

South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation SAZARC 5th Annual Conference



Today, zoos have an enormous responsibility because these institutions are the only places where most of the public can see, hear and smell living wild animals. Although there are myriad wildlife programmes on television which are very educational, there is no substitute for being in the presence of wild animals. The wild animals which are kept in zoos are ambassadors for their wild counter-parts and zoos are their theatre. The public learns what they see, and if they see animals being kept badly, they learn the wrong attitudes toward them. Also, some of the wild animals being kept by zoos are highly threatened species listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals. These animals hold valuable genetic material which might be required for strengthening wild populations via reintroduction, introduction or translocation. Conservation scientists can learn a lot from the animals kept in zoos if they are managed well. If they are not properly managed in their breeding, health care, nutrition and housing, they will not be fit for aiding conservation. Therefore, zoos must be run as a scientific institutions. That is, in reality, what they are – wild animal laboratories, but laboratories which allow the public to come and inspect !

Hence the zoo director's and other staff's jobs are not easy – imagine ! running a hospital, or space station or research laboratory with thousands of people coming in every day to see your work, bringing their lunch for a picnic and in a holiday mood ! Add to this his other problems of management and the zoo director and his staff have a double-time job.

SAZARC is intended to give the zoo personnel a forum to discuss their problems and find solutions.

Today, because of the immense responsibility of zoos, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums WAZA has requested the zoos to organize themselves into national and regional associations, and to apply for membership in the world zoo organisation. This year, SAZARC, applied for and was almost unanimously elected to membership in the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. This is a great honour but also a tremendous responsibility. WAZA has a very strict Code of Welfare and Ethics and membership is contingent on a zoo association requiring high standards from its members. I have no doubt that the zoos of South Asia can rise to this challenge and SAZARC will help them.

Every year, training is organized during the SAZARC conference. Topics have ranged from Zoo Education, Welfare and Ethics, Zoo Management for Welfare and Conservation, Nutrition and Zoo Design. This year it was Zoo Population Management and Zoo Nutrition. In addition to the training there were participants presentations about the problems and potential of their zoo and discussion of SAZARC business including the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy.

SAZARC in brief

The South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation (SAZARC) - pronounced "sah-zark" was founded by a group of zoo directors from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in 2000 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The meeting was organised by Zoo Outreach Organisation and hosted by the Central Zoo/King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation and was a pioneering event in that zoo personnel from five South Asian countries met together for the first time. SAZARC has met every year since 2000 in different South Asian countries and also once in Malaysia to join with the South East Asian Zoo Association. SAZARC applied for and was awarded membership in the prestigious World Association of Zoos and Aquaria in the summer of this 2004. SAZARC is administered from the offices of the Zoo Outreach Organisation and Wildlife Information Liaison Development which also hosts several IUCN Species Survival Commission specialist groups and regional networks, providing valuable linking, training and educational advantages for the South Asian Zoo Association.

In Taipei, Taiwan, during the meeting of the World Association of Zoos and Aquaria, a new World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy was approved by the World Zoo Association. In the SAZARC meeting, several working sessions were devoted to plan how SAZARC, individual zoo associations and even individual institutions can use this Strategy to create an Action Plans for the next few years. This was the first regional zoo association to meet and discuss this strategy since its passage, and we got a very good output from this exercise which is included elsewhere in this issue.

Preceding this conference, there was a two day meeting of the IUCN SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group and Reintroduction Specialist Group led by the Chairs of these groups. They have come out with some useful recommendations which have also been included in a Report in this issue.

Sponsorship of this workshop was from both local and international sources equally which is another step towards SAZARC sustainability.

Despite great inconvenience and even hardship due to weather conditions and delayed flights representatives from 8 countries gathered for the meeting, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, UAE, UK and USA.

Resource persons for the SAZARC training were: Dr. Miranda Stevenson, Director, British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquaria, Dr. Bob Lacy, Chairman, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group. Dr. Ellen Dierenfelt who was to

lead the Nutrition component of the training was unable to come, sadly, but the training went on with local resource persons, e.g. Ms Uzma Khan who gave an overview of Zoo Nutrition in order to insure that people who were not present in the previous workshop could catch up and also served as a review for others. Also there was Dr. R. K. Sahu speaking on the handrearing of carnivores, Dr. Jayanthi Alahakoon, speaking on how she used the Nutrition training to make various diets for her zoo animals in National Zoo, Dr. Geetha Seshamani who spoke on the nutritional plan used for the Agra Bear Centre in India. We will be publishing a special issue on these presentations and the output of the research done by participants from last SAZARC meeting to the present SAZARC meeting in April or May. Ellen is in touch with us and will help us put the information collected into the **Zoo*trition** format so that an ongoing Nutrition Handbook for South Asia can become a

