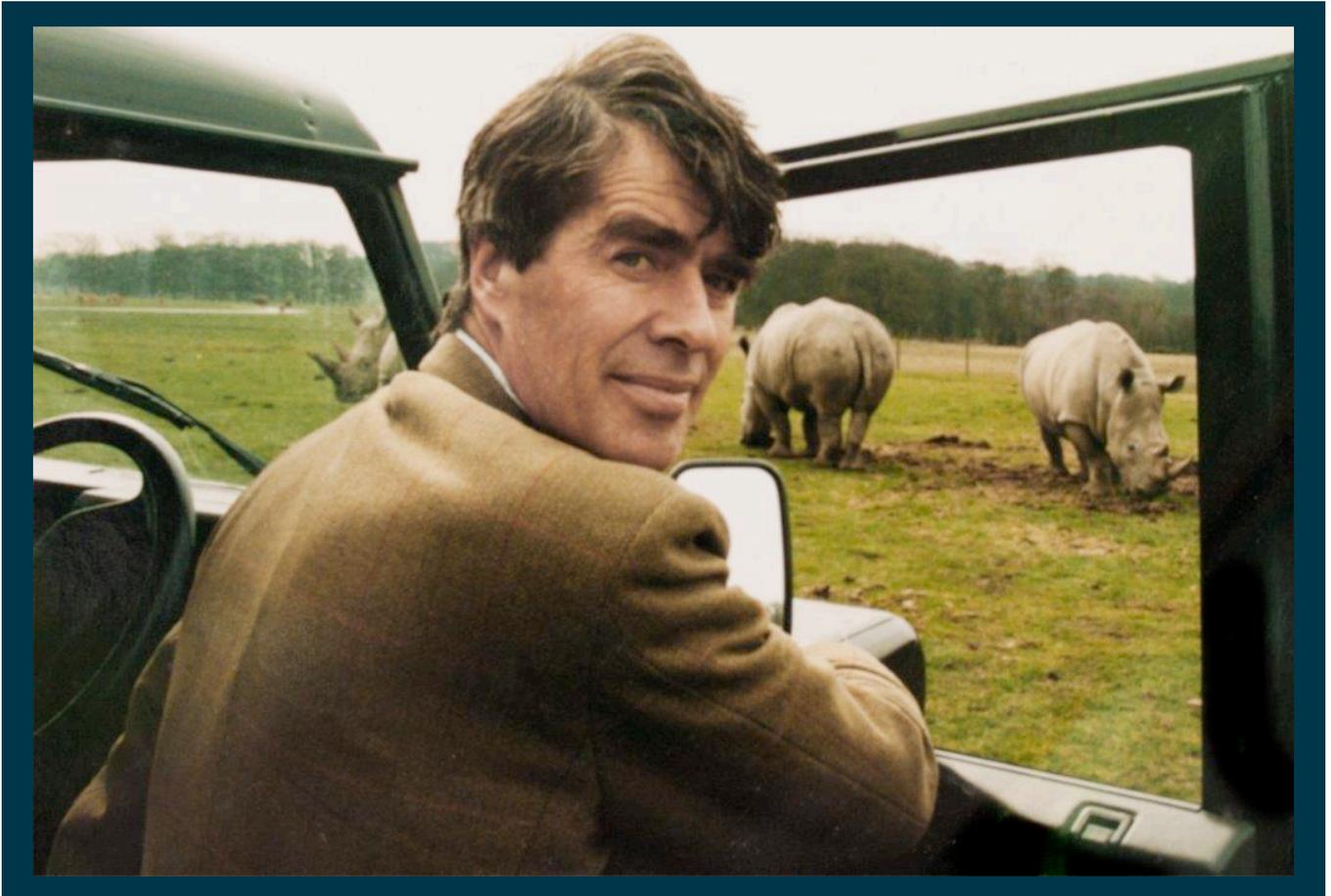


NICK ELLERTON
5 February 1949 – 29 March 2014



Obituary

Sadly this reports that Nick Ellerton died suddenly in the early morning of Saturday 29 March 2014, when he suffered a heart attack, in Sri Lanka.

