

Some current news of Baghdad Zoo, Iraq

David Jones, North Carolina Zoo

Despite some earlier setbacks, and the continuation of violence in Iraq, the zoo situation appears to be stable with most animals now housed satisfactorily, if not optimally. Issues still remain around the need to sterilize to prevent breeding among the larger carnivores, the rehousing of nine lions at Uday Hussein's old palace, and one or two clinical cases, notably an aged blind brown bear.

The great advantage that Baghdad Zoo has over Kabul Zoo is leadership, with keen and fairly knowledgeable Iraqis heading the operation, ably assisted by Brendan Jones from South Africa and with considerable logistic help continuing from the coalition forces. They also had a good start with the help of a number of animal welfare bodies, notably the International Fund for Animal Welfare. We recently facilitated a visit to the U.K. for the three most senior Iraqi staff, including the director and deputy director, with Brendan Jones, to look at designs for large cat and bear enclosures, constructed at relatively low cost, and to give them an extended network of people to whom they can turn for advice, particularly on this type of construction.

The trip also enabled them to talk to a wide variety of animal staff at Whipsnade, Woburn, Marwell and London Zoos. This trip already appears to be having a beneficial effect on the discussions relating to the rebuilding of exhibits in the zoo.

The remaining AZA linked funds being held by the North Carolina Zoological Society will be used largely for the purchase of construction materials and items for enclosure rebuilding that have not been provided through the coalition.

Captain William Summer, who has been in charge of the Zoo site, along with antiquity sites in Baghdad, has just left Iraq. He played a major role in assisting with the Zoo, particularly in its difficult times during the first few months after U.S. troops took over. We are looking for opportunities for the Iraqi staff at the zoo to network more effectively with the better zoos in the Arabian Gulf region and the Middle East generally. There is a rather loosely organized Middle Eastern Zoos Association, but attempts are being made to strengthen it at the moment, and the Baghdad staff should try to play a role. Like all the zoos in the region, these sites are very popular with the public, and the big challenge for Baghdad Zoo in coming years, as outside help withdraws, is to see whether they are able to attract enough resources to continue the rebuilding program with a keen eye on evolving zoo standards around the world. With the calibre of senior staff that they have, Baghdad, together with one or two other zoos in the Middle East and several in India and Pakistan, could become models for what the region might achieve in terms of improved zoo standards.

David Jones, Director, North Carolina Zoo, in Communique (American Zoo and Aquarium Association), April 2004. Reprinted from International Zoo News, Vol.51, No.4 (2004), pp. 243-255. Jones and the N.C. Zoo led the fundraising drive for Kabul Zoo and Baghdad Zoo and has continued to play a pivotal role in monitoring and directing the expenditure of funds and rebuilding of these zoos.

Death of only captive Asiatic cheetah

From Cat News, Newsletter of the Cat Specialist Group

There was only one captive Asiatic Cheetah known in the world currently. This cheetah, which lived in the Pardisan Park, Tehran, expired on 23 December 2003 from respiratory collapse. She was nine years of age. The female cheetah, Marita, was born in 1994 and captured when she and her two sisters and their mother came too close to the city of Bafq in August of the same year. Local people captured the whole family, one of which escaped and two other died. Marita was taken to Tehran and kept by the Department of Environment. Apparently there was talk of initiating a captive breeding programme but it did not want to take a wild male from the 60 scattered specimens in the country. However public interest in saving the cheetah's has grown in Iran. There is an Iranian Cheetah Society which works to save the last Iranian cheetahs. Founded by three students of natural resources who studied cheetah, the society focuses much on public awareness, socio-economic programmes, public participation in conservation and field studies.

Marita is to be mounted and kept at the Department of Environment's Museum in Tehran to serve as an ambassador to remind people of the need to work particularly hard to save this Critically Endangered species.