Report -- day by day

Generally the Programme of 5th Annual SAZARC Conference conducted from 1-7 December 2004 by the Lahore Zoo/Punjab Wildlife Department at the comfortable and elegant Sunfort Hotel, Lahore took the following shape:

First December, 2004 (Wednesday – Day 1)
Inaugural Session,, Registration and seating of Participants, Recitation from the Holy Quran, Welcome Address by Abdul Qadeer Mehal President, SAZARC, Addresses by Capt. (Retd) Iftikhar Ahmad Rao, Director General, Wildlife & Parks, Punjab, Raja Muhammad Javed, Director, Lahore Zoo, Sally Walker, Director (SAZARC) & Founder, ZOO, Address by Secretary, Forest, Wildlife & Fisheries and Chief Guest Address.

The training began right after tea consisting of presentations on Zoo Population Management Systems by Dr. Miranda Stevenson and Species Management by Dr. Robert C. Lacy. After lunch and some participant presentations there was a Visit of Lahore Zoo, shopping and a gala dinner at the zoo.

On the 2nd December, 2004 (Thursday - Day 2) Dr. Miranda kicked off with a presentation on Ethics and Welfare followed by Dr. Bob on Genetic Concerns in Species Management. Miranda also presented on Regional, National, & Institutional Planning and after lunch Bob explained Demographic and Genetic Methods of Management. The rest of the day was devoted to participant presentations with dinner at the beautiful Shalimar Gardens.

The third day, 3 December, 2004 (Friday - Day 3), Dr. Miranda presented on Studbook Management with a Case Study of Sloth Bear. Bob gave a presentation on ISIS and ZIMS, Record Keeping which, along with the Primate Taxonomy presentation given later by Sanjay, inspired participants to select Record Keeping and Taxonomy for next year's training theme. More work was done on studbooks and there was a working group session on the World Zoo & Aquarium Conservation Strategy, led by Miranda Stevenson.

After lunch we went to the Jallo Park just near to Lahore and

saw both on site and off exhibit breeding facilities followed by an excellent entertainment and dinner in a huge tent at the park.

On 4 December, 2004 (Saturday – Day 4) Miranda led working groups on species coordination and collection planning with groups on mammals, birds and reptiles. This was followed by another session of the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy and participant presentations. Participants enjoyed more shopping after closing the session at 7 pm and a gala dinner on the roof of Cuckoo's Den, a unique and excellent restaurant in Lahore.

The last day on 5 December, 2004 (Sunday - Day 5) the whole morning was spent on the Nutrition component of the training with presentations by Uzma Khan, R.K. Sahu, Geetha Seshamani and Jayanthi Alahakoon. This was followed by the final participant presentations and a long business session including Committee Reports and discussion of new committees, Resolutions, etc. after lunch. An emotional Validictory was conducted with many compliments and thanks. The owner of the Sunfort presented each participant with a beautiful plaque in honour of their work for their zoo community. Participants presented Sally Walker a lovely engraved tray for her work in assisting SAZARC get membership in WAZA. Participants were given beautiful colour certificates. The final dinner of the conference was held at the elegant Gymkhana Club.

The planned tour to Lal Sonhandra National Park could not be held due to a conflict of appointments at the park itself and some participants travel schedules which would not have allowed sufficient time to return. Instead, the morning of the 6th December, participants were taken on a tour of the many historical places in Lahore itself which was most exciting and worthwhile. Lunch was at the Lahore Zoo where participants could spend the afternoon if they chose to do so or go for more shopping or sightseeing. The 7th December the whole group took a field trip to the amazing salt range near Islamabad, a home cooked lunch at a government guest house, and some historical sites of Hindu temples. A tired but happy group returned the same night, too tired for dinner, and flew out the following day. Many participants flew through Karachi where Mansoor Qazi entertained them at the Karachi Zoo and the Karachi Safari Park.

We are highly indebted to our gracious, resourceful, creative, generous, patient and above all humourous and affectionate hosts, Mr. Qadeer Mehal and Raja Javed. We also thank superior officer Capt. (Retd) Iftikhar Ahmad Rao, Director General, Wildlife & Parks, Punjab, without whose cooperation and good will, the conference could not have taken place. A special thanks also to the World Wide Fund for Nature Pakistan and its Director, Dr. Ali Habib and Conservation Biologist Ms. Uzma Khan who were involved in the conference from the start and provided much cooperation, sponsorship and assistance.

