Zoo Education at Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens, Mysore

Tanuja D.H.*

The National Zoo Policy, 1998 which states that

> "Each zoo should have a drawn-up plan for educating the visitors as well as others in the community. Zoo shall keep a close liaison with other *ex-situ* facilities in this regard".**(3.8 Education and Outreach Activity).**

Mysore Zoo, officially known as Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens, Mysore, has been carrying out educational activities in keeping with the Policy. Mysore Zoo has activities going on throughout the year. Officially the educational activities start of in the month of April. The following programmes were conducted in Mysore in 2006.

Summer Camp: Twenty five students from different schools enrolled for week long camp, from 24-30 April 2006. Fees: Rs-50/- per student was collected, the fee is nominal so as to accommodate every cadre of the society. These classes were juxtaposed with elephant bathing and feeding, census of captive animals, feeding of animals, visitors survey, visitors feedback. Participants also had interaction with animal keepers- Shankara, Naganna, Manju, while CEE worksheets were handed out by zoo volunteers. The students prepared project works on any animal of their choice. They were taken to Karanji Nature Park, where had bird watching session, butterfly park visit and later to Regional Museum of Natural History.

Youth Club: Sixty students from various schools enrolled for the club. Youth Club is for 6 months, from June-December. This year the club was inaugurated on 25th June and went on until 17 December 2006. The classes included slide presentation/Power point presentations on the following topics were covered: Why study nature? Birds, Plants, Reptiles,Wood Science and Technology, Personality Development, Himalayan wildlife,Herbivores, Tranquilization, Primates, Elephants, Flightless bird and Captive Breeding. Apart from this elephant feeding and bathing, kitchen visit along with feeding, and the students had first hand information about procurement, sorting out the carton each animal would get. They accompanied the feed-truck and distributed the feed. They also conducted a visitors survey, visitors interaction, animal behaviour studies, and filled CEE worksheets. They had interaction with various animal keepers.

Master **Sishir** of 6th standard says " I like this club, it is not like my regular school class, I got a lot of information from the club and it has helped my studies, especially biology. I wish to continue my connection with the zoo and I will join as a zoo volunteer". Also, Miss. **Vishnavi** doing her 11 std, says, "Although I was interested in wildlife and environment, I got impetus only after joining this club. Now I have better understanding and I had great fun".

World Environment Day:
Every year Zoo celebrated World Environment Day on 5th June. In 2006, special children, i.e. physically and mentally challenged students were invited and drawing competition was conducted for them. Elderly citizens along with special children were invited to plant saplings to mark the occasion. Later all participants were taken on zoo rounds.

Competitions:
Competitions are always a bridge between the zoo and the students. Mysore has been conducting various competitions for many years now. Students not only participate in the competitions, finishing the competition, they take opportunity to go round the zoo. It is also one of the ways of getting students to the zoo.

Wildlife Week: Every year Mysore Zoo celebrates Wildlife Week with following activities.

Naming Ceremony: Zoo invites public to suggest names for the new born. It is a strategy for involving the public.
Photography Competition and Exhibition: All these years Mysore Zoo has been organising photography competition and exhibition. Fifty one photographers participated and we received about 200 plus photographs.
Free zoo entry: School students upto 7th std were given free entrance, during Wildlife Week.
Keepers Training: This was 5th year of keepers training programme, held from 18 -22 September 2006. On the topic of Behavioural Enrichment for Animals. Thirteen keepers from Karnataka state zoos and 8 Mysore Zoo keepers participated in 5 days training and later they were taken on field trip to Arignar Anna Zoological Gardens, Vandalur, Chennai.
Teachers Training Programme: Two day teachere training programme was held on 28-29 August 2006. The theme of the programme was 'Teaching syllabus with Zoo as a centre'. Forty two teachers from Mysore and neighbouring areas attended this programme.
School Children concession: Mysore zoo gives concession for students as well as people from other public groups.
Bird–watching: Mysore Zoo is very lucky to have Karanji Nature Park where bird watching was done by 26 participants on 20.08.2006 session.

FUTURE PROGRAMMMES:
Feed-Talk: Talking to visitors and catching their attention may pose difficulty sometimes. The best way of capturing their attention is to do something unusual or something they cannot get access to.
Feed-Talk: Tigers are fed in the late afternoons and talk will be given on them while they are being fed. Later it will be done for elephants and chimpanzees.
Outreach for Hospitals and Aged: Now outreach is being done for educational institutions. Slides on zoo are shown at educational institutions and at the end of the session questions are invited and clarified. This will be expanded to homes for the aged and a few hospitals.
Birds and Butterfly Watching Club: We hope to have students enrolled for Bird watching and butterfly watching clubs. In these exclusive clubs, once a student enrolls for the club they will be meeting regularly.

*** Education Officer, Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens, Mysore –570 020. E mail: zoomysore @gmail.com**