

## Volunteers in Zoo Activities at the Mysore Zoo

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Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens is one of the oldest zoos in the world. It has a history of over a century now. Established in 1892 by the then ruling King Sri Chamarajendra Wodeyar for his personal collection, the Zoo management then changed hands from the Horticulture Department to the Forest Department and finally came under the Zoo Authority of Karnataka in 1979.

The Zoo has an over all collection of 110 species, which include 50 mammals, 45 birds and 15 reptiles totalling to about 1,100 animals.

Zoos are no more a place where animals are just exhibited. The concept of zoos has changed drastically in recent times. The modern zoo concept gives importance to zoo education and awareness programmes on environment, wildlife and research. This is done through zoo education, and most of the zoos have a post of a zoo educator. Though our zoo has no such post, it however still has year long educational activities run mainly through the help of volunteers.

Volunteers can play an important role in any organisation. Mysore Zoo has the luxury in having a group of 9 volunteers called 'Volunteers of Mysore Zoo' who come from various walks of life, from house wife to journalist, government servant and students. And one of our volunteer is now an officially appointed Zoo Guide. This group helps the zoo in conducting educational activities.

Some activities taken up by volunteers at the zoo have been elaborated below

### Zoo Outreach and In-house Programmes

Zoo outreach is a programme where in we reach out to various schools, institutions, rural communities and slums to create awareness. We concentrate on environmental issues, wildlife and zoo's role in protecting the wild stock. Slide shows in local language are organised to help the audience understand various issues. After the slide show we interact with them and invite them to the zoo for in-house programmes.

Through the zoo in-house programme various schools, rural communities and institutions are invited to the zoo. These people are not charged an entry fee, once in the zoo the group is taken for a zoo round by one of the volunteer, where in he/she explains the importance of animals and birds and how they play a major role in maintaining ecological balance. The group is also made aware about the importance of forests and the need to conserve them. In addition to this the group is also shown video films pertaining to handling of snakes, wildlife etc.

### Youth Club Activities

Mysore Zoo conducts the Youth Club Programme on Sundays for a period of five months (Aug- Jan) every year. Sixty students from various schools in the age group of 8-16 years participate in this programme on a first come first



Volunteers and keepers from Mysore on tour

serve basis. They are exposed to various aspects of wildlife and role of zoos in protecting them. The volunteers take the initiation in bringing the resource persons to deliver talks and slide shows.

To help better understand the care required for animals at the zoo, students are allowed to feed animals (mainly herbivores) with the guidance of animal keeper, they are also explained about the diet provided in the Zoo. Students also participate in cleaning animal cages and are encouraged to interact more closely with animals (like giving bath to the elephants)

Zoo being a plastic-free zone we initiate and guide students in organising plastic-free day. They are encouraged to conduct visitor's survey and animal behaviour studies. They are also taken for outings including bird watching sessions and "butterfly hunts" at the adjacent Karanji tank.

### Summer Camp

Summer camps were initiated in 2002. It is an annual event conducted during the summer holidays, i.e. in May for a period of one week. A press release about the camp is given and a maximum of 25 students between the age groups of 12 to 16 are taken. The students spend the entire day at the zoo and are exposed to animal behaviour studies, slide shows regarding wilderness and its importance, identification of medicinal plants by experts, cleaning of cages and the use of street plays for creating environmental awareness is taught and also performed.

### Competitions at the Zoo

As part of the Wildlife week we help the zoo conduct drawing and quiz competitions at the zoo premises for various age groups. Essay writing competition and debate for collage students. Drawing and painting competitions for physically challenged is also organised. In addition to this photography exhibition and competition have become an annual event of our zoo now.

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### **Identification of plants, trees and birds**

Some of our volunteers along with the help of experts have prepared a checklist of plants and tree species present in our zoo. Some have put together a checklist of birds and presented the same to the zoo. This not only adds to the knowledge of volunteers but also helps the zoo authorities in generating a database of uncaged species.

