

Report on SAZARC Conference

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The 10th annual conference of South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation (SAZARC) was organized by Zoo Outreach Organization (ZOO) and Wildlife Information Liaison Development, India in Kathmandu, Nepal between 22 and 27 November 2010. The programme was hosted jointly by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) and Central Zoo. The inaugural ceremony was organized on 22 November within Central Zoo premises and graciously inaugurated by the Rt. Hon. Subash Chandra Nembang, Chairman of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal. The 10th Conference was the decade celebration of the SAZARC and it was a great coincidence for NTNC- Central Zoo to host the 1st and 10th Conference in Nepal. The Conference was also a part of the 7th Annual Joint Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) and Reintroduction Specialist Group Meeting (RSG). The five-day conference was held in NTNC's Biodiversity Conservation Centre based in the vicinity of the Chitwan National Park. The Conference was attended by 42 participants from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka including zoo directors, veterinarians, education staffs and field biologists.

A total of 16 participants representing different organizations in Nepal participated the conference. The theme of the conference - Emergency Response Protocols for 21st Century Crisis in the Zoo: Climate Change, Emerging Disease and Terrorism was very relevant and provided an excellent forum to learn and share the issues on climate change and different diseases of captive animals. In addition, various aspects of zoo management, husbandry work and bio-security measures were also discussed during the conference.

The group work to draft an Emergency Response Plan was an important exercise and learning for all the Nepalese participants - the Central Zoo does not have its emergency plan. The draft plan includes potential emergency cases (outbreak of diseases, escape of animal, earthquake, visitor - keepers injuries and casualties) that the Zoo may encounter. The Central Zoo is committed to produce a draft plan within few weeks.

Wildlife Reintroduction Guideline was shared and discussed during the Conference. This greatly helped new veterinarians and biologist to get knowledge on role, importance and basic procedures of reintroduction programmes.

The facilitators, mainly Sally Walker and Sanjay Molur and resource persons Wendy Foden and Mark Irwin led the group work in a systematic manner so that the group was able to draft plans.

Major Outputs

- Capacity of participants to prepare zoo emergency plan was enhanced.
- Draft Zoo emergency plan prepared
- Approach to teaching about Climate Change to youngsters through life style changes was conveyed.
- Knowledge base on climate change issues, captive animal health and disease, and wildlife reintroduction programme enhanced
- Network among the professionals associated in captive management of wildlife and conservation breeding programme established.



Sarita Jhawali (Centre) with resource persons and the Afghan contingent after the Inaugural function

Conclusion

The 10th Conference of SAZARC was a milestone in introducing new and innovative approaches to manage captive animals, climate change issues in captive management and zoo emergency plan being the major ones. Rigorous group works in framing emergency plan, in particular, empowered the young professionals in preparing such plans. Extensive discussion on reintroduction programme helped participants to understand role and importance of such programmes. The conference also created a platform to establish networks among veterinarians and zoo professionals. Finally, SAZARC has been a very important common ground to bring zoo professionals, biologists and veterinarians to discuss and come up with prudent solutions to address issues related to captive management of wildlife species in the region. SAZARC's efforts in introducing scientific approaches in zoo management has been well appreciated and felt imperative to continue in the years to come.

Acknowledgements

Finally, I would like to express our sincere thanks to Sally Walker, Founder Director of Zoo Outreach Organization, who made the SAZARC's decade celebration conference possible in Nepal. We, on behalf of Government of Nepal - DNPWC and NTNC and Central Zoo would like to extend deep appreciation for giving us an opportunity to host the Conference in Nepal. As the Central Zoo in close coordination with DNPWC is in the process of upgrading its facilities and expanding role for the better management of the mini zoos in Nepal, the knowledge and experiences gained during the Conference has become instrumental to speed up the overall process. I would like to reiterate in thanking Sally Walker for assisting Central Zoo in many ways over the last one decade. Her assistance has helped to build up the capacity of zoo staffs and school teachers, and adopt science based conservation education programme.

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