

Visitor profile at Peshwe Zoo, Maharashtra

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Introduction:

Recreation and wilderness areas are frequented by millions of visitors each year (Smith-Jackson and Hall 2002). Based on attendance figures, zoological parks are unsurpassed as recreation destinations (Morgan and Hodgkinson, 1999). The growing awareness for nature and wildlife conservation has made zoos a popular institution. Estimates indicate that 10% of the world's population visit zoos every year. There are about 350 animal collections in India, which are visited by more than 50 million people annually (Anon, 1998).

The National Zoo Policy of India states that one strategy to fulfill its main objective will be "To inspire amongst zoo visitors empathy for wild animals, an understanding and awareness about the need for conservation of natural resources and for maintaining the ecological balance." This is possible only when we have demographic information about the zoo visitors.

Many different methods have been used to study the visitor in zoos. Some of these are using in-depth interviews and interactions with visitors (Wolf & Tymitz, 1981); questionnaire surveys (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999); asking questions in television programmes and children's magazines (Šuronivá, 1971, Morris, 1960) and observing the visitors as they tour the zoo (Venugopal et al 1993; Raju & Venugopal, 1994). Exit interviews with visitors, especially those who have been observed as having had one or more interactions with the staff, provides an excellent source of information on visitor satisfaction (Bitgood & Shettel, 1996). For many visitors, a visit to the zoo is a family affair (Cheek *et al*, 1976; Wolf and Tymitz, 1981; Wells, 2000; Kellert 1979). Morgan & Hodgkin (1999) have investigated the typical group size and composition Sunset Zoological Park (SZP) while Wells (2000) conducted a survey at the information Center of the Golden Gate Canyon State Park. Survey conducted in the U.S., Canada, Australia and in the U.K. revealed that the most popular reason for visiting zoos was being close to animals (Tunicliffe, 1994). Wells (2000) reported that sixty percent of the visitors in his study cited recreation as the primary reason to visit the zoo. Empirical support was found for the typical reasons listed by zoo visitors for attendance: have fun, learn about wildlife, and socialize with friends, teach children about animals, etc (Morgan & Hodgkin, 1999).

Morris (1960) found that children liked the monkey & chimpanzee the most. In the most disliked list, snakes topped the list with 28% votes followed by the spider, which got 10% of the votes. In a study by Šurinová (1971), the most popular animal was the monkey, followed by the dog, parrot and bear. Seventy percent of the most popular animals reported were mammals.

A majority of the visitors desired more information about animals (Wolf & Tymitz, 1981). Cleanliness of exhibits, comfort of the animals in captivity, normal behavior and care for the captive animals affected visitors' perceptions of the zoo.

Study area:

The present study was conducted at the Peshwe zoo, Pune, which was established by the Pune Municipal Corporation in 1953. It is a small zoo with an area of 7 acres and located in the heart of the city, adjoining a famous park called the "Saras-baug". The zoo has a variety of animals and serves as a place of entertainment for children by having a toy train in addition to a play park. It is essentially a traditional old-fashioned zoo, with most enclosures typically bar caged and barren.

Due to the concrete jungle surrounding the zoo, it was decided to shift the animals of Peshwe zoo to the Katraj Zoo, now renamed as Rajiv Gandhi Zoological Garden, which is located on the Pune-Satara road, and encompasses an area of 165 acres. All the animals at the existing sites have now been transported to their new enclosures in the Katraj Zoo.

Methodology:

I used close-ended questionnaires for this study. Questionnaires were handed over to the visitors at the exit gates. The visitors were chosen randomly and the questionnaire survey was done on weekends. The questionnaires were prepared in both English and Marathi to overcome the language bias. The questionnaire consisted of 19 multiple choice questions with a few of them requiring detailed answers. To get the visitation data for past five years, the records from the ticket sale counter were taken. There are different tickets for adults and children (upto 12 years of age). Thus, according to the records of the ticket sale counter, visitor numbers were accounted for and grouped as children or adults.

