

Report on 10th Annual Conference of SAZARC, CBSG & RSG South Asia, 22-27 November 2010 hosted by Central Zoo & NTNC, Nepal

Aziz Gul Saqib* & Sally Walker**

The South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation, SAZARC, including CBSG, South Asia and RSG, South Asia, conducted a Tenth Anniversary celebratory conference, which began at its birthplace, e.g. the Central Zoo, Lalitpur, Kathmandu Nepal. Our hosts, Central Zoo and the National Trust for Nature Conservation, NTNC, made very pleasing arrangements to insure participants felt comfortable and welcome. Sponsors were numerous, mostly zoos and animal welfare organisations from western countries.

Central Zoo/NTNC hosted a Welcome dinner for participants in their hotel where all stayed with a programme beforehand. In the programme, Sally Walker welcomed all and related a short history of SAZARC and how it came to be. She called on others who had been at the first meeting, in 2000, in Kathmandu, e.g. Mansoor Qazi (Karachi Zoo, Pakistan), R. K. Sahu (Ahmedabad Zoo, India), Sanjay Molur (Z.O.O., India) and B.A. Daniel (Z.O.O., India). Others attending that first meeting had been transferred to other posts, reflecting one of the many challenges which obstruct continuous progress of zoos in the region.

Sally had asked me to deliver a presentation on Kabul Zoo highlighting its new improvements, in infrastructure, exhibition, veterinary and education. Kabul Zoo has risen like a phoenix from a flattened state resulting from the war in Afghanistan.



Dr. R.K. Sahu, who has attended all SAZARC meetings since the first in Kathmandu shares his and others' feeling about SAZARC

Its recovery and progress has been due to the resilience of the Afghans and also to the assistance provided from many zoos throughout the world coordinated primarily by the North Carolina Zoo. Zoo Outreach Organisation contributed in small ways from afar but has been more active recently in providing training, but again, with help from the North Carolina Zoo. The Kabul Zoo team brought one of the specialties of Afghanistan, the enormous red fruit

called Pomegranate which was offered to all following the presentation.

According to schedule the Inaugural Ceremony of SAZARC was conducted on 22 November on the premises of Central Zoo, Lalitpur, Kathmandu under a large shamiyana surrounded by the beautiful vegetation of the zoo. SAZARC guests and local officials were welcomed and felicitated with garlands of beautiful, fresh seasonal flowers of Nepal by traditional Nepali dancers. VIPs representing government agencies delivered speeches for the opening ceremony and welcomed all Members of SAZARC, Resource persons and local Guests. The dancers entertained with a beautiful Nepali cultural dancing and very nice songs and music. An elaborate tea was served for all guests followed by the departure of participants to Chitwan National Park where we arrived about 6:00 pm. All the participants lived in the same hotel near to the Park where the conference was held which made us close friends.

On 23 November, the conference began in the auditorium of the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) located adjacent to Chitwan, NP.



Participants enjoying Pomegranates, a speciality of Kabul, Afghanistan.

*Director, Kabul Zoo, Kabul Municipality, Afghanistan

** Director, SAZARC and ZOO, Coimbatore, India

Director of Chitwan and Director, Central Zoo, welcomed all guests. Director, SAZARC presented each one a traditional shawl, given in the traditional manner by draping it around the shoulders.

SAZARC conferences are strong on training. The training theme for this 10th Anniversary was Twenty-first Century Crises: Climate Change, Emerging Diseases and Terrorism. All of those topics fit under a project that participants were asked to work on, the formulation of an Emergency Response Protocol to include all the expected zoo emergencies and also the 21st Century Crises. Until last year, no zoo in South Asia had an emergency protocol and then only the Indian zoos had just begun. Zoos are by nature "crisis prone" with their mass of visitors and delicate wild animals so an Emergency Protocol was much required.

The first topic for our training on all the days was Climate Change with Dr. Wendy Foden as the Resource Person. Dr. Foden is Programme Manager for Climate Change for IUCN SSC and leads the IUCN "Species Vulnerability to Climate Change" project. This project collects and identifies data on life history and ecological traits of species of animals and plants with particular vulnerability to climate change. She and her group identify species that face the greatest risk of climate change-driven extinctions, using the results to compliment the current IUCN Red Data List and to prioritise conservation efforts. We were able to create a basic species prioritization for our country's zoos based on some of the principles taught, and also came away with a better understanding of climate change.

The second topic was Emerging Diseases in context with Climate Change. The Resource Person was Dr. Mark Irwin, who is a tenured faculty at Jefferson Community College (JCC), State University of New York since 2002. He is Primary teaching faculty member for all Animal Management (AMG) courses in the Associates of Applied Science degree program for training zoo keepers & educators. Dr. Irwin covered Emerging Diseases, veterinary implications for emergency response to disasters, Biosecurity, zookeeper training and related topics. Each working group, organized by country, used the material from presentations to structure their Emergency Response Plan. Also a Manual entitled Model Disaster Management for Indian Zoos, by Sri R. Hemanth Kumar, former Director, Kanpur Zoo provided an example and



Chief Guests Mr. Juddha Bahadur Gurung, Sally Walker, Director SAZARC and Rt. Hon. Subash Chandra Nembang during inaugural

guide for the working groups. The Manual had been commissioned by Central Zoo Authority to help zoo directors with a new CZA directive that every zoo must have an written emergency protocol to compliment their overall management plan. CZA gifted copies of the Plan to us.

