Zoo Keepers Enrichment - The Basic Tool of Zoo Management

The word “ZOO” itself strikes with imagination of a place where wild animals are kept in enclosures and cages. Zoo is an excellent tool for education, conservation and research on wild animals, but zoo objectives are not achieved until all the animals are healthy and reproductively active. In this context, zoo keepers play important role because of their skill and knowledge which makes them to stand in first place in zoo’s success story. During 20th century zoo were only place of entertainment, but today due to deforestation (although in recent years few states have recorded increase in forest cover) and rapid urbanization they are now acting as a place of conservation for flora and fauna, in this situation zoo keepers role is of great importance as they are unit of the all wildlife activities in a zoo.

Zoo keeper is the only person who spends maximum time near or with animals affecting their daily life activities and also fulfills their physical, mental and natural needs. Hence a zoo keeper must have sentiments, should be hard working, and invariably be aware with characters of the wild animals.

Therefore, there is urgent need to strengthen the keepers with modern equipments, techniques with special emphasis on regular training to keep them acquainted with new developments in the wildlife field. However, before enriching them in different aspects it is necessary to describe the duties of a zoo keeper, as summarised below, which are basis of keeper’s enrichment.

• To inform zoo vets regarding ill health of animals as soon as possible.
• To help vets during medication and treatment of animals.
• Providing food and water for animal.
• He must be well acquainted with nature, food habits, nature of excretion; way of walking, scent etc. of animals housed in his area, so that in case of any change in their habit he could inform to zoo vets. He must have thorough knowledge of their attitudes like, aggression, warning, fear, attacks etc.
• He must have knowledge of quantity of food to be given as decided by zoo vets.
• Keeper is responsible for giving timely food and water to the precious animals. Therefore the keeper should be fully aware with the feeding habit of the animals, type of utensil to be used. He must keep utensils or feeding platform clean and germ free after every use. He should make efforts that every animal should consume feed or fodder and should prevent wastage of food especially by free
ranging animals like langur, monkey, rats, peafowl and squirrel etc. A keeper should spread and distribute the feed uniformly so that all animals can eat easily to minimize fighting.

• A keeper wherever possible should call animals by their names.
• To help zoo vets in conservation breeding program.
• A good keeper must know age, sexual maturity, reproductive and special behavior of the birds and animals of the area.
• He should maintain records of reproductive strategies and success stories of breeding in register.
• To take care of pregnant animals like:
  a) He should be aware of pregnancy signs.
  b) To have conversation with zoo vets regarding diet of a pregnant female.
  c) To make separation plan of female from males.
  d) Try keep pregnant female far from visitors.
  e) To inform date of birth, time to zoo vets.
  f) To take special care of female so that she does not get any stress.
• To take special care of newly born animals like:
  a) Time taken by him to stand on his legs.
  b) When he drinks milk first time.
  c) When he did first excretion.
  d) Time interval of food consumption.
  e) Time taken to open his eyes.
  f) Changes in dental arrangements.
  g) Moving with her mother.
  h) When separated with mother.
  i) Weaning period.
• Security and safety of all enclosures within his area.
• Security and safety of animals is primary duty of a keeper.
• In the morning before releasing the animals a keeper should do regular keen inspection of iron, wooden fittings, wire meshes, shutters, grill, doors, locks, fencing, taps, pipes, fountains etc. and he should inform immediately regarding any repairing work to the zoo authorities. The exercise should be repeated in the evening.
• Early morning, when entering in their area, he must count all animals and should inform to watchman in the evening regarding any special care.
• To remove objects thrown in the moats like paper, plastic, bottles, left out picnic food which can be eaten by animal, pan-masala, tobacco, cigarette, stones, coins, wires etc. must be cleaned and removed before releasing the animals.

• Periodic oiling of all squeezer, shutters, doors etc. in order to keep them in ready to use conditions.

• To inform zoo authorities regarding repairing of enclosure, night cell etc.

• Arrangements in the enclosure according to weather conditions should be done by keeper immediately.

• Deworming and vaccination schedule of animals along with time and method of administration must be recorded at the time of administering the dewormer for future ease.

• To control and help visitors to understand wildlife and its importance.

• Keeper should answer and explain the queries by visitors.

• Regular cleaning of enclosure, manger, tanks, utensils etc. should be priority of a keeper.

• He should co-operate with sweeper in the process of removing all garbage, bones, meat, feed, excreta etc.

• To remove all unnecessary things likes grass, weeds etc. or wooden logs that may attract poisonous snakes.