Results:

Visitation trends:

Records were obtained from the ticket sale for the past ten years. The data for the year 1999 was not available and has thus been excluded. Visitation trends in Peshwe Zoo show that a peak in visitation occurred in the year 1996. Thereafter, there has been a steep decline in visitation rates of children as well as adults (Fig. 1). A month wise visitation trend from 1993-2001 shows the highest peak was observed in the month of February, followed by May in the case of children, whereas peaks were observed in the months of May and November respectively in the case of adults (Fig. 2).

Results of the Questionnaire survey: Hundred and two visitors representing 442 visitors responded to the questionnaires, out of which 64 were males and 38 were females. It took an average of 4 minutes to complete answering the questionnaire. Most respondents belonged to the age group of 25-45, came in groups and the average

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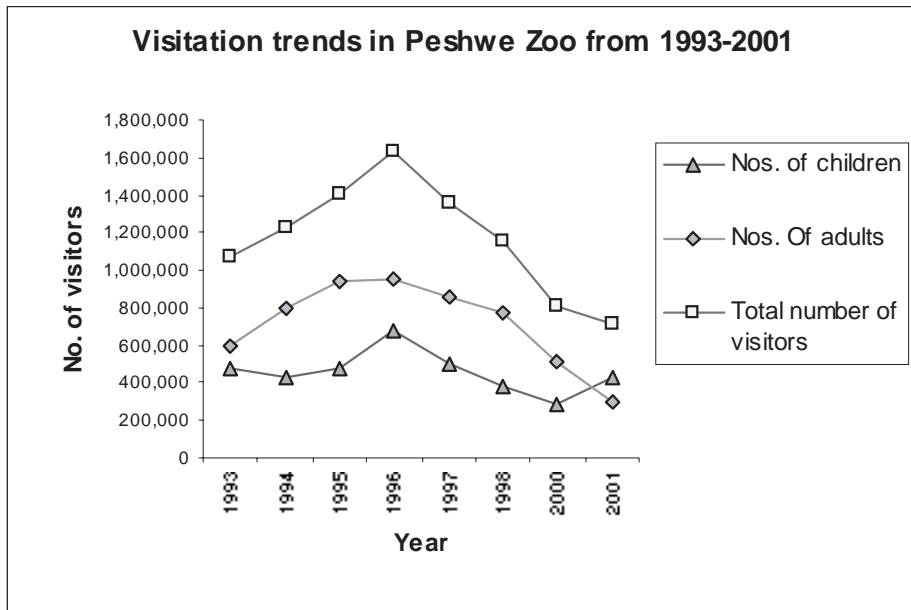


Fig. 1: Visitation trends in Peshwe Zoo from 1993-2001 (Excluding 1999 data, which was not available)

group size was 5.47 persons. Most of the respondents were at least intermediate pass. Maximum respondents were from the working class. Majority of the visitors was from middle class economic backgrounds (Monthly income less than Rs. 10,000). The ratio of local visitors and outsiders was almost 1:1 (47 local visitors and 53 outsiders). Most visitors were familiar with the zoo, and had been coming there for the past two to five years. One third of the respondents said that the frequency of their visit to the zoo is not fixed while a quarter of them visit the zoo at least once in a year. Eighty percent of the visitors said that their purpose for visiting the zoo as recreation and tourism, while 10% of them had come for educational purposes (Fig. 3).

Thirty-four percent of the visitors selected the White Tiger as their favorite animal, followed by Tiger (26%). On pooling the animals according to their groups, big cats (65%) were the most preferred animal group for viewing, followed by herbivores and birds.

On seeing the animals in the cage, the most predominant activity of the visitors was to observe them (53%), tried to attract the animal by making noise (34%), while 10% visitors confessed that they tried to offer food and/or touch the animal (Fig. 4).