Nick worked as Deputy, then Curator of Mammals at the North of England Zoological Society (Chester Zoo) for 31 years before moving to Knowsley Safari Park for 11 years. Together with his longtime partner Penny Boyd (formerly of Burstow Wildlife Sanctuary in the UK, and latterly also at Knowsley) they moved to Sri Lanka in the summer of 2010 following their retirement. Having been born and raised in Kenya, Nick's interest in animals was strong from an early age and he was incredibly knowledgeable about all kinds of species (not just mammals). He had animal handling skills second-to-none, and his intuition around animals was extraordinary. Above all he

really knew and cared about animal welfare and was prepared to be vocal about those issues. He always put the needs of the animals first and foremost, even though it made him politically unpopular at times. He was a man ahead of his time in Zoos, and particularly drove changes in our attitude to elephant welfare and breeding so forcefully back in the 1980s. He was able to get a lot of progressive ideas around animal welfare started and worried little about the fallout for those who were not prepared to change their attitudes. Many of his colleagues learned a huge amount from him, and he was indeed a very significant and inspiring person within the zoo world for many early careers.

Those who knew Nick well, are aware that he lived life to the full! He was extremely well-read, an incorrigible raconteur, an excellent

cook, a red wine lover and a loyal friend. At times he had some outrageous opinions, strongly expressed, but was always willing to listen to challenges to those views, even if this did not always shift his own.

Nick was probably the most observant person I have ever known. He noticed everything. He felt strongly about looking after his own back yard before suggesting to other countries how to look after theirs. He was realistic in the advice he offered to overseas colleagues about animal and disease management because he understood the challenges faced as he was widely travelled. He was happiest beside a river with a fly rod (and a gin), not only because he loved his fishing, but because he loved the countryside and everything going on in it. The zoo world has lost a true character. **Penny Rudd.**

More about Nick Ellerton from Penny

As far as Nick's CV is concerned, he worked at the Zoos for 31 years and started off pretty well straight from school as far as I can work out at 17-18 years old! He started at Chester as a Keeper and specialised a bit in primates but worked on practically every section at various times before becoming the Curator of Primates. Afterwards he was made Assistant General Curator and then finally the Curator of Mammals.

Nick then worked about 10-11 years at Knowsley as their Animal Manager before retiring to Sri Lanka. He had been born (in Kikuyu) and raised in Kenya where he had many, many wild animal pets. He was public school educated at St Edwards in Oxford, UK (known as 'Teddies') and always had a passion for Rhinos and fishing! His general knowledge and animal handling skills were simply the best. As you know only too well, he was a complete rogue in many ways, a womaniser, a drinker, a smoker, an avid reader, an amazingly entertaining raconteur, a great cook for things he liked to eat (he ostracised people who liked Quiche!), the most infuriatingly impatient man and the most genuinely broadly capable 'animal person' on the planet.

He was also a remarkably good people-manager who taught well and inspired outstanding loyalty from those who understood him. Although he was blunt and outspoken in his views, somehow his forceful personality meant that people still liked him despite that. He was both scrupulously honest, morally incorrigible and incomprehensible at the same time!

He did a massive amount to promote Elephant welfare in zoos and where possible in logging camps *in-situ* too, and had strong opinions on keeping elephants in unchained environments which could only be done if zoos were prepared to invest in adequate facilities. Woe-betide any zoo who

argued against this. He also wanted natural breeding - so facilities had to be built to enable bulls to be safely housed, and for females to deliver calves without human intervention and disturbance.

Many, many exotic species in European Zoos (and indeed in Indian Zoos when he helped with launching the health screening and individual identification techniques) have a lot to be grateful to Nick Ellerton for. He berated countries who would in his view 'plunder' third world collections and cherry-pick the best species from smaller collections and take them back home for commercial purposes. He was certainly not naïve to the 'goings-on' in this complicated world.

He also loved British wildlife and had amazing identification skills for Mammals, Birds, Fish, plants and insects. He was a genuinely good all-round naturalist and he was incredibly observant. He rarely missed anything and would know where many of the wild birds were nesting in the Zoo!

In latter years in Sri Lanka, he was saddened by the Elephant situation there which meant that the herds were often pushed from pillar to post by people with firecrackers as they were not really wanted anywhere near habitation, and they were forced to keep moving. He mourned the loss of a female elephant knocked over by a truck on the road, and the fact that no one would humanely destroy this dying animal, so he sat by the roadside with her protecting her from being prodded and poked as she took two days to die. He would not leave her side despite witnessing such sadness.

This was a complicated man.

