

Intern Programme for Environment Educators at New York, 10 - 24 October 2003

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Dr. B. A. Daniel, Dr. Gigi K Joseph, Mr. Anand and I were selected for the Intern Programme for Environment Educators at Bronx Zoo / Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in New York from Oct 10 - 24, 2003. The trip was educative and fun filled and helped to get a look into the system.

WCS is one of the premier institutes in the world that has for many decades as New York Zoological Society worked in the field for conservation of wildlife. As WCS, it has a wide reach both in Conservation and Education. The Education Department bridges the gap between people on field (scientists) and common people. Mr. Steven Anderson is the President of WCS and Ms. Annette Berkovits is Senior Vice-President, Education.

WCS has good infrastructure. I will write about Bronx Zoo that most captivated me. This zoo spans an area of 263 acres and is the world's largest urban zoo. Every one working for it has a feeling of "this zoo is mine" and strives hard for its excellence. Exhibits are like heaven for animals. They have so much space to move around while in India they are still caged and even in an open space, have less space. This is marvelous. Though I had watched on television about this kind of zoo, I got to see it in reality.

The Jungle World - the first to place animals in open exhibits in 1940's is superb. It takes us on a journey of different habitats. Congo Gorilla Forest with humans caged, Tiger Mountain for tiger dreams, Bengali Express Monorail to get a peek at wildlife in Asia, Sky Ferry to get a aerial view of the Zoo and many such facilities took me to a different world. Reptile house, monkey house, aviary and many such exhibits made me feel that I am only a tiny speck.

I interacted with many of the departments at WCS but major interaction was with the Education department and hence will emphasise on it more. The facilities of the zoo is excellent but without the help of education, it cannot achieve the place it is in today. The staff is cheerful and answer queries cheerfully. Even the volunteers behave likewise.

They have a number of programmes from kids – adults and even distance learning. For each of these I have seen them prepare a lot even though they are well versed with it. I have seen classrooms being prepared for the class. Instructors are pleasure to work. They get the psychology of the target audience they work with and bring out interesting facts. Another important activity is that whether the class is for kids or adults live animals are brought for demonstration and this electrifies the situation. The animals are handled well as each instructor is trained to handle 2-3 animals. I hardly get to see such things in India.

Annette's well-defined approach to difficult things, Tom's superior knowledge, Ann's goodwill, Don's observation, Ron's love for nature & enthusiasm, Nalini's understanding, Anthony's ever smile while keeping kids

engaged, Danielle's explanation, Tracy's eye contact and Gabbi's composure have kept me in awe. There are many more of the people who have influenced me. In all it is a big list.

Apart from the Bronx Zoo, Curator's at Central Park Zoo, Queen's Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo and New York Aquarium also report to Annette. I visited the Central Park & Queen's Zoo and New York Aquarium and met the Curators. They all have an amazing ability to get people attracted and hence reach them effectively.

I attended the classes at Zoo & visited the school. The education system is more student oriented and the number of students in a classroom is restricted. In India, although we have huge numbers that restrict individual attention of teacher we can least make it more student friendly. Our syllabi are higher and teachers get less time for outdoors. In an average day, I saw many schools at zoo. If this could be made for our students here, it will be a good step. If in the existing curriculum we could get some more activity based projects as in US, I think our students can understand better and develop respect for what they do because most of the time they are forced to do it for the sake of examinations rather than to understand. These are some of my observations and hope we can adapt at least one of them.

Finally I would like to quote what I found on Ron Griffith's (senior instructor) door

"Life is not important unless you have made an impact on another person's life" and "A zoo is a place devised for animals to study the habit of human beings". I hope this can turn into reality in rest of the world too.



The team at WCS, New York

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