

Report on Visit to Kabul Zoo - April 8th -14th 2002

John Lewis* and Nick Lindsay**

This is the final report on the visit to Kabul Zoo undertaken by John Lewis and Nick Lindsay on behalf of WAZA. The Preliminary Report dated April 16th is an appendix to this report but please note that there has been some additions to this report. The main body of the report will focus on the future of Kabul Zoo based on meetings held during the visit and direct observations.

The Animal Collection

The collection is made up largely of indigenous species which have been acquired by different means. Currently animals are bought by the Zoo Director as members of the public bring them in. This is unsatisfactory as this does not appear to follow any plan and there is no health check protocol for



Kabul Zoo Entrance. Photo by Nick Lindsay



John Lewis operating on the bear. Photo by Nick Lindsay.

receiving these animals. There is pressure by the public and possibly the Municipality to increase the numbers of animals at the zoo.

The animals in the zoo at the time of the visit generally were in reasonable condition. The macaques are overweight, the canids have poor coat condition, the wolf has repetitive behaviours, particularly when staff are near, some of the raptors have damaged plumage, possibly due to

inappropriate housing and the rabbits are overcrowded. All these problems can be resolved with relatively little effort.

The Zoo Staff

Although there are 17 staff on the payroll, there appeared to be relatively few working at the zoo on any one day. Only five keeping staff were seen working with the animals. It was difficult to assess the skill and knowledge of these keepers but they

were willing and obviously are able to undertake much of the required work with the animals.

There is at least one skilled labourer, the mason, and other skills are available through the Municipality. One member of staff is responsible for the gardens. A veterinary surgeon visits daily but we did not have the chance to meet him as he was ill. Some staff stay on site every night for security.

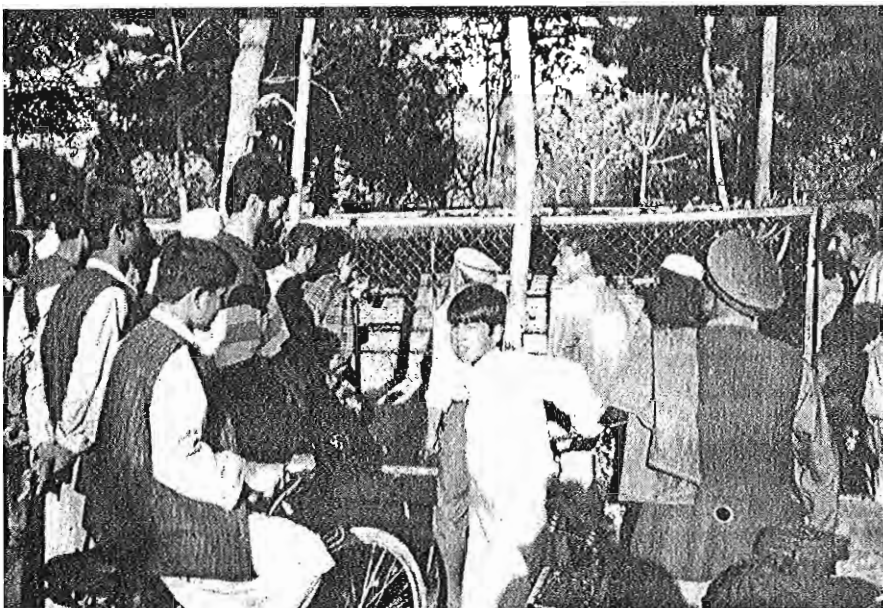
The Director appears to have good records on the management of the site but there are no animal records. There diet sheets, species lists and detailed financial records are maintained. The food acquisition is well recorded. New equipment is kept locked away and is only used when required. Veterinary supplies and drugs are under his supervision.

Site Management

The animal cages are cleaned and washed every morning and zoo grounds are cleaned daily. This is very basic but does present the site reasonably well. Much more work should be carried out in the majority of the animal areas including cleaning inside areas, drains, nest-boxes, etc.

* Wildlife Veterinary Officer

** Curator, Whipsnade, UK



Kabul Zoo visitors. Photo by Nick Lindsay

Many of the original animal cages and facilities are not in use due to extensive damage. Some of these can be brought back into use with relatively minor repairs. Those that are beyond use could provide a source of materials for repair work and then they should be removed completely. A number of the animals could be relocated to better facilities if this repair programme were undertaken. The Director is reluctant to move animals to new cages without the approval of the Director of Culture.

There is an urgent need for a reliable, clean water supply. A storage tank provided by WAZA is in use with weekly tanker deliveries.

The gardens were a feature of the zoo and there is still the basis there for establishing a pleasant garden area. Water from the river is now used for irrigation. Rose plants were delivered by the Municipality while we were there.

A new office is available in the main building. It would be useful to repair some of this area to provide other rooms for staff use. The night-duty room is being redecorated and the storerooms are reasonable.

