

Kabul Zoo Update - 16 July 2006

Brendan Whittington - Jones*

Kabul Zoo watchers will be happy to read this upbeat update by Brendan Whittington - Jones. Eds.

General

The management of the zoo has settled down with Sha Nuri, a long time employee and manager of the zoo, as the new director and no deputy. Sha Nuri, Fazil and the vet make up the management team once again; they share a bond and work together closely.

The zoo has maintained its level of cleanliness since last good reports, and, with minor exceptions, the grounds are being swept up every day and hosed down on and more or less regularly. The animals areas are also being cleaned daily. The vet is still working with the disinfection schedule and that's most noticeable in the macaque, lions and bears holding areas where it is now possible to breathe easily !

The protective barriers erected last year for the bears and the macaque island have been largely successful; more so in the bear area, but has still reduced the amount of rubbish tossed to/at the macaques. Sha Nuri is doing an excellent job of making sure the standards are maintained around the zoo. There have been a handful of changes among the keeper staff which has seen some more active individuals replacing the less efficient ones.



Entrance to the Zoo; statue of Marjan.
Photo by Brendan W-Jones



Display case for carved souvenir animals.
Photo by Brendan W-Jones

The question of a possible entry of the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA, the government environmental arm under the control of the previous King's grandson) has not materialised. There may be interest in the zoo from NEPA (just because it has something to do with animals) but no representatives have been at the zoo for sometime. NEPA is more of a regulatory body than a management one at this point. The municipality are putting good effort into the zoo, with the construction of a building either side of the main gate (one being for shelter for the ducks etc in the pond / forest area, and one for the crane exhibit).

There is also a 2.5 x 5m display cabinet opposite the ticket office with carved stone animals for sale. The entrance on the outside has a concrete carved lion mounted either side. The Aquarium looks busy and quite tidy (this is under the control of a private contractor who struck a deal with the municipality last year). I am concerned about the conditions for the snakes on display but working on that. The elephant building and outside area is virtually complete, and while it looks quite good I am not sure whether much of the gates and fencing on the wall would stand up to the attentions of an elephant or two (not to mention obviously the many other issues associated with the zoo wanting an elephant).

A green house for cultivation of plants for the zoo is also being built in the area near the elephant building.

Public toilets were constructed by ECO which look great and are surprisingly clean with attendants who charge about 2 Afghanis (@ 50 Afghanis/1 \$) per visit. The other areas/destroyed buildings around the zoo previously used as toilet sites are slowly being cleaned up. The municipality is providing the gas supply for the kitchen.

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Macaque enclosure with enrichment
Photo by Brendan W-Jones

The next project on the cards is the rebuilding of the main building by ECO. That is meant to start in about "a month". The municipality have removed large amounts of rubble from between the building and the Chinese bear area. They are also thinking about extending the zoo across the river but there is no plan or money for this yet.

Sha Nuri says that the municipalities of Jalalabad and Herat are keen to build zoos also but no construction has started yet. Sha Nuri is trying to get information on the Jalalabad project at the moment.

The Marjan statue looks impressive and is quite a hit with the public. Most people want to touch it, lay on it or have a photo taken with it but it doesn't look in any danger of being damaged.

The Chinese bear went walking about 3 weeks ago after a keeper left the gates open. It was herded back in without incident. No disciplinary action was taken. The 4 black bears and 2 brown bears mounted a great escape several weeks ago after discovering a way of climbing out of the moat in a corner. They too were shepherded back in without incident and the area has been reinforced.

Animal Collection

There have been some changes since last time, particularly among the small birds where there are a few more parakeets, love birds, finches, pigeons, chickens and guinea fowl. These have been brought in to replace birds that died over winter. The aquarium also lost fish in winter due to power failures stopping the thermostats and they have only purchased a small generator to run the lights in this event. From a business side it makes sense that they make the investment to keep the fishes alive, and they claim they will be ready for winter.

The cranes are now down to 1 Eurasian and 1 Demoiselle. 2 Demoiselles have been killed courtesy of attacks by a turkey and the Eurasian. These have been separated. I have been in contact with George Archibald regarding what is meant to be happening at the crane area but I fear this may drag on. It is intended that a pair of Demoiselle

and Eurasian Cranes come from Pakistan. Avian flu is apparently restricting the movement of birds across the border from Pakistan although I am slightly sceptical about that.

The wolves have become a greater issue than before since there have been 5 births and 1 adult female left at the zoo. This brought the number to 12. One pup was killed by its mother 2 days ago. There are an additional 3 gazelles which were donated by a wealthy government minister. The other animals look healthy, without skin conditions, and slightly overweight in the case of the lions and some of the macaques.

