

Editorial : More on Dhaka Zoo...some History...and a plea to return to better days

Sally Walker

Last issue we devoted a great deal of words and space to Dhaka Zoo and the Ministry of Fisheries and Animal Husbandry. I had visited the zoo and was shocked at its continued condition despite plans for improvement. I had also visited the Ministry and heard about the ambitious plan for transforming it. The plans should have been good news but having spent 12 years visiting Bangladesh, sometimes several times a year, I was shocked and disappointed.

The plans for improvement seemed to consist of two major and disturbing elements, e.g.

- 1) the belief that over 250 exotic animals purchased from other countries now, not after renovation, could improve the zoo, and
- 2) the conviction that taking "big people" in government to foreign countries to see good zoos would result in an improved zoo.

The purchase of exotic animals has proved disastrous several times. Animals from other continents need different care depending on their origin. The Dhaka Zoo team was not sufficiently taught how to take care of them, and lost most of them one by one within a year.

The idea that showing good zoos to VIPs would help Dhaka Zoo was particularly specious ... it might have helped Dhaka Zoo staff who actually look after the animals, that is assuming they remained in the zoo for some years, decades, but not VIPS.

I wanted to review the years I'd been interacting with Dhaka Zoo and came across some reports that I had completely forgotten, particularly the report of the Third Conference of the South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation, SAZARC, which was conducted in Dhaka. For those who might be interested, the Report is included with this issue of ZOOS' PRINT as an Appendix. Here, however, I'd like feature three items which, if carried out, might have made a big difference to the condition and future of the Zoo. These items were only about Dhaka Zoo but the members of SAZARC were also called into their working groups from time to time to give advice and confidence. The three items were

1. the formation of a Bangladesh Zoo Association,
2. the creation of Bangladesh Zoo Legislation, and
3. a list of Recommendations for the Dhaka Zoo submitted by the visiting zoo personnel, presented during the Valedictory and followed up by a letter and the list to the Minister, Secretary, D.G. and Curator.

I would like to share the short version of the working groups for these topics and the entire list in this issue itself, but it is also in the Appendix (Page. 4).

Bangladesh Zoo Association

I was actually quite shocked to remember that over a decade ago, I had discussed the value of a national zoo association for Bangladesh in addition to their participation Type to enter text in the regional association, e.g. SAZARC. This suggestion was so well received that the Bangladesh zoo personnel wanted to have a working group on it during their conference so as to get help from Miranda Stevenson, one of our resource persons chairing the British and Irish Zoo Association. The group came up with some aims and objectives and a Draft Constitution. All working group members and others who helped signed the Constitution.

Bangladesh Zoo Legislation

This one I remembered because it has been rolling around in the Ministry for over a decade. Actually, in founding SAZARC, one of my primary goals was to use it to encourage the countries with multiple zoos to create legislation for running a zoo. India had done so and its zoos were improving exponentially as a result. Moreover, India's documents of zoo legislation were so good they could provide a model for other zoos.

This idea was embraced by certain of the zoo staff who were not threatened by the threat of regulation but, in fact, welcomed it.

The Bangladesh Zoo Act has been the rounds and is ready to be approved. I have not seen an English version recently and do not know what wisdom or mischief has been added but we can only hope for the best.

What really ails Dhaka Zoo ?

In my experience with the zoo personnel, I have found many of them genuinely interested in the zoo and its animals, sufficient to encourage them to stay in the zoo, if permitted, and make it a career. All of these people were transferred as is the policy in most of South Asia. Others might not have been so interested, but they did no harm. A very few were corrupt and always looking for more rake off.

But what has made the zoo so bad is not the staff, even the few corrupt ones. It is some of the government people in the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock. There has been a trend in the Ministry not to fund the zoo adequately. The only generous funding I have observed is that which goes for bringing more animals to the zoo to fill the space left by those which died from lack of experienced staff. Other significant funding has gone for enclosures that mostly are out of date even on the architects page ... decades and even a century for some, and which look decades old in a year or two. Generosity has been shown for hospitality to a foreign guest while inviting everyone in the Department at a cost of thousands of Taka. And now the new trend is to spend millions of Taka taking people to foreign countries to see good zoos and promote themselves.