The staff do supervise the visitors but need to be more proactive in preventing them from teasing and feeding the animals. This would be an excellent opportunity to talk to the visitors about the animals.



Kabul Zoo keeper in new uniform.

The Municipality

The zoo is run by the Kabul Municipality, therefore, is the responsibility of the Mayor's Office. The Zoo Director reports to the Director of Culture who in turn works with the Director of Planning on all aspects of the management of the zoo.

It is very apparent that the zoo features well in the future of Kabul. It appears to have a high profile and the Directors are ambitious for its future. The Mayor is frustrated by the lack of communi-

cation since the visit by other organisations. Promises were made then that could not be kept. It was difficult to explain differences between NGOs. It will take some time to convince him that WAZA is not just another NGO wanting a quick PR result. The Mayor is aware of the amounts of money raised for the zoo and feels that this should be handed over so they can then use it as they wish. We talked about a meeting in Europe in May and the Mayor agreed that he or a representative should attend. During the meeting it was agreed that a Memorandum of Agreement should be drawn up between the Municipality and WAZA. Unfortunately communication has been impossible since the meeting which will not help the situation.

Following the meeting the Director of Culture provided support for the installation of new electrical wiring and was very supportive of our proposals for the provision of wages and funds for the purchase of food. Funds are available until the end of May. He also investigated the costs to provide a new bore-hole. The Director of Culture is also very keen to develop an education programme for the staff and visitors.

The Faculty of Science

There are historical and current links with the Faculty of Science. The

Director of Culture would like the educational programme to be developed with the assistance of the faculty. We met the Assistant Director of the Faculty of Science but there was no time to talk at length about any programme.

The Future

a) Medium Term

The Municipality has very detailed and ambitious plans for the development of the zoo, taking in about 5 times the current land space on the other side of the river. The plans were drawn up some years ago. Current funds are not enough to even consider starting this work.

The zoo currently has two contrasting styles of animal facilities. The smaller cage units form the basis of the exhibits currently but are small, in poor condition and inappropriate for most of the species held. The large paddock areas are not in use but could form an excellent basis for the future of the zoo. The original Marco Polo sheep enclosure is a very good example of the future potential. The bear and lion areas are acceptable with minor improvements.

The initial focus of any development work must be the construction of new facilities or the redevelopment of existing cages suitable for the species currently held. This will also address the problems presented by the public through teasing and feeding. This could include some extra work to provide space for new acquisitions as they become available.

The redevelopment of the large paddock areas would be a second phase to enable the acquisition of new large species. In the meantime the grass and plants can be maintained for visitor use.

Staff and visitor facilities must be developed at the same time as the first phase animal facility work. There may be an enthusiasm to re-build the museum as well. Whether the main building is sound enough to be re-built will need expert advice. If so there is space for a catering outlet as in the original area.

The Priority I physical development must be run in parallel to staff training. This can be through a formal education programme utilising skills and knowledge available in the country as well as keeping skills from elsewhere.

b) Short Term

Direct contact with the Mayor's Office and the Zoo Director is essential and must be resolved.

As soon as possible a team should visit to advise on and carry out short term work on existing facilities to allow the movement of some of the stock to better facilities. This could be quick and dirty to address the main welfare concerns over a period of a week with a team of two or three experienced staff. Further advice on diets, husbandry and the acquisition of animals can be given at this time.

The timing of a visit needs to be agreed soon to enable flights to be booked and to give some assurance to the Mayor that we are serious and committed. The timing of elections will be significant to any future visits.

Longer periods of staff secondment can only be planned once there is stability in the country that enables the Embassy to support such work.

The education programme can be implemented with the employment of someone recommended by the Director of Culture (or on secondment from the Faculty of Science). Funds to support this role would be required - signs, leaflets, etc. This is highly recommended and will make a real impact on both the staff and the visitors if done well.

Links with the veterinary officer must be established to enable work to be undertaken as needed on the bear and other stock currently held.

Funds will be required for the wages and animal feed from the end of May.

Other Issues

a) New Lions

It is apparent that the Municipality would be keen to get new lions. They have been upgrading the lion facility in preparation. As young animals they may be OK but there is not the expertise to look after them at present. If the lions arrive from China with keepers they may take on work in the zoo. If this happens where does WAZA stand?

b) The Mayhew Veterinary Clinic

Mayhew have stated that they are due to start building the veterinary clinic soon. This will be at the edge of the zoo grounds with two clinics, one with access into the zoo. This will take domestics from outside as well as zoo animals. John was able to express his concerns to the Mayhew representative and the Director of Culture. The latter assured us that the Ministry of Agriculture does not want or need a clinic at the zoo.

John Lewis and Nick Lindsay
May 5th 2002



Installation of water pump. Photo by Nick Lindsay.