

OLD ZOOS TO KEEP PACE WITH CHANGING CONCEPTS

M.V. Wani

The Veermata Jijabai Bhosle Udyan-Zoo is one of the oldest zoo in the country. It was laid out in 1862 and the zoo was developed in the year 1873, when the concept of zoo-keeping was primarily for entertainment of visitors. These old concepts have been changing regularly as the decades pass and environmental and wildlife issues change. The existing 48 acre area of this zoo is too small to develop much as per modern concepts of zoo management. In olden days, animals were displayed in cages on a taxonomic theme for the amusement and possibly education of visitor. Education, when it could be achieved, was simply zoological, e.g. the identification and differences between species. Now the purpose of zoos and even of education has totally changed. Zoos are expected now to serve the purpose of

- (1) conservation of wild fauna and flora,
- (2) breeding centre for endangered species,
- (3) education about conservation issues (C.Z.A. report 1992).

Over the last two decades, the responsibilities and activities in running the zoos have increased tremendously. Old barred and small cages are to be replaced by large open enclosures which, ideally, represent eco-types and at least show the animal in a naturalistic setting. Bars have given way to chainlink mesh fence or open moated enclosures.

Within our limited space constraint the administration of the Mumbai Zoo has developed plans for transformation of cages into spacious enclosures by merging the available space around the old cages. This will result in more comfort and well being for the animals as their behavioural and biological needs are met.

During the last 10 years, we have expanded, renovated, re-designed and reconstructed the enclosures of monkeys, bears, crocodiles, aquatic birds, hyaena, lion, and leopard. This process will go on phase by phase. Similarly in order to update the veterinary facilities, a new Zoo Hospital building has been constructed.

Due to changes made in the display methods and introduction of breeding facilities as per the requirement of respective species, we could succeed in breeding rare species such as Four-horned antelope, Gir lions, Adjutant storks, Sarus cranes, Military macaw as well as more common species such as porcupines and Eritrean Grey Peacock-pheasants which were never bred in past in this zoo. In the near future, more emphasis will be given on breeding endangered species.

In order to develop the V.J.B. Udyan-Zoo and to seek the expert advice in management/development of Zoo, the Municipal Commissioner has constituted the Committee of the experts in the field, since May 1988 under the name 'Zoo Advisory Board'. The advisory board comprises of the experts from 'World Wide Fund for Nature, India', Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay Veterinary College, Naturalists and Zoologists with meetings once in every two months under the Chairmanship of the Municipal Commissioner.

During the year 1996-97 we have expanded the enclosures for Rhino and for Hippo. The old enclosure had a compound fence wall of 5 ft. height with 2ft. pipe railing above the wall. There was obstruction due to this wall to the young visitors, particularly for children below 12 years. This enclosure has been renovated into open moated enclosure by construction of a dry moat. The size of the moat is 5 ft. deep from inner side towards the animals, and 6 1/2 ft. deep from visitors side with 6 ft. width. This has resulted in better display of the animals and there is now clear visibility to the visitors of all age groups.

Further the feed house which was in the old enclosure from close to the visitors side has been demolished and new feed houses have been constructed on the far side, away from visitors, in such a way that they are not obstructing the view of the animals. This has resulted in removal of visual barrier between the animals and the visitors. Moreover, the animals have got more open space within the space.

During the current year it is proposed to construct an open moated enclosure for elephants by utilising the surrounding space. The new open moated enclosure will have about 1 acre of area for the elephants to move around freely. The estimated cost of this enclosure is around Rs.56 lakhs within which fifty percent of the cost has already been borne by the Central Zoo Authority. This new enclosure is likely to be completed within a year.

The total remoulding of this oldest zoo is not possible at this stage due to restriction on demolition of structures which are of historical and heritage value. However some of the cages and enclosures which are in dilapidated condition can be demolished and new spacious enclosures are being constructed. We are thereby trying to keep pace with the changing concept of zoo design.

The experts from the field various news media and other zoo personnels have noted and appreciated the recent changes made by V.J.B. Udyan-Zoo, Mumbai, during the last few years and the process of development will be continued phase by phase.

Dy. Supdt. (Vet.), Veermata Jijabai Bhosle Udayan Zoo, Dr. Ambedkar road, Byculla, Mumbai 400 027