### **Visits to other zoos**

As part of the Animal Keepers Training Programme this year, we had an opportunity to visit other zoos along with 5 animal keepers and an official. This enabled us to understand the various problems faced by different zoos in maintaining animals and visitors. We picked up some positive points from our visit and presented the same to the Director and Member secretary. They would discuss and if required implement some of the gathered information.

### **Teachers -training programmes and workshops**

The Zoo takes initiation in conducting Teachers Training Programmes along with other Organisations. This year a three-day workshop was organised in association with the Centre for Environment Education at the Zoo. The aim of training the teachers is to reach out to more number of students. We help the zoo in organising such workshops and also participate in them.

We represent the zoo by attending workshops like the 'Teachers for Tigers' conducted by Zoo Outreach Organisation and Wildlife Conservation Society at Regional Natural History Museum and one at Ahmedabad 'Youth for Environment' organised by CEE and Asian Common wealth Society.

These are some of the activities, which have been regularised at the zoo. The idea behind writing this article was to encourage more youth groups and zoos to take up such initiatives. This not only helps zoos but also the individual volunteer. From my experience of nine years with this zoo, I feel these activities have become an important means to create awareness among the local public regarding Wildlife and Environment.

Our volunteer group is really happy to work with this institution and do our little bit in joining hands with the efforts of Mysore Zoo in conserving wildlife. I am thankful to Sri. Shivanna, Manager and our Director Sri. Kumar Pushkar who in spite of their busy schedule take a lot of interest and give us ample time to discuss about the programmes and support us in all the educational activities taken up here.

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## **Animal Welfare Fortnightly with Zoo Outreach Organisation**

The Animal Welfare Board of India conducts Animal Welfare Fortnightly every year in the last two weeks of January. Every year Zoo Outreach Organisation makes available educational materials to encourage zoos to take up "active learning" education programmes to engage children more fully.

This year we do not have any new packets to offer but we have more of the primate, bat, bear, tiger and behaviour materials left from Wildlife Week. You can try these materials on new groups of kids.

This year we would like to do everything by email, if possible, so if you want some of these materials, please email us and request a instruction letter and a form for ordering materials.

If you do not have email you could fax us or mail us but the time is short. Applicants who live far away from South India should allow extra time for their materials to be delivered.

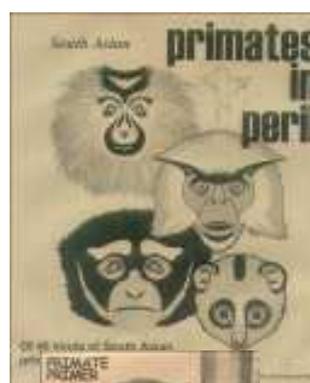
The materials are without monetary cost but they are not free. We expect you to plan a proper programme for a group of kids or adults with a theme to fit the material you order. You should provide a lecture or presentation about the species or topic and for kids, organise games and activities using materials in the packets. You have to describe the programme in detail, give date, venue, target audience in your proposal and send it to us. You also must pay postage for the materials (never more than about Rs. 300/- and send us a Report, with press clippings and photographs. We will publish your report in one of our publications and you will be considered eligible to apply again for materials from us.

The materials we have for use during this event are :

Status of Bats of Indian Subcontinent - summary of CAMP workshop (for adult programme - you can order up to 35 booklets)

Status of South Asia Primates - summary of CAMP workshop (for adult programme - you can order up to 35 booklets)

Bats about Bats -- bat packet (for kids - you can order up to 100 packets, more in special cases.)



Primates in Peril -- Primate packet for older kids (you can order up to 100 packets, more in special cases.)

Primarily Primates - Primate packet for young kids (you can order up to 100 packets, more in special cases.)

Dare to Care for Bears - Bear packet (for kids - you can order up to 100 packets, more in special cases.)

Tiger Toolkit - Tiger packet (for kids - you can order up to 100 packets, more in special cases.)

Zoo Behaviour - packet for zoo patrol for kids (you can order up to 50 packets)

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