

# Developing a training Programme for Zoo keepers

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*This document was originally a Guest Lecture delivered by Dr. S. Paulraj, M. Sc. Ph. D DWLM (USA) and published in ZOOS' PRINT in December 1992. It was made into a booklet shortly thereafter and distributed to all the zoos.*

*The current iteration -- 12 years later ! -- has been updated by Sally Walker for use in the SAZARC Zoo Management Training courses which were held in October 2004 in Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore.*

## Introduction

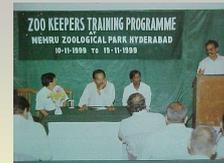
Unlike zoo animal keepers in many western countries, many South Asian zookeepers do not possess many of the basic qualities required for animal keeping. Many of them lack knowledge about the basic biology and correct handling of the animals. The main reason for this situation is, perhaps, that many of the works to be done in the zoo for animals, such as cleaning and sweeping the animal houses, do not, or (more accurately) do not seem to require, education or technical qualifications. The zoo animal keeping "profession" requires something more, however. Zoo animal keepers in western countries are expected to know some basic biology of the animal as well as cleaning and sweeping. Many zookeepers in western countries are highly educated and work their way up from zookeeper to Curator even to Director. As zookeepers, some of them are responsible for record keeping, studbooks and other important tasks in the zoo, as well as caring for animals.

Knowledge of basic biology and animal behaviour by zookeepers, however, is necessary in order to care for the animals and himself properly. Incidences of casualties among animals and keepers are primarily due to lack of training and application of training on the basic facts and skills of animal husbandry and zoo management.

**Background :** Although the need for imparting training to zoo keepers has been felt for a very long time in South Asia, few serious attempts were made to develop training in any country until the late 1980's, when the Zoo Outreach Organisation raised funds for the British based Animal Management Correspondence Course for about 30 Indian

zoo personnel. These people consisted of a few keepers who had some command over English and some middle level zoo personnel who either wanted a more systematic approach to zookeeping for themselves or to think of training zookeepers. In the early 1990's the Arignar Anna Zoo began a zookeeper training course which was a systematic training that went on for some months and was quite successful. Dr. S. Paulraj, who developed this training at Arignar Anna Zoo, gave a presentation on his method at a Central Zoo Authority training course for zoo directors hosted by the zoo in 1992. The presentation was a detailed and systematic model or framework for developing zookeeper training in this part of the world. Dr. Paulraj was asked by ZOO to flesh out his presentation for publication as mentioned above.

**Zoo Animal Keeper Training is best preceded by training for zoo managers – organising training is not easy !**



In the last few years the Central Zoo Authority of India has provided funds for selected zoos in different parts of India to organize keeper training workshops of about one or two week's duration regionally to accommodate linguistic needs. These are going on every year.

Still, very few zoos in India have made individual attempts to train their own animal keepers by themselves with continuous and consistent input. Hopefully this situation will change in time.

There are certain zoos or institutions which have some special expertise which is more developed than at other zoos. Such zoos and expertise should be identified and keepers should be deputed at least once in a year to attend special courses. Even, each major zoo in India may develop a systematic training programme in a different and important skill.

Probably the first step in providing training for animal keepers is to provide zoo management training for other staff, including how to organise training for zookeepers. This is the result of attempts to do just that.

## ZOO ANIMAL KEEPER TRAINING

Aspects and issues in developing a  
Training Programme for Zoo Animal Keepers

Pakistan, October 2004

A different version of this presentation was used in Chennai, India in 1992 for the Annual Central Zoo Authority Training for Zoo Directors organised at Arignar Anna Zoo in Chennai India by the Wildlife Institute of India. An article was subsequently published in ZOOS' PRINT magazine in March 1993.

