

## 25th Year Celebrations - Zoo Outreach Organisation

Zoo Outreach Organisation was registered on 11 January 1985. The Divisional Commissioner of Mysore Division, saw to it that it was registered in half an hour, beating the former D.C.'s record of several hours, less than a day. The D.C.'s in Mysore were part of the Karnataka Zoo Authority and took a keen interest in anything which would assist the zoos.

As I have told many times, I agonised over the name for the new zoo society. I wanted a name which would not only express "reaching out" (we call it "networking" these days!) to other zoos and encouraging them to reach out as well, but also to make it very clear that, although we considered ourselves an animal welfare as well as conservation organisation, we were NOT a welfare organisation like the norm of the time (and certainly not like those of today!). We wanted a name that would say : "Rah rah, zoos, the institutions that give wild animals with no chance, a last chance. Oddly enough it was not a zoo person who convinced me to select the current name, but just an ordinary friend. So Zoo Outreach Organisation was named as such because the acronym was Z.O.O. I felt (and still do) that that alone, conveyed our attitude towards zoos. We gotta have them and we gotta help them.

The defining philosophy of ZOO was to help in a positive and constructive manner. We didn't criticise zoos. We might point out areas in which improvement was a good idea but this was criticism of the zoos...it was, at times (well, practically all the time) critical of the government, which owned the zoos, but was not doing enough for them.

We promoted two major ideas which might improve zoos and those were zoo associations and zoo legislation. We promoted zoo associations primarily by singing the praises of the (then) American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria (AAZPA) and spreading around their printed material (no email; no internet then). The idea was already there and acted upon by Dr. J.H. Desai, Director of National Zoo, who had already organised a first meeting in about 1985. Kamal Naidu followed and pushed it through but the Indian Zoo Association never had the clout of AAZPA, primarily because the directors had no power or decision making ability, not where it counted and not much interest in cooperating and no budget for improvement. The suggestion of official zoo regulation and official help followed a visit by a group of directors from AAZPA who commented on the need for empowerment and financing of the zoos. First there was a suggestion of a Zoo Grants Commission, then a Zoo Policy and finally legislation. ZOO helped by keeping up a stream of feature articles to the national press about zoos and their problems. I wrote more than 300 such articles about every aspect of zoos and why they couldn't improve themselves. ZOO fully supported the Zoo Act in every way that an NGO could.

Another major contribution of ZOO were our "status and management surveys" of captive animals in zoos. We got them funded by zoos abroad and covered a variety of threatened taxa such as Manipur Brow-antlered deer, Musk deer, Indian cats, Vultures (yes, 15 years before the vulture crisis) and others, and brought out reports, studbooks, and studbook-like listings.

After the passage of the Zoo Act and formation of Central Zoo Authority, ZOO found some problem in operating with Indian zoos and CZA (despite my being a member for six years) so we decided we were no more required and turned to three initiatives, 1. the conduct of PHVA and CAMP workshops for a wide variety of species, 2. the setting up of "networks" for neglected taxa designed to act as regional networks for IUCN SSC specialist groups and 3. the founding of SAZARC, which is celebrating its 10th year.

Sally Walker, Founder/Director ZOO and  
Sanjay Molur, Executive Director, ZOO Trust