• Keepers should remain in their area during duty. In case of emergency he must leave place only after informing beat in charge, sweeper or any other responsible zoo employee nearby him.

• This is the keepers responsibility to keep all the official things like spray machine, racks, pipes etc. safely and to keep them always in ready to use condition.

• It is responsibility of a keeper to ensure that all the cages or night cell or doors are locked before allowing any authorized person or sweeper to complete the work in animal area or paddock.

The Kanpur zoo is spread in an area of 76.56 hectare with its peaceful environment and sights. The zoo is currently having 1307 animals of 116 species (Singh Asha et al, 2016). A zoo success story can only be written when there is minimum mortality and maximum natality. To achieve this goal the zoo keeper should be enriched with modern technics. In this context, Kanpur Zoological Park has undertaken many important steps few of them are as under:

• Annual availability of uniforms to all zoo keepers.
• Sitting arrangements for keepers near animal enclosure.
• Stationary for all keepers.
• A food trolley for bringing and taking away food items.
• Food tray for keeping food items.
• Detergent and water for cleaning food tray and utensils.
• Sharp knife for cutting fruits, vegetables and meat.
• Soap for washing hands.
• Each enclosure with tap and manger for providing clean and fresh water to animals.
• Provision of room temperature thermometer so that a keeper can implement immediate temperature maintaining measures.
• Provision of pressure water pumps in each carnivore enclosure for proper cleaning.
• Trolley mounted gas cylinder with flame gun for blow torching the iron bars.
• Keepers pathway from one enclosure to another.
• Providing pit for disposal of food, meat and bones.
• Providing shelf to each keeper for keeping daily use items like tonics, knife, medicine soap and diary etc.
• Frequent training of keepers to keep them familiar with modern zoo practices.
• Exposure visits of the keepers to different zoological parks.
• Monthly meeting of keepers with zoo officials in order to exchange their innovative ideas with other keepers.
• Provision of reliever keeper in order to ensure weekly rest of the regular keeper.
• Well documented animal feeding and cleaning schedule to ensure proper cleaning and to avoid any confusion.
• Every enclosure has been provided foot bath at the entrance to ensure biosecurity.
• All the keepers of Kanpur zoological park are subjected to annual health checkup and screening against zoonotic diseases in a NABL and ISO certified laboratory. Those found suffering from any ailments are barred from duty and are provided treatment by the Kanpur zoo administration.
• Keepers of Kanpur zoo are equipped with CUG mobile cell phones to ensure immediate communication.
• Since the Kanpur zoo is spread in a vast area of 76.56 hectares hence all the keepers are provided with bicycles for movement.
The Kanpur zoo administration provides appreciation certificate to the zoo keepers who perform their duty more sincerely or have helped in breeding of endangered animals or have provided any innovative ideas.

In order to ensure more exposure all the zoo keepers are given opportunity to accompany the zoo vets during rescue operations and animal transport from other zoos on a rotation basis.

Provision of all possible animal handling equipments such as rope, ladder, nets, stretcher and snake catchers etc. in each enclosure.

Separate vehicle for food transport, animal transport and for the disposal of garbage.

Daily assistance to zoo keepers by zoo vets, administration and vet assistant for implementing animal and enclosure enrichment.

The keeper’s gallery of recently made serpentorium is 1.5 meter wide and well ventilated. It also has sufficient space to keep the safety equipments etc. A pair of gumboots, stick, leather jacket and cap for the both keeper and sweeper is also provided by the zoo administration for their safety. Few airy wooden rescued boxes are also available in the keeper gallery for the rescued snakes. A first aid box with all requisites is also available in the keeper’s gallery (Gupta et al, 2016).

Apart from this the Kanpur zoo is home for around 52 types of local and migratory birds. Kanpur zoo administration always keeps close watch on activities of birds so that they can have admittance to their safe nesting locations and since the birds are integral part of aquatic life hence zoo administration also ensures plenty of prey bases for them (Singh Rakesh et al, 2016). For this purpose keeper of aviary of the zoo plays an important role by keeping regular watch on them.

There is no girth of innovations in modern age but if all above ideas are implemented properly a zoo keeper not will only be helpful in improving health and number of animals but also he will act as an essential tool in day to day management tools. The experiment of Kanpur zoo in this regard is very positive and not only yielded healthy animals with increase in progeny but also helped in achieving one of the lowest mortality rate of around 1.6 percent only. The overall scenario resulted in acquiring three ISO certificates for Kanpur zoological park one of them being given for “to conserve, breed and provide alternate home for fauna of national importance and to create opportunities for education, research and awareness amongst the masses”.


Singh Rakesh et al, 2016.
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References