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Editor's Note :

The objective of this series of pages is not only to honor a gentleman (Nick Ellerton) who gave a great deal to the zoo community in his region, but also to honor him for giving much to the zoo community in South Asia, particularly to India in the 1980's and again to the zoos in Sri Lanka from 2010 to present. I can't speak for Sri Lanka but I was in India running Zoo Outreach Organisation in the early 1970's.

Take time to read the article below entitled Sangai Breeding Strategy Discussions at Calcutta Zoo - May 1988, by Sally Walker which is followed by succinct advice from Nick Ellerton after his visit to Calcutta to get the breeding of Manipur Brow Antlered Deer or "Sangai" on right track.

In this first article, it is explained succinctly what the situation and problems were regarding breeding of this highly threatened species and how difficult it was to get help from expert zoo personnel that had overcome those problems. Government officers were very reticent to get foreign experts and it took years to straighten out some protocol. At the right time, important people in Calcutta managed to arrange a visit to the Alipore Zoo in Calcutta by an expert in all aspects of animal breeding, rearing and health. This was a young Nick Ellerton who came from an upper class family and joined the Chester Zoo as a zookeeper. Nick was then a Curator and had learned a great deal about zoo management.

He accepted the invitation to Calcutta and blew the minds of locals with his expertise. He refused to let people call him an expert and was just a very straightforward human being who wanted to help. Although he stayed only two weeks, he set a precedent for international interaction that resulted in many foreigner experts to come and assist. Hats off to Nick Ellerton who modernised zoo management in India and other countries. **May he rest in peace. Sally Walker, Zoo Outreach Organisation.**

A Tribute with sadness for the early death of Nicholas Ellerton

Dammika Malsinghe*

The second time I met Nicholas or Nick as I called him later, was at the Knowsley Safari Park, England in the year 2003, when I went there with my husband and my Director of the Department of National Zoological Gardens of Sri Lanka (at that time). The Director and I went to attend a conference on zoo designing at Paignton zoo, Devon and as a part of the tour we elected to see the Knowsley Safari Park where Nick worked as the manager.

One reason for selecting Knowsley was we wanted to see a Safari Park and the other reason was the acquaintance made with Nick during his one visit to the Sri Lanka zoo.

At the entrance of the Safari Park, around 10.00 a.m. we were welcomed by Nick who came there by Land Rover. He took us around the Knowsley Park and later to his home, at where we met his partner Ms. Penny Boyd and Founder and Director of the Zoo Outreach Organization, Ms. Sally Walker. We had a nice meeting there and in that experience I understood his knowledge on his subject of zoo management.

He had been a practical zoo operator. There I remembered the words said about Nick by one of our Curators, who came to a one and half months training in UK. The Curator said Nick had been a wonderful person to him and during his stay Nick had helped him lot. That humanity was with Nick till his last breath.

Later I met Nick and Penny 2-3 times at Dehiwala zoo. They expressed their willingness to stay in Sri Lanka forever. Later I found they had settled in Puttlam area in the country which is more than 135 Km away from Colombo.

During that time I was engaged in construction of a Safari Park to the Department at Hambanthota area, down South of the country. Though we worked with consultancy groups it was necessary to receive expert advice on how to do certain things. Thereby with the consent of the Director of the Department and the consultancy groups I spoke with Nick for his opinion on providing expert advice. To my utmost pleasure Nick agreed instantly. I got a big relief from the burden of having incorrect constructions.

We had our first meeting at Dehiwala Zoo. Both Nick and Penny attended it. Thereafter we had several discussions at Dehiwala zoo and as a result we could design the zone African safari within the Safari Park. Simultaneously Nick and Penny visited the site with the consultancy groups.

One day we all went to Nick's house in Puttlam, which was in the countryside. They had made a normal Sri Lankan house in a tranquil environment. The environment was much more close to the wild and they had established contact with some wild

animals like birds, mongooses etc. and also with a cobra. I felt the harmony and pleasure they were experiencing with nature. Both Nick and Penny loved the surrounding so much. They were very interested in explaining about their pet wild animals rather than the subject matters we were dealing with. Nick described how an elephant came close to his fence one day. They had kept a water bath for birds and planted many tree bearing fruits, which attract birds. I knew that Penny was interested in planting.