Education

This is still being operated on an opportunistic basis with about 320 school children having been to the zoo last month. There is no effort being made to bring more groups in. The zoo has a copier/printer now so they have the ability to produce many copies of the masks/labelling book pages etc which the Z.O.O. crew produced. I have spent a day with Fazil and the vet going through all the materials in the SAZARC package from the conference. They are now again working on the brochure idea, of which there may be some copies made here, but I still think it would be a good exercise for Fazil's educator training trip to India to continue developing it (as was mentioned in the schedule for that trip).

Veterinary

The vet has maintained his cheery attitude, as well as the disinfection and parasite treatment programs. The Civil-Military Cooperation units that visited the zoo last year no longer visit. The veterinary students from the vet college are now again coming to the zoo once in a month. The vet has left today (along with 2 vet graduates) to go with the WCS vet to the Badakshan region (north-eastern Afghanistan) for 2 months. They are spending time working on public health issues, livestock veterinary health issues, necropsies and wildlife research. It is a fantastic opportunity for the vet to get some hands on experience and a broader view of the importance of vet work. More about WCS involvement below.



Enclosure hoped for elephant.
Photo by Brendan W-Jones

Sha Nuri assures me that if a vet is required over this time, they can get assistance from the Ministry of Agriculture.

KABUL ZOO Visitor figures 2006 (20-07-2006)

January	14 406 Afghans	6 Foreigners
February	11 663 Afghans	2 Foreigners
March	21 183 Afghans	13 Foreigners
April	48 065 Afghans	58 Foreigners
May	36 605 Afghans	35 Foreigners
June	46 605 Afghans	30 Foreigners
July	35 225 Afghans	16 Foreigners
Total	213 752 Afghans	160 Foreigners

Average per day 1008 +/- Afghans 0.7 Foreigner

Entrance fee 10 AF /adult (above 7yrs) *100 AF/adult (above 7yrs)*

Income

From Afghans visit \$44 531

From Foreignes visit \$333

Communication

The Ministry of Communications has an internet service at the zoo running reasonably well and the costs of this are covered by the municipality. I am pushing and hoping that Fazil will now stay in contact and send reports over e-mail. I have been emphasising the need to communicate with the stakeholders, particularly the folks at Z.O.O. Fazil also apparently has internet at home so his communications will improve.

Wildlife Conservation Society

I have met briefly with Alex Dehgan (Director of WCS Afghanistan), Stephan Ostroski (Consultant Vet for WCS) and Kara Stevens (Liaison and Training Co-ordinator). Although their aim is primarily veterinary, public and wildlife health issues in the northern part of Afghanistan they are based in Kabul and are establishing their program for an initial 3 years. Kara in particular will be spending



Boys and Marjan



Visitors amenities

most of her time in the next 3 years in Kabul (lucky!). The zoo was initially not on their radar but since they have been there they have seen potential for involvement. I have explained in detail the role players, what has been done in the past and what we are trying to achieve. They want to be involved. They don't have budget money allocated for the zoo but feel they could overlap some of their work with the zoo, particularly regarding veterinary work and education. As was seen by the e-mails there were several folks from zoos around the US putting in their comments. I have told Alex that any interest or involvement with US zoos must be directed through NC Zoo. I don't believe this should be compromised.

Sally, Kara Stevens wants to make contact with you since I explained the ZOO and SAZARC involvement, the time and effort put into Fazil by your staff, and the links between Fazil, James, Nick and David. She wants to help with signage and the brochure initially but this can only begin in a few months time on their side. I believe there is certainly a possibility of establishing co-operation with her to back up the efforts of ZOO with Fazil. Of great benefit that it means there is someone in Kabul who can be a reference point. Our aims as well, of establishing a more structured educational plans and the media links I tried to put in place through Akbhary last year. This is out of their line of focus for now but may be something which can be worked to the benefit of the zoo at a later stage.

Stephan Ostroski, as I have mentioned is keen to train the vet. I think this next 2 months will put the vet's capabilities and potential into perspective. Stephan is keen to work with the zoo during his time in Kabul to train the vet in day to day treatments, immobilisation, necropsy etc. This could be enormously beneficial for the zoo, but I guess we should wait and see how far this goes. The vet is very happy about this opportunity. If nothing else, it should keep his interest and motivation levels up. I believe this has potential to help us out in an area that has always been of major concern for the zoo.

Cheers, Brendan Jones