Forty nine percent of the visitors suggested that they would like to see improvements in the cleanliness standards,

while 18% indicated towards modifications in the animal enclosures. Among the other suggestions, visitors requested for guided tours (17%) and improved sign boards (14%).

Discussion:

Visitation trends:

The visitation trend (Fig. 2) shows that there has been a steep decline in the visitation rates since 1996. This can be attributed to the shifting of animals from Peshwe zoo to the new site, Rajiv Gandhi Zoological Garden, Katraj. The graph showing a month wise visitation trend from 1993- 2001 shows that the highest peak occurs in the month of February, followed by May in the case of children (Fig. 2). The reason for this could be the increased number of

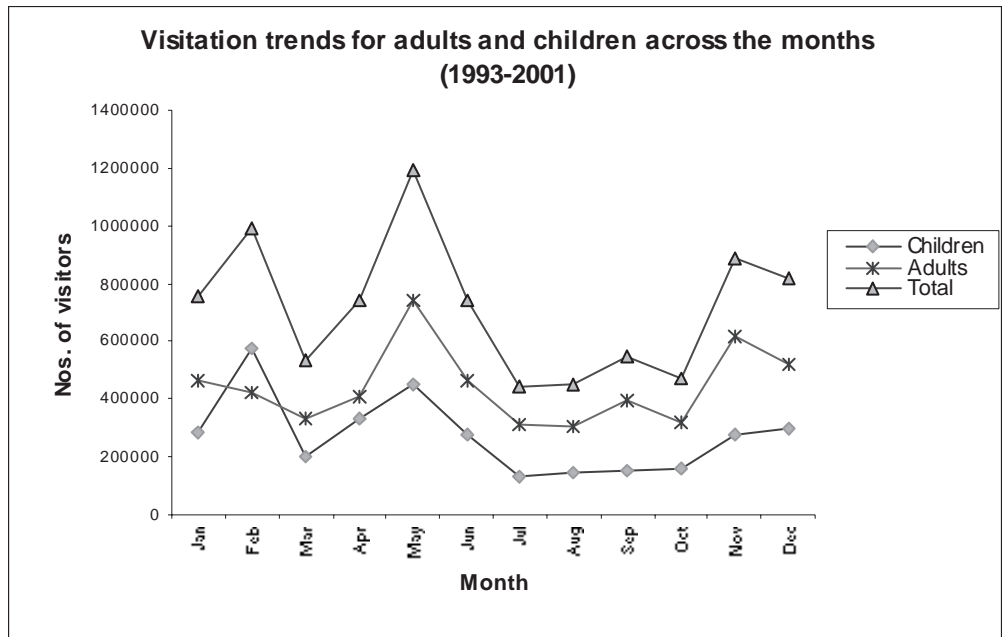


Fig. 2: Month wise distribution of visitation by children and adults to Peshwe Zoo from 1993-2001 (Excluding 1999 data, which was not available)

school trips during February and summer vacations in May. Peaks were observed in the months of May and November in the case of adults (Fig. 2). Overall, the month of May shows the highest visitation period.

Visitor's Profile:

Most respondents belonged to the age group of 25-45. The answers provided by respondents were not their individual opinion but the consensus of the group. The group size of 5.47 corresponds with the average Indian family size. Although visitor profile varies from one country to another, family groups constitute the typical zoo clientele (Wolf and Tymitz, 1981; Wells, 2000).

The questionnaire survey revealed that there were a number of people who had come to the zoo from places other than Pune. The ratio of local visitors to outsiders was 1:1. This is actually a good sign that a sizable proportion of visitors are from outside Pune. However, the survey was done on a weekend when most people from nearby places would also have come, and so the results are only indicative.

Twenty- percent visitors who answered the questionnaire did not wish to state their economic status. Most visitors did not have any fixed frequency (35%) of visiting the zoo, while 25% visitors came to the zoo once in a year, while only meager 5% visitors came there once in a week. Wolf and Tymitz (1981) found that serious zoo goers and occasional repeat visitors took care to plan their visit to avoid crowds. For them, crowds interfere with the purpose of the visit and affect it negatively.