Sometimes when they came to the zoo or to Colombo, they used to go to a famous plant sales center at Battaramulla. One day I saw them carrying bundles of plants here and there. They were very happy in selecting plants. Nick was eagerly carrying plants to the vehicle for Penny. Even now I remember the smile on his face at that occasion.

I used to give 'How are you?' phone calls to Nick. Last month also I gave him such a call but no one answered. After few minutes the Curator who stayed with him at Knowsley Safari Park came to meet me and said 'You Know, Nick has passed away by an accident'. I was told that the accident happened to another person and by seeing it Nick had heart attack.

Penny Boyd was shattered by Nick's death as was Penny Rudd but then we, also, his friends and colleagues, all were devastated. We lost our good expert on zoo subjects. Personally I lost a good friend with whom I could talk about any zoo matter. We have to accept life as it is, however.

According to my religion, Buddhism, '**Nick I wish you happy births during *Sansara* and achieve *Nibbana* one day**'.



Nick chatting with the team that would raise the Safari Park

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Nick Ellerton ... long term mentor and friend

Sally R. Walker*

Nick Ellerton was a very, very good friend of mine. I am sad that he could not live longer. For some years he and his mate, Penny Boyd, had been living in Sri Lanka and we discussed meeting several times as I often visited Sri Lanka, but it didn't happen and now it will never happen.

I would like to start with life, however, and how Nick enriched my life, my conservation passion and my sense of humour. I am indebted to Mrs. Ann Wright, of Calcutta, a well-known and very active wildlife woman for inviting me to a small meeting featuring the Manipur Brow-antlered deer (Sangai) in Calcutta. Nick was the guest of honor and it was the first time I had met him. Nick loved all animals but was particularly fond of ungulates and particularly threatened ones. I had done a lot of work on Sangai including visits to all the zoos in India that held Sangai and had put together a crude studbook. The meeting went well ... on the next page there are some recommendations Nick made to the Calcutta Zoo Director, Sri A.K. Das that I believe were implemented.

After this meeting Nick and I stayed in touch. I invited him to a Sangai PHVA and other events and on my trips to U.K. and U.S.A. I managed visit him and Chester Zoo very often. Nick was extremely supportive of me and of ZOO and convinced Chester Zoo and later Knowsley Safari Park to assist Zoo Outreach Organisation financially. Chester Zoo still does. Every visit, he took me on his rounds of the zoo and pointed out every little thing that he thought would interest me. I learned a lot from him and will never forget his hospitality, generosity, kindness and dry sense of humour. The last years I visited, I also enjoyed the company of Nick's companion, Penny Boyd. She is a most talented individual in photography, education and in tolerating Nick's eccentricities. When Nick was napping, Penny and I used to take the dogs and cat for a walk in the country atmosphere surrounding the zoo where they lived. Then he

would wake up and take me in the Rover all around Knowsley after which he would make dinner ... he was a marvelous cook and I always left the place a few pounds lighter.

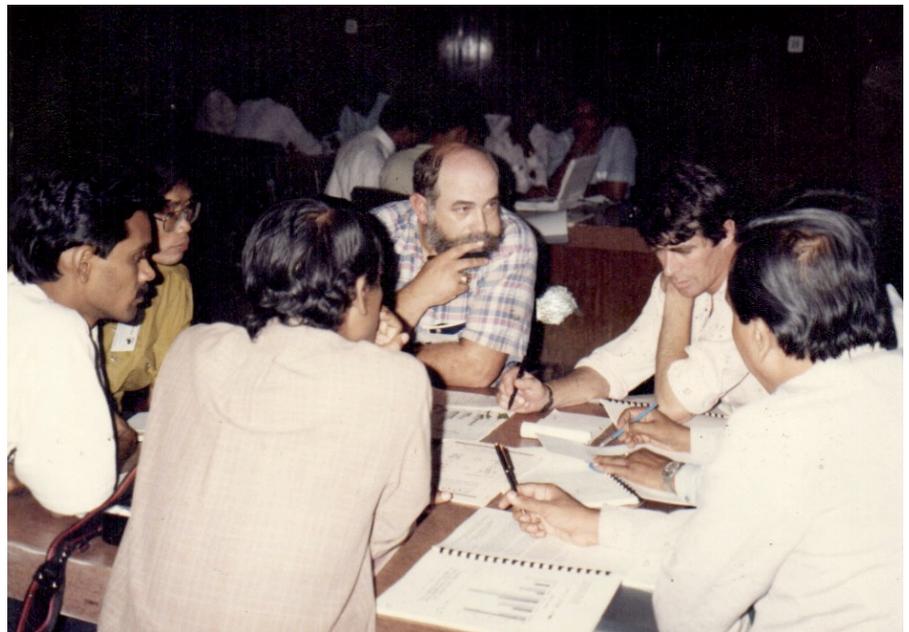
I continued my visits until he moved to Sri Lanka, quite ironically, because Sri Lanka was way closer to me and my office which was in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. I could get to Sri Lanka in just a few hours instead of the almost two-day flight to USA. In any case at that time, I spent months in USA looking after my elderly parents until they passed on.

