

## **Observations and Recommendations on Five Selected Indian Zoos: Report of USFWS sponsored Zoo Team to India Mar. 17-27, 1980.**

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*In 1980 on the invitation from Government of India, a small group of some of the best and most experienced American zoo directors from some of their best zoos visited five selected Indian zoos, interacted with their directors and other staff, and commented on both good and questionable aspects of the facilities. This was with an eye to suggest improvements without bias when required and to establish a relationship with Indian zoo personnel involved. This was only one of the many, many steps GOI took over many years to improve their zoological gardens and parks to what they are today. SRW*

### **Report - March 1, 1981**

#### **Introduction - Visits and comments**

##### **Zoos visited in India by the USA contingent**

Delhi Zoological Park, New Delhi;  
Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad;  
Indira Gandhi Zoo, Vishakapatnam;  
Alipore Zoological Garden, Calcutta;  
Assam State Zoo, Gauhati.

Some abbreviated comments by the team:

The public zoos of India, with few exceptions, are managed by the Forestry Department, with zoo directors coming from the ranks of the Forest Officers with what seem to be automatic transfers on a regular basis. They do not stay in the field of caring for wild animals usually more than three years. This results in experienced members of the Forest Department becoming zoo administrators—a position many of them are not prepared for because of the specialization that is required for the captive management of wild animals in captivity today. This constant change-over of directors can only leave staff in the various institutions on permanently unstable footing. This constant turnover leads to the same errors being made over and over again with little continuity of management. Zoos can only be as good as the people who run them and it is imperative to have experienced, knowledgeable, zoologically trained personnel administering the zoos. This is not only necessary of the director but throughout all levels of administration from the veterinary care, education aspects, research and day to day animal management viewpoints.

One of the major flaws seen in the Indian Zoo tour was the lack of cooperation between zoos in exchanging animals to maintain viable breeding

programs and also for the sharing of knowledge to better enable this staffs to care for the animals in their charge. A national of zoo personnel similar to the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums would benefit the entire Indian Zoological community by providing for improved communication between administrators that would enable them to better manage the collections under their care. In theory, this is being done to some extent and the exchange of zoo animals with foreign countries is now supposed to be handled under the direction of the central government operated zoo in Delhi. This function should be expanded however to include more functions than just the exchange of animals and inner zoo cooperation should be strongly encouraged.

#### **Recommendations**

In fairness to the zoos and the animals that they house, recommendations have been made with considerations as to what is the appropriate way to house, display, and care for the animals with the full understanding that some of the recommendations may be impossible to carry out due to numerous socio-economic restrictions.

1. *Indian zoological gardens should be taken out from under the Forestry Department and a new government commission, specifically for zoological institutions, should be established with qualified personnel.*

As an alternative, the Forestry Department could form within itself a zoological park division that would be composed of members of the Forestry Department with an interest in zoo management as a profession. Members of this group could not become zoo directors until they had had previous work experience (X number of years) in a zoo. Zoo directors with an interest in zoos and previous experience should more easily recognize the problems that come up from day to day and would be better equipped at handling them. Such people would also be more aware of advances occurring in animal exhibition techniques, animal nutrition, animal management, veterinary care, etc.

2. *A union of Indian zoo personnel, similar to the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (AAZPA) should be found. This organization would be a by-product of the first recommendation.*

There is a serious need for cooperation and communication. Zoos are breeding and keeping many of the very endangered species of India independently at a time when zoos should be managing animals together for the betterment of the species. The AAZPA would be an excellent model for

independently at a time when zoos should be managing animals together for the betterment of the species. The AAZPA would be an excellent model for Indian zoos to use and would probably be more than willing to assist in this matter.

*3. Training programs in zoo veterinarian science, animal nutrition, animal management and exhibit techniques should be explored and provided for Indian zoos.*

It would be beneficial for all of the Indian Zoo Veterinarians to have some exposure to an experienced zoo veterinarian. This could be accomplished by either having them travel to Europe or North America for post-graduate study or to have an experienced zoo veterinarian put on a graduate level course at one of the veterinary schools in India.

Captive animal management is becoming a science in its own right today. It might be very helpful to send an experienced zoo man to India as a consultant to one of the major zoos that might later be used as a model used for the others. Six months to a year would allow the consultant to learn much about the day-to-day operation and therefore be in a position to make suggestions in areas such as animal nutrition, animal management and exhibit techniques. As with the veterinarian, an experienced zoo man from the U.S. might be more readily available than a person with other obligations.

The educational and social broadening opportunities of Indian zoos should be pursued by trained educators. Preparing accurate and informative labels that might be used by all the zoos of India might be best handled at least in the beginning by an educator in conjunction with the various zoo directors or other staff members.

In addition to preparing the labels that are so necessary, today the same people should cooperate in the preparation of graphic displays. Such displays would focus on such subjects as: animal behavior, animal adaptations, animal societies, endangered species and conservation.

Throughout, the emphasis should be on Indian wildlife, its uniqueness, variety and what conservation methods people should be using to protect these species.

It would also be of benefit to attempt to develop programs of 'docents' or other interpretative personnel to give guided tours of the zoos. This would be particularly useful for conducting school children, special interest groups, etc., through the grounds.

*4. Since almost all crocodilians are endangered, projects for captive rearing under semi-natural conditions should be expanded.*

Of primary importance is the gharial breeding project. The program seen at Hyderabad was excellent but both the gharial and mugger crocodile breeding programs should be expanded to include more zoos and more species. Aquatic turtles could also be included in these considerations.

### **Conclusion**

The zoos of India can only be as good as the staff of the respective institutions. As an example of what the best can be, Hyderabad is certainly one of the finest zoos in the world and Vishakapatnam, though in a fledgling state, is certain to be an excellent facility under the direction of Mr. Pushp Kumar. The fact that this gentleman has been able to stay for a number of years at the head of these institutions, and has the talent required for this kind of operation, only underscores the problems seen in the other Indian institutions visited.

The governing bodies of the various zoos would find a vast improvement if they would make an effort to help their respective staff become educated in the modern art of zoological management so that their zoo professionals could upgrade the facilities in India to modern world standards. The animals are available in India and the people are obviously in need of education toward the preservation of these rare resources. The knowledge exists in many areas of the world and in India itself to have excellent zoos, but some other countries cannot get some of the rare and valuable animals that are available in India. Therefore, India has an obligation to seek help and upgrade their facilities so that some of the world's modern methods of animal keeping can be applied toward conservation projects for the indigenous Indian wildlife. International and national cooperation is necessary and essential.

Indian zoo personnel have shown a thirst for knowledge and a genuine desire to share ideas and learn to better care for their animals. This desire for improvement should be accommodated and the necessary materials, education, and assistance should be given to these zoos and their employees to fulfill the moral obligation that we have to care for the animals living in these facilities.