Why Visit Zoos?

Visitors coming to zoos today live in increasingly urbanized society, with little and shrinking opportunities to live and experience wilderness (Conway, 1968). In a study carried out by Wolf and Tymitz (1981) to understand visitor impact in zoos, visitors possessed a considerable knowledge of zoos. To the local people, it was truly a zoo park., meant for mental and physical relaxation. Rosenfield (1981) stated that the zoo visit is foremost a social outing. Most visitors view visiting zoos as a unique social occasion. Hood (1983) and Miles (1986) found that less than half the visitors come to zoos for educational purposes. Hood and

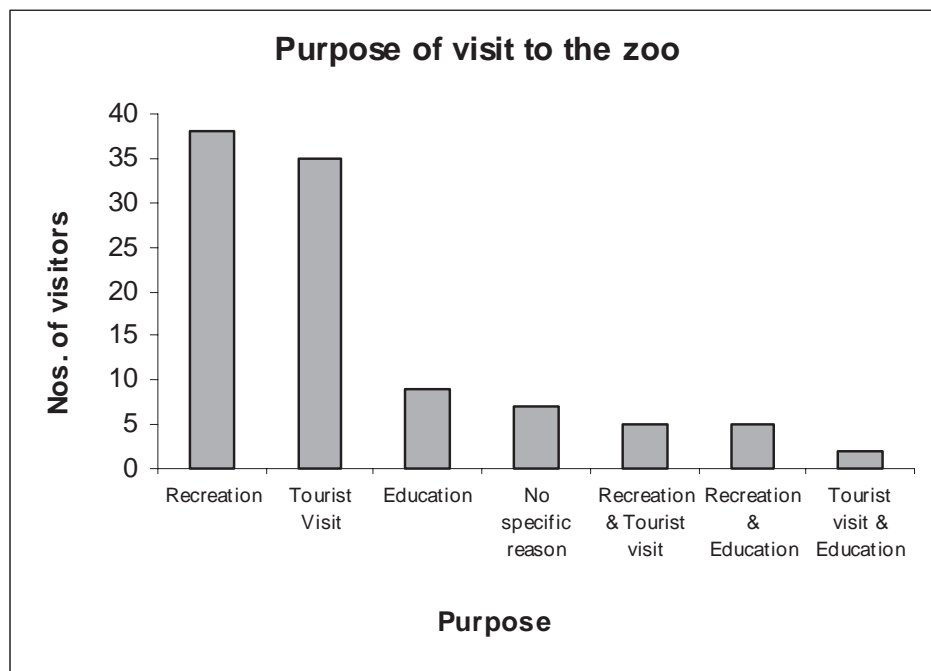


Fig. 3: Visitors' purpose of visiting the zoo.

Roberts (1994) found that visitors had greater social goals in attendance and family outings than education. The present study indicates that 80% of the visitors come to the zoo for recreation and tourism purposes, while 10% come for educational purposes. It is a real challenge to reverse these figures, and make the zoo as much entertaining as well as educative.

Which Animal is the Favorite and Why?

Morris (1960), Surinova (1971), Brennan (1978), Kawata & Hendy (1978) and Martin (2000) have reported that the most popular animals in zoos are primates. Marcellini and Jenssen (1988) found that the top ranking exhibits in terms of attractiveness and holding power are the exhibits of relatively large animals, mainly primates and predators, while the lowest-ranked exhibits are mostly small animals, primarily amphibians. This study supports their findings, showing that the visitors prefer larger animals over small sized animals. Visitors to the Peshwe Zoo chose the Tiger and Orangutan as their favorite animal. A point to be noted here is that their choice probably has a relation with the animal's unusual characters. White tiger was voted as the favorite animal by 34% visitors, while only 26% of them selected Normal Tiger as their favorite animal while sixteen percent of the visitors selected the albino peacock. Another factor that influenced the