Another Penny in Nick's life was Penny Rudd, a long-term employee at Chester Zoo and a rock to Nick. They used to go fishing often and were great buddies. Penny is an amazing person also ... when I met her she was looking after some valuable little furry creatures that needed a Mom, right in her admin office. She is one of those people that never say no and also

never give up...her patience, energy and sense of humour never flagged.

I was so proud of Nick for his work with the zoo community of Sri Lanka, particularly in giving advice and helping the zoo personnel who were constructing a Safari Park in the South of Sri Lanka. Dammika Malasinghe had been working on this for some time and she was very happy to get an experienced zooman like Nick to help with construction plans.

Penny Rudd told me what happened to Nick on his last day of life. He was driving home from the fruit market with delicacies for the birds that hovered over his house and the many bird feeding stations in the garden. It was early morning on Saturday 29 March 2014, when he suffered a fatal heart attack. It is said the he had the fatal heart attack upon seeing the accident of another person. There was simply nothing to be done for him by the time he was taken to the local hospital.



Nick Ellerton (Mysore, 1992) attended the first Population and Habitat Viability Assessment (PHVA) Workshop, held in India or South Asia. It was organised in Mysore, Karnataka at the Mysore Zoo which held Sangai. He is leading one of the several Working Groups. Photo by Sally Walker.

Sangai Breeding Strategy Discussions at Calcutta Zoo - May 1988

Sally Walker*

A Reprint from ZOO'S PRINT, May 1988

The Manipur Brow-antlered Deer (*Cervus eldi eldi*) is also known as the Elds Deer. Locally the deer is called "Sangai", meaning "the one who looks at you". The Sangai is referred to even by people who know better as the "Thamin" deer, however the Thamin Deer (*Cervus eldi thamin*) is the Burmese variety. There is yet another sub-species (*Cervus eldi siamensis*) which is from Thailand.

The Sangai is one of the most endangered mammals in the world. Feared extinct in the mid-fifties, someone (Perhaps E.P.Gee, according to some sources), convinced the Commissioner of Manipur to send a pair to Calcutta Zoo in 1959 and later to the Delhi Zoo in 1962. The Calcutta group started breeding the following year (1960) and the Delhi group also the year after they were received. They bred steadily and both zoos have spared breeding pairs or groups to several zoos in the country.

New Delhi sent deer to Mysore, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Nandankanan, Trivandrum and Imphal. Calcutta Zoo has given pairs to Mysore, Trivandrum and Bhilai Steel Plant. Mysore gave deer to Madras, Trivandrum and Gauhati zoos. Both Calcutta and Delhi had given animals for ill-fated and fatal release programmes in the wild at Keibul Lamjao and Jalpalguri Sanctuary.

Although there were two separate pairs of founder animals for Calcutta and New Delhi, only one Indian zoo collected deer from each group: that was Mysore. The Mysore Zoo lost their Delhi male in the same year and subsequently acquired 1.2 from Calcutta. Since there was only one male and several offspring were born in the years to come we have reason to think that some of the offspring of this group derives from the two groups instead of one. Due to lack of marking techniques, however, we do not know which this may be. Although Mysore has spared deer to Madras, Gauhati and Trivandrum, only the Madras deer are surviving and breeding.

Over the past 30 years many Sangai have been born in those zoos. From time to time there would be an article of paper calling attention to the fact that the deer must be inbred and bloodlines in the late 70's between Delhi Zoo and Calcutta Zoo to exchange animals to strengthen the gene pool, but it was cancelled.

