

My Volunteering experience at Jamshedpur Zoological Park Jayashree Ram Mohan*

Having a desire to work with wild animals I found a host in Jamshedpur Zoo. I was appointed to work under my mentor, the Zoo Biologist cum Education Officer, Miss Seema Rani. I joined work on 16th July, 2013 and during this time my experience with each and every animal was different.

During orientation period, my mentor took me around the Zoo and I had the chance to see and feel what I had just read in books or saw on Animal Planet. I came across many birds, small animals and insects present in the Zoo which never failed to draw my attention, like, Little Cormorants, Pond Heron, Bee eater, Sun bird, White Wagtail, Stone Curlew, Water Hen, Common Myna, Starling, Small Blue Kingfisher, Red Breasted Kingfisher, Rose ringed Parakeet, Squirrels, Common Mongoose, etc.

Jamshedpur Zoo has a "World of Parrots" displaying 9 different species of Parakeets and two little surprises awaited me. Once out of curiosity I whistled and called out, "Mithu" to the Large Indian Parakeet/Alexandrine. One of them replied back. Another day a wild Rose Ringed Parakeet hovered around the enclosure of the Sun Conure and I saw the Sun Conure take some seeds from its feeding bowl to feed the parrot outside.

The monkeys, Rhesus Macaque and Bonnet monkey looked the same to me before I read the signages to notice that Bonnet monkeys not only differ in colour but had longer tails and also a patch of fur on top of their heads which resembled a bonnet!

The Hippopotamus rested more often. But there was more to the territorial herbivore. A "yawn" of a Hippo, as I had once read, was not a sign of laziness but a warning to



The author near Peafowl enclosure at Jamshedpur Zoo

back off and when I saw it for the first time I could not even blink. The pheasants, on the other hand, are a constant reminder of the fact that in the animal kingdom males are more attractive than the females.

I watched Peacocks' dancing a couple of times and attracting a peahen to mate. There is a myth that they dance because it is going to rain but it is actually because their breeding season coincides with monsoon in July and August.

A Deer Safari displays Sambar, Nilgai, Spotted Deer and normal coloured and Albino Blackbucks, in open area visited by bus. In the deer family, the males of Spotted deer, Hog deer, Barking deer and Sambar flaunted their sets of "antlers" that fall after the breeding season every year. Nilgai/ Blue Bull and Blackbucks, however, had "horns" which come out and stay lifelong. The coats of males of both these species undergo a colour transition as they reach sexual maturity and they turn black while the females remain brown throughout.

The Butterfly Park hosted

colourful spectacular creatures that hovered around during the day and miraculously hid when sunset neared.

The Striped Hyena enclosure hosted a nocturnal pair of mother and daughter that lazed all day.

In the Aviary which was previously known as "Pets' park", the Hill Myna called out its name and other noises like other bird calls and whistles of the visitors.

Reptiles, a Crocodile and four Gharials lay down with the least movements and visitors often asked if they were real or statues made up of stone!

The zoo staff were of a very friendly nature. They were good to me and helped me out when needed. The Director, Mr. Bipul Chakrabarty, was approachable and generous with help and advice. He was the reason why Jamshedpur Zoo could exhibit pure bred African Lions and the world's

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The Director, Mr. Bipul Chakrabarty, made himself quite approachable and was always generous enough to help and give me advise whether it was about my reports or otherwise. He was the reason why Jamshedpur Zoo could exhibit pure bred African Lions and the world's largest monkeys, Mandrills. The Zoo Veterinary Hospital which was a visitor restricted area was under the Deputy Director cum Veterinary Officer, Dr. Manik Palit, a very encouraging individual and would tell me about the medicines and treatment as and when I was a part of it. The Zoo Curator Mr. Sanjay Kumar Mahato, helped me in identifying all the birds and of course met me every day, motivating me when I had trouble on and off the field. He even took me to the butterfly park and showed the larvas in the larva room where he successfully bred different kinds of butterflies. Before that informative session I knew nothing about them. My mentor, Miss Seema Rani, was a pillar throughout this journey and I couldn't thank her enough for the unconditional guidance and support, she gave me each and every day I spent in the Zoo.

The sign of a good organization is when the authorities are helpful and encouraging which makes the workplace enjoyable!. During my 8 months stay, my life was an adventure with a number of privileges given only to a volunteer.

My experiences with deer were among the most interesting. One day a Barking deer was hurt due to a fight and critically injured due to the stomach having been torn. He was being stitched and he struggled to run away which made treatment a difficult task. Another day I saw a Nilgai giving birth to twins. The mother licked and nudged them to get up and they gradually did. I also accompanied the keeper at nervous Spotted Deer enclosure. Another keeper was having a problem putting the male "Motu" inside the feeding cell as the Zoo was about to close. My mentor and I stepped in to help. I caught his attention by calling out his name and kept walking, he followed me obediently and from the other side my mentor called him. She suggested the keeper to use honey as an incentive which worked well.

My personal favourite were the African Lions. Although I started my observation on them from November I was present every day when they were released to the display area, and of course in every treatment. They were brought from South Africa and were very fond of humans. I was delighted to be a part of the team, calling them in order to throw turmeric at them. I also submitted a report on my behavioural observation on these juvenile Lions.

The tigers were opposite, known for her temper and ironically named "Shanti" (meaning peace). The

male, "Raghav" was of intimidating size. They had a female cub named "Dona". She was 1year 3months the first time I approached her and she stood still, watching me, as I slowly but steadily approached her at the feeding cell area. I called out her name twice and I was astonished to get a "prusten" in reply. "Prusten" or chuff is a sound tigers use to communicate with other tigers or with keepers.

The leopards were friendlier than the other two Big Cats. I was appointed to study the leopards first and I ended up writing a paper on "Comparative behavioural observation of two female leopards and their cubs in two different conditions".

There is a nature trail alongside a rivulet through which water of the Jayanti Sarovar (lake) flows into the Subharnarekha River where one of our keepers had released a 20kg python that he caught from the Capuchin Monkey enclosure.

The nature trail led to the large flightless birds Ostrich and Emus. The emus used to fluff up their feathers near their neck when visitors approached. Most probably a defensive technique to make themselves look larger than real.

There is also a Bat Island which is full of Fruit Bats. Once we got a dead fruit bat near the Deer Safari and my mentor suggested we take measurements and write a paper on it.

I took part of various programmes like Van Mahaotsav, Wildlife Week Celebration, Nature Camp, Animal Welfare Fortnight, World Forestry Day which the Zoo organizes. From taking visitors for a Zoo visit to organize a Debate and a Quiz Competition, I had done it all. I also conducted "touch and learn" programmes, under the guidance of my mentor in Nature Education Centre which had specimens of antlers, horns, nest, hive, eggs, stool, pugmarks etc. and by letting each child touch and feel, we taught them about the animals present in the Zoo. My mentor gave me enough opportunities to get rid of my stage fear. I improved on my interpersonal skills also and now thanks to the Zoo I am a more confident individual.

People mostly go for mainstream careers that can give them a fat salary and a satisfying pension. A Zoological Park is not a profitable business for employees but it is life-changing. We have only taken from nature and we should learn how to give back. In Wildlife there is always a new adventure to look out for but so does Jamshedpur Zoo. ***"Join as a Volunteer! The Wild Awaits You!"***