The Ministry does not fund or activate anything that is required to make it a good zoo, e.g.,

- training abroad for zoo personnel in all disciplines ... veterinary, management, record keeping, education, etc.
- providing continuity for interested, talented zoo personnel
- upgrading the veterinary school to include much more on wild animals, both in country and exotic wild animals,
- creating a genuine conservation breeding programme

Dhaka Zoo is sited in one of the most beautiful places in Dhaka ... it is next to a lake where Freshwater Dolphins could be seen ... it is covered with beautiful vegetation ... it is convenient to visitors and next to the botanical gardens.

There is hope for Dhaka Zoo but apparently not under the present Ministry. Interested, honest and knowledgeable people need to come forward and be put forward by the national administration to change this ongoing maintenance of the worst zoo management of any so called "National Zoo" in the world while contributing to unnecessary deaths of numbers of valuable animals.

Working Group Reports on Bangladesh Zoo Association and Bangladesh Zoo Legislation during SAZARC Conference in 2003

Summary Bangladesh Zoo Association Working Group (Recommendations)

Group Members: S. M. Khan, A.K. Saha, Reza Khan, M.S.Khan, A.M.K. Omar Faruk, Jatindra Nath Das, Feroz Md. Shafique Islam, Khudesta Akter Begum, Md. Salim Iqbal Prakash, Chadra Das, Md. Abdul Baset, Begum Shirina Khatun, Enamul Haque, A.T.S. Fazieh Elahi, S. M. Morshed, Sheikh Abdul Gaffer (ADC), Mrinal Kanti Mitra, A.K.M. Fazlul Haque, M. Mujafar Hossain, Md. Abdul Mannan and Sally Walker (observer).

A Working Group for the establishment of a Bangladesh Zoo Association met and reviewed a Draft Constitution of the proposed Bangladesh Zoo Association. Copies of the Draft were handed out and attendees were asked to give their comments. The aims and objectives of the Association as stated in the Memorandum are :

Aims and Objectives:

1. For better cooperation and functioning of zoos of Bangladesh
2. Generating support and making a start on national zoo legislation and standards for zoological gardens of Bangladesh
3. Wildlife Welfare
4. Conservation breeding
5. Forming a Bangladesh Network of the IUCN SSC CBSG, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group
6. Enhance activity between zoo, wildlife and academics of the country and with neighboring countries pertinent to raising the quality of management.



Summary Bangladesh Zoo Legislation Group (Recommendations)

Group Members: Reza Khan, M.S. Khan, Omar Farouk, Jatindra Nath Das, Feroz Md Shafique Islam, Khudesta Akter Begum, Md. Samim Iqbal

The Working Group began with an open forum for

- Sharing individual experiences
- Need assessment
- Issue Identification
- Recommendations

A working process was developed to forward the task of creating zoo legislation for Bangladesh. Tasks were identified:

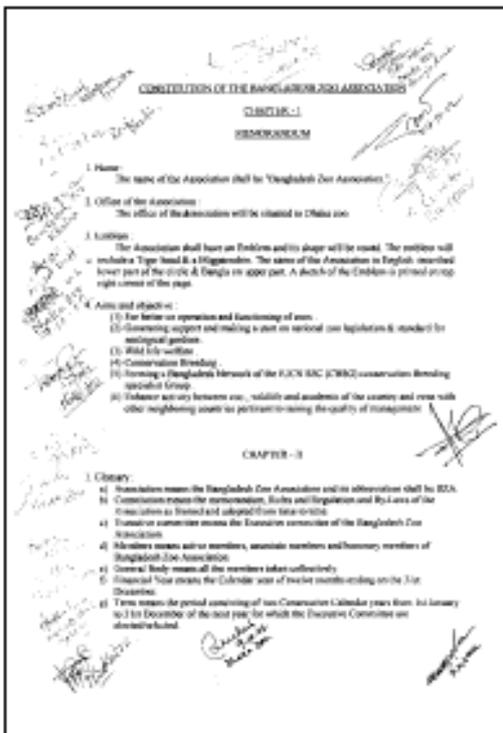
- Collection of all related legislation (national, regional, global)
- Review and study of all relevant documents
- Preparation of Working Documents
- Formation of a Zoo Legislation Committee
- Preparation of a Project Proposal for Bangladesh Zoo Act
- Formation of a Bangladesh Zoo Authority (BAZA)

Representative for Working Group to formulate and promote zoo legislation for Bangladesh