Third topic was IUCN SSC Specialist Groups – CBSG and RSG, South Asian Networks. Other training topics were featured around the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group and the Reintroduction Specialist Group. Dr. Sanjay Molur, Executive Director of Zoo Outreach Organization that hosts the South Asian Networks of RSG and CBSG, explained the mandate and activities of the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group and reviewed the Guidelines of the Reintroduction Specialist Group in context with South Asia. Dr. Molur emphasized that the Guidelines had been written to guide reintroduction practitioners as many reintroductions, translocations, releases, etc. encountered difficulties due to incomplete or misguided planning. There was much discussion and interest as many zoos and forest departments undertake release of surplus without following guidelines and encounter problems for human and animals' welfare and survival as a result. Climate change also willforce movements of some animals to higher elevations.

Fourth topic was Climate Change and Education. Dr. B.A. Daniel, Scientist and Mr. R. Marimuthu, Education officer, Zoo Outreach Organization, India presented a good explanation, with information and exhibition of an education program related to Climate

Change developed by Z.O.O. Based on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, which was to live a simple life, they demonstrated a new educational packet which focused on everyday things that the common man can do to reduce carbon emissions, to modify behaviour, which exacerbates it, and to adjust to activities which mitigate climate change. They led the participants through the various items in the educational packet entitled Live More Simply, which was developed by Zoo Outreach Organisation for distribution at Wildlife Week 2010. Many of the items were intended for children but participants were very charmed by the "global warming spectacle", Red Cross armbands and small placards to carry when "lobbying" for actions to defeat global warming. There were three different handouts for reading about how to bring about a lifestyle more consistent with the current crisis facing us all. This was a very nice, and new, innovative and effective tool for participants.

The Chitwan Warden had given us a presentation on Chitwan National Park on the first day and followed up with a range of activities in and around the park, e.g. a ride on Elephant back into the park, a visit to the Elephant Breeding Centre, a canoe ride and visit to the Museum of Natural History. One event that was unplanned, was one of the most exciting. This was the daytime visit of a Great Indian One-horned Rhinoceros from the National Park into the village area surrounding it. The village was nearby our conference venue so after lunch on the day, we all walked over to see the rhino peacefully nibbling leaves from

bushes around villagers houses. This is not an unusual event and the villagers were very calm about such a large animals in their compound. The elderly rhinos periodically make this trip. Other officials of NTNC and the Park gave presentations and participated in the conference.

Many of the directors of Zoos in the conference presented Reports of their zoos to the other participants. There were presentations from all countries. It was a good opportunity to get ideas from so many participants of the same region who face the same difficulties and obstacles in their zoo work.

On the last day, 26 November, we finished our class sessions and reports and gathered for a valedictory ceremony. Each country group selected one person to make a speech on the conference and how it helped them. The first speaker was Aziz Gul Saqib, who said the 10th annual conference of SAZARC was a very nice and efficient meeting for all members, specially for him and his colleagues from Afghanistan who felt they got more information for taking back to their zoo to improve animal care and other zoo duties. He profusely thanked Sally Walker, Founder Director of SAZARC and ZOO and Dr. Sarita Jnawali, Director, and all of her colleagues and assistants from Central Zoo, NTNC for all their hospitality. Dr. Jnawali also spoke about SAZARC,



Sanjay Molur and B.A. Daniel of ZOO pose with R.K. Shrestha, former Director of Central Zoo, Convenor of SAZARC (2000) and first President

the conference, Zoo Outreach Organisation and her interactions with ZOO and all participants. Sally Walker thanked Central Zoo, Resource Persons, participants and sponsors. Resource persons related their satisfaction with the work of participants and the conference generally. Following all countries speeches, the D.G., Department of Wildlife and Nature Conservation presented specially made *Thangka* to each and every participant. The *Thangka* is a painting on silk with beautiful embroidery and brocade trim of a mandala, a beautiful scene or a Buddhist god. Each painting was done individually for the conference participants. The *Thangka* is well-known in Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal. It was a generous and perfect gift of the Central Zoo/NTNC for the conference participants. There were many farewells which continued that night with a gala dinner next to a river. The following morning participants left for Kathmandu and most had a good tour to sites of interest which, of course, included the Central Zoo.



Bhutan participant receives traditional garland and welcome with which all South Asia is familiar



Participants and guests enjoyed the lilting music and the traditional dancers' costumes and performance



Participants with *Thangka*