

Belief systems, behavioural change and conservation education

Sally Walker

While it is possible to teach many things at the zoo, conservation education is a priority. Being able to name animals and know their biology is good, but even many animal trappers and traders know animals' names and biology, yet they still trap and trade animals, thus contributing to wildlife population decline. Likewise, understanding that populations of animals (and plants) and their habitats are declining and need conserving is good, but if it is not followed up by action, how good is it really ?

In the 19th Century (Menagerie days), zoos which cared about education were satisfied to educate the public about zoology, about the diversity of species, perhaps about adaptations ... essentially the same thing people would learn in a good school. In the 20th Century (Zoological Park days), however, zoos were satisfied to educate people about the fact that problems exist ... declining wildlife and habitat, environmental degradation, etc. In the 21st Century (Conservation Centre days) a growing number of zoos throughout the world want to do more than teach facts ... they want to interact with the public and the community at large **to bring about change ... to make people act in such a way as to bring about conservation in their own lives, at their own level.**

The concerns of zoos have changed as zoos have become more adept at keeping and breeding animals. In the 19th Century their concerns were Species husbandry and propagation. Having perfected keeping and breeding, the 20th century zoos became more concerned about cooperative species management and professional development, e.g. breeding for maximum genetic diversity and improving their science. In the 21st Century, a modern holistic zoo is concerned with integrated conservation, organizational networks (partners and cooperative relationships and activities so as to increase genuine conservation success) and visitor output.

Visitor output ?

If we thought of a zoo as a business, we would devote some thought to it's output or product. What does every zoo produce ? No matter what the quality of the zoo, the zoo "produces" visitors which have had a zoo experience. What the visitors are like when they come out of the zoo ... whether they have changed in knowledge, attitudes, intentions, behaviour, etc. is the visitor output.

Although we like to think of our zoos as producing more and more animals which can go back to the wild, very few zoos are actually producing many animals that do go back to the wild. In South Asia, few zoos (even among the Large zoos) are producing numbers of genetically diverse animals that can be used for reintroduction, but ALL of the 220 odd wild animal facilities, zoos, biological parks, deer parks, minizoo, rescue centers that permit public, etc. are producing visitors who have had a captive wild animal experience. But have the visitors been changed by that experience ? Was the change for good (meaning that they became more interested and possibly even inspired to act in support of wildlife conservation), or for ill (their beliefs that animals are vicious brutes or insentient toys and that zoos are cruel or indifferent jailers of suffering animals)

were confirmed, or did not change at all ? The results of a visit is the **visitor output**; it is the visitor himself – his mental attitude, which is the **product or result of the zoo's existence** that your "zoo business" is generating. The quality of that product depends entirely on the zoos' education programme.

Any zoo can be a 21st century zoo in terms of the **product** it produces. Zoos have one absolutely unique thing ... accessible living wild animals. How they are displayed and kept; how the zoo staff treats them; what the zoo teaches all contribute to the visitor output or product. Indian zoos also have a Central Zoo Authority which has actually passed legislation to insure that zoos don't keep sick and aged animals on display, to provide funds for upkeep of the built up area of the zoo, to guarantee the welfare of the animals, etc. Indian zoo legislation is practically unique in the world in these aspects.

With their collections of living **wildlife**, animals and (hopefully) living plants and trees, Zoos have a variety of possible approaches to education and can support many topics in an environmental education or conservation curriculum. Zoos can provide a unique & exciting experience for children and adults – sight, touch, smells, sounds.

Again referring to our historical construct, in the 19th century menagerie, the visitor outcome would have been recreational amusement (primarily passive), fascination with variety of life forms without interpretation of interrelationships, no expression of linkages of mankind to natural world. In the 20th century zoological park, the visitor output was more or less an introduction to biology and animal behaviour, familiarization with complexity of ecology and its basic principles, active interaction with interpretive components.

But in the 21st century conservation center, we want our zoos to stimulate a caring attitude towards wildlife and environment, provide empowerment to act on behalf of conservation issues and enhance visitors' perception of his intimate relationship with the natural world.

You can teach good values in the zoo. The modern zoo should be

- **a conservation & animal welfare role model**
- **a community steward**
- **a public conservation conscience**

Some values which can be conveyed in zoo conservation education are responsibility towards our environment such as saving paper, power, other reusable material, conserve natural resources, such as water and wood; avoiding pollution, by using natural produces and trash by avoiding disposable plastic bags; kindness to animals by treating them as we would like to be treated – with respect; by electing environment-friendly politicians, by volunteering for nature conservation projects...and so on.