- a) Department of Livestock Services
- b) Department of Forest
- c) Department of Environment
- d) Law Ministry
- e) Planning Commission
- f) IUCN
- g) BEKB
- h) BELA
- i) BAU - 2
- j) Veterinary College
- k) Department of Zoology, University of Dhaka/CTG/Rajshahi/Jhangirnagar
- l) A renowned Zoo Specialist
- m) Curator, Dhaka Zoo (Member Secretary)

Recommendations:

- SAZARC cooperation fought for facilitating the Bangladesh National Legislation Formulation for Zoos
- To establish Bangladesh Zoo Authority
- Formation of National Network of Zoos
- Legal Advisor for each Zoo



Bangladesh Zoo Association

South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation

c/o Zoo Outreach Organisation, host of SAZARC
29 Bharati Colony, 1st Cross, Peelamedu,
Coimbatore 641004, Tamil Nadu, India

15 November 2002

Md Sadeque Hossain Khoka, M.P., Hon. Minister
Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock
Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
& Mayor, Dhaka City Corporation, Dhaka

Respected Minister:

The Third Annual Meeting of the South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation (SAZARC) was held very successfully with the assistance of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock. Department of Livestock Services and the Dhaka Zoo.

On behalf of all participants, I would like to thank you for your gracious cooperation in making excellent arrangements and giving maximum hospitality and support. Every participant was taken care of in a highly personal and efficient manner, and all participants agreed that there were no lacunae on the part of the Bangladesh government officers and service personnel. Everyone was impressed with the ability of the organisers to conduct a complicated event after a zoo emergency as took place just before the meeting.

We were extremely impressed as well with the sincerity and determination the government to consider recommendations leading to bringing the zoos of Bangladesh into the 21st Century in the areas of management, animal welfare and conservation.

As Patron of SAZARC I would like to apologise for any and all gaps on our side. Personally I found it a real pleasure to work with your officials, who were consistently cooperative and efficient throughout.

Regarding recommendations, which were read out at the Closing Ceremony and are appended in this letter, they have been formulated as a long range plan for insuring that the zoos of Bangladesh can improve their standard, first on a par with the Asian region and also internationally. We do not expect you to do this overnight or alone. We do not intend to leave you to do this all yourselves, but will provide help in most of the areas, particularly legislation, training and education. We will also pursue assistance in the form of staff exchange and training with zoos from India, Australia, USA, Europe and UK. Already we have had offers from the Australian Zoo Association.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to hold our 3rd SAZARC conference and training in your beautiful country. On behalf of SAZARC as well as Zoo Outreach Organisation, we intend this to be only the beginning of a long, productive friendship.

Yours sincerely,

Sally R. Walker, Patron, SAZARC
Founder, Zoo Outreach Organisation

cc: Dr. Z. Karim, Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock
Md Nurul Islam, Director General, Department of Livestock Services
Dr Md S. Khan, Deputy, Director, Central Poultry Farm
A.K.M. Omar Faruq, Curator, Dhaka Zoo

**Recommendations of Visiting Zoo Personnel to Bangladesh for the country's Zoos
Presented during Closing Ceremony of South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation -
Third Annual Conference of SAZARC, Hosted by Dhaka Zoo, Bangladesh, 2003**

Recommendations

- 1) Government should formulate zoo legislation including standards of animal care for Bangladesh Zoos.
- 2) The financial powers of the Head of the Zoo (Curator) should be increased so that life-threatening animal emergency situations can be addressed immediately and the zoo can operate more efficiently.
- 3) Training in all aspects of zoo management should be organised for zoo personnel at all levels, both in country and abroad.
- 4) There should be continuity of service of zoo personnel, particularly Curator and Veterinarian, but (ideally) in zoo officers as well.
- 5) The public education potential of all zoos of Bangladesh is enormous; therefore, this function of zoo needs to be strengthened with an Education Wing, designated officer and assistants, and infrastructure provided.
- 6) Veterinary expertise to be more specialised for wild animal; equipment such as tranquillizer gun, blow pipe, etc. should be provided.
- 7) Exposure to modern zoos in other countries is highly advisable for in-charge and engineers and even others, for development of new ideas and expertise.
- 8) Nutrition for the animals needs immediate review and consultation with experienced zoos in collaboration with local universities.
- 9) The upcoming Bangladesh Zoo Association is much appreciated by the international zoo community and may be endorsed by the Government as a very positive step for creating cooperation, communication and collaboration between zoos.
- 10) The Bangladesh Zoo should cultivate a positive relationship with the media
- 11) Powers of Curator to take action on Class 3 and 4 workers is strongly recommended.