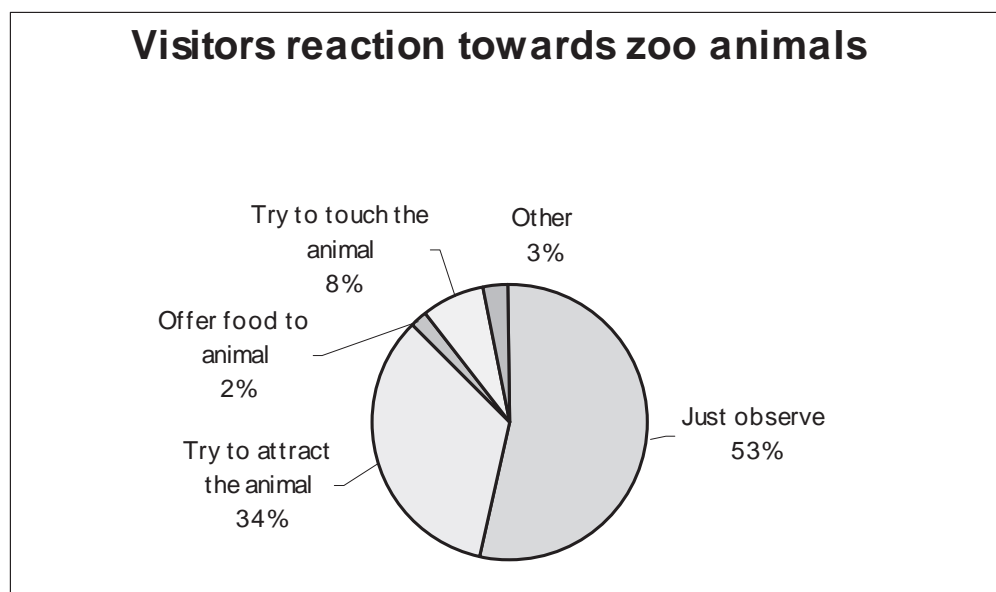


Fig. 4: The visitors activities towards zoo animals

visitors' choice was that they preferred exotic animals over other animals. Orangutan was voted by 11% of the visitors as their favorite animal, while none of the visitors mentioned wolf in the same context, although both animals are housed near each other. Visitors wanted and expected to see exotic rare specimens in a study at the National Zoo, Indiana (Wolf and Tyritz, 1981). According to them, popular animals were those which interacted with the visitor or other animals. A third character, which can be concluded from the visitors' choice, and is substantiated by other peoples' work, is that most visitors are anthropomorphic in their behaviour. Kellert (1979) stated that it is clear that many zoo visitors are anthropomorphic in their attitudes towards animals and it is mammal-based anthropomorphism that abounds. The Orangutan was a very interactive animal; it would beg, imitate and amuse the visitors, and there was always a huge crowd around its enclosure (Dutta, 2002).

Conclusion:

Kellert (1979) regarded zoos as the most important source of contact between humans and animals. With the large number of people visiting the small Peshwe Zoo, it is an opportunity that can be used to provide infotainment to its visitors. The public's visitation patterns are only one component in the creation of zoo exhibit philosophy. Along with the visitors' profile, it is essential to investigate visitor behavior at zoos and the reactions of animals to the presence and activity of the visitors (Dutta, 2002)

The Indian public has to be sensitized about the importance of zoos and *ex-situ* conservation, and zoos have to be promoted as places of learning and education. Indian zoos are improving in terms of animal welfare and captive breeding, but visitor studies have yet to take a major turn. There are very few studies on visitor behavior, and those that are, are mainly concentrated in the South Indian zoos (Kumaragurubaran 1992, 1994; Venugopal 1993; Raju and Venugopal, 1994). The first step to be taken before thinking of anything to do with the visitors is to get a visitor profile and study their composition, behavior, and then direct the conservation and education efforts accordingly.

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