Visitors out for a day of relaxation and fun won't respond well to a diet of gloom and doom. Instead of conveying information only about problems, suggest what can be

done to make a difference ... to provide solutions. Tell people what they can do to bring about change for the better. How effective is education? What is the measure of "effective" ? What and how do we teach ? These are rhetorical questions and despite many studies of visitors and their reaction to learning facilities, still not much is known.

Can just knowing biological facts about plants and animals help conserve nature? Hardly! The ultimate achievement of conservation education is to make people appreciate the natural world in all its glory and utility, realize their responsibility, and change their values and stop their destructive behaviour. Have we done it ?

Human behaviour is responsible for the current environmental crisis, after all : exploitation of natural

resources, population explosion, conspicuous consumption, greed, ignorance, environmental pollution. We are dependent for our survival on these fragile and disappearing ecosystems. How do we convey this?

Emotion enhances memory. When we feel something, we consider it more seriously. Education can be more effective by teaching about emotionally charged issues. We want to reach visitors, and the most effective path to the mind is often through the heart.

When we enjoy, we remember. Consider this when planning signage, or a lecture, or any sort of programme. Zoo education should not be too dignified ... people come for fun. A good zoo educator can make learning full of fun and meaning at the same time.

Wildlife Conservation Advocacy — Zoo Partnerships in Conservation Education with SAN-IZE and Email

As announced in September issue, ZOO, WILD, SAZARC & CBSG South Asia is partnering with the International Zoo Educator Association and WAZA for conservation education as recommended by the WAZCS.

Zoos as well as other conservation organisations want to achieve "the securing of long-term populations of species in natural ecosystems and habitats wherever possible." For some zoos, the most immediate and meaningful way to support protection of wildlife and its habitat is through education. And, as stated in the preceding page, we want education to communicate not just facts but incentivebased knowledge, which will make people want to change their behaviour for the survival of species and also for their own survival and quality of life.

ZOO and WILD use material from our CBSG process workshops — CAMPs and PHVAs — to make educational material for young people as well as adults. Using this material guarantees two things — that it is both current and accurate. It is current because we would have only recently conducted the workshop. It is accurate because we got the information - not from an encyclopaedia or website - but from working indigenous field biologists, sharing their field notes and observations with the workshop. Moreover, those who used our educational materials know that even for small children, we make a point of trying to convey the importance of each species to life systems and thus to our own survival as well as the survival of species and populations.

Our last issue carried an invitation for individuals and institutions to join us in conducting education which is meant to lead to the security of long-term populations of wild animals in the wild. Through our SAN-IZE we hope to attract more zoos and wildlife enthusiasts of all kinds to dynamic and meaningful conservation education. We also plan to utilise our members talents to help design educational material.

Those of you who want to join this new initiative and help with the designing of material that you will later be able to use in your programmes, do one thing if you have not



South Asia Network of International Zoo Educators

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

you have received this by post, mail or write our office and ask for either a soft copy of this form or check our website. If you fill this form out electronically it is much easier and you can tell as much as you want about yourself and your ideas.

Name	First	Middle	Last	What you want to be called
Institution name				
Designation/post				
Address : Street				
City & District				Pin Code:
State & Country				
Phone, fax, area code	Phone			Fax
Email				
Please answer the following questions				
1. What is your interest in conservation education? Is it job related, a hobby, etc.				
2. What experience have you had in conservation education? Give a brief description.				
3. What kind of facility are you most interested in having for a venue? Zoo, forest, classroom, seaside, etc.				
4. What do you most want to teach people?				
5. Any other things that you would like to share with us ?				
6. How can we best assist you and your institution or organisation ?				
Date:				Signature:

already **GET EMAIL**. This is the modern world we live in. Nobody should be without email. We will be designing our educational products together, using our website and email to communicate. If you do not have an email address, get one. Yahoo, Hotmail, Gmail, Rediffmail are all free. An hour at a browsing centre costs Rs. 10 or 20. Many of you know that this magazine in your hand is loaded onto its own website <www.zoosprint.org> the day it is posted. One day there will not be any paper copy — and this is good for conservation also. Join us ... Get engaged in conservation education and get Email !!!