAZARC, this publication contains (p. 9) a section on ethics and animal welfare in conservation.

In conclusion, I offer my best wishes for a productive and enjoyable SAZARC conference. I very much look forward to hearing about the outcome!

**A Hearty Welcome to SAZARC participants and Guests
from SAZARC President* and SAZARC Director**, January 2008**

Thank you for coming to the Fifth Annual CBSG/RSG meeting and/or the Eighth Annual SAZARC meeting. We are happy to have you here in India again. Last year (actually 2006) our 7th meeting of a small group of us was held in Vietnam with the South East Asian Zoo Association, conforming to a practice of celebrating their major anniversaries with them. In 2007 we planned to meet in November, December but municipal elections in Ahmedabad took precedence and here we are in early 2008.

Let us establish the serious objectives of our meeting. In SAZARC we wish to focus on **zoo regulation** but coming from the zoos themselves, before an animal welfare group takes hold and convinces our various country governments to pass extreme welfare legislation drafted by persons who are not familiar with the potential and problems of zoos. India has led the way in this regard by self-regulation in an act passed in 1991 setting up a Central Zoo Authority. In 1992, Norms and Standards were passed as well and since then Zoo Policy and a draft of Guidelines and Amendments as the new legislation was tried and found to need supplementation or correction.

In SAZARC we are not trying to force any specific path our member countries. Every country is different but every country has zoos and wants to improve. Thus SAZARC's responsibility is to make sure all the countries have all information they need about legislation, standards and inspection of zoos.

SAZARC is a member of WAZA and we also have to continue to earn our membership by continuing to try and improve zoos that need improvement and to bring our zoo community in line with international standard, as appropriate with our economic, cultural and ethical milieu.

Also, we are proud to be associated with WAZA and its courageous attempt to address the issue of "zoos needing improvement" around the world. It is not easy for an association to come out and say "some of our members need improvement", but better we say it than others. And if we say it, then we have to do something about it. WAZA now has a protocol for zoos which have good technology and expertise as well as some financial resources to spare to assist zoos that need & want improvement in any aspect.

At the same time, SAZARC wishes to keep up with the world's zoos and their conservation concerns to the extent possible. The recent ones are the **Amphibian Crisis, Gharial Crisis and Global Warming**. WAZA has passed resolutions on all of these and has a special project for Amphibians which you all have heard about. In fact, recently we showed that we could keep up with the best by having a series of innovative, high profile amphibian education programmes conducted in connection with Leap Year just entering the new year : Bangladesh (4 zoos), Nepal (1 zoo), Sri Lanka (1 zoo) and India (4 zoos). We want to discuss the Gharial Crisis since that is our own region and Global Warming since that applies to everyone and come up with Action Items and a Resolution of our own. So we have a full schedule of activities with lectures, working groups, presentations and outings in this most interesting city of Ahmedabad. We hope you all have a good time, learn a lot, eat a lot, spend a lot of money and make a lot of new friends.

*** R. K. Sahu, President/Host, and Director/
Organiser Municipal Corporation of Ahmedabad /
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