Despite the occasional feeble protest, the general feeling was that the Sangai was "safe" in captivity. A "100 plus" figure for Manipur deer in Indian zoos was quoted in ensuing years as a captive breeding story and indeed it is. BUT, not without some problems. A 1987-88 survey, (sponsored by the West German Zoological Society for Conservation of Species and Populations) which published report is pending,

indicated distressing trends. Despite the fact that the animals had been liberally spared to several zoos and had steadily increased from 1960, since 1980 the birth rate had fluctuated in a steady decline. Moreover, as the herds increased up to 1980 it had been with a slight preponderance of males, which as they came of breeding age, fought and killed other males and even females, further reducing the gains made up to 1980. There is a positive correlation between the fluctuating birth rates in the early 1980's and the high death rate due to fighting. T.B. and other diseases have taken a toll as well. On the positive side there has been a very low rate of infant mortality, particularly when compared with births of similar Burmese subspecies in Western zoos.

In 1982 an important gap was taken by the Department of Wildlife, Government of India, in calling an all-India meeting of zoo directors and designating certain appropriate zoos as captive breeding centres for endangered species. Calcutta, New Delhi and Mysore were designated as the main breeding centres and National Zoo as Studbook Keeper. Not much had been done of a practical nature, however, due to the lack of detailed breeding records from all zoos holding the species and a lack of experience in rectifying this particular type of complex and serious management problem. Expertise and action was wanted and needed.

As early as 1979 (and probably even before) others were fretting over this problem and trying to find ways to help Indian Zoo personnel with this. In 1979 the General Secretary of the Wildlife Society of Meghalaya, Mr. Peter Thorne, wrote a letter to Mrs. Anne Wright, a founder trustee of the World Wildlife Fund, India and a member of the Indian Board for Wildlife attesting the extreme situation of the wild population and commenting that in his opinion the only hope of saving the species may be captive breeding.

Anne Wright, who had obviously been thinking about this and making inquiries for some time, immediately responded with a suggestion that an expert from some zoo which had dealt with the inbreeding problem with other species should be invited over to assess the situation in the Indian zoos and suggest a long-term breeding strategy for the existing herds.

Anne Wright not only suggested this but immediately went into action, galvanising a number of other important wildlife and zoo experts and enthusiasts in the process. For the next three years, letters flew back and forth between Wright, Thorne, Samar

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Singh, Peter Scott, Bernard Bertrand, and others, trying to locate and bring a suitable advisor to India. Finding a person experienced in genetic planning and herd management was not difficult but the procedure and protocol to bring such a person to India is more complex and sensitive than sending a man to the moon.

Consequently there was a sort of dull spell for some years, then, *voila*, everything came together and a "New Noah" (e.g. Nick Ellerton) as the Calcutta Newspaper dubbed him (to his great embarrassment) appeared. This was a result of years of effort spearheaded by Anne Wright and finally brought to a meaningful conclusion by her also.

Nick Ellerton, who started his zoo career as a keeper in the Chester Zoo and is now Curator of the 2nd largest collection in UK at the same zoo spent two weeks in Calcutta and New Delhi, observing the Sangai herds and consulting with virtually every level of zoo, wildlife and governmental personnel. His interview on general aspects of zoo management will appear in a subsequent issue of ZP and hopefully a report of his visit to New Delhi and the result of his discussion there.

In Calcutta, Mr. Ellerton first met with Mr. A.K. Das, Director, Calcutta Zoo and Mr. Benerjee of the Calcutta Zoo Committee, Mrs. Anne Wright and others on the zoo staff took Nick around the zoo and discussed the history of the Sangai herd. The following day Ellerton, along with Tona Crukshank, a Veterinary Nurse from Bristol Zoo studied the herd and enclosures in more detail with the help of Mr. Choudery, Asst. Director and the Sangai keeper, Mr. Subash Buch.

A discussion with Mr. Ashok Kapur, Secretary, Department of Environment, and Vice President of the Zoo Committee was followed by a well-attended public lecture at which the entire zoo committee was present.

Finally Ellerton presented his conclusions in a meeting at the zoo with the President of the Zoo, Mrs. Supriya Acharya, Mrs. Wright, Mr. Das, Mr. Banerjee, Dr. Lahiri Choudhury, and Ms. Tona Crukshank.

In brief, Mr. Ellerton's initial report suggested: Considerable reason for optimism due to high birth rate and low infant mortality over the years. There was a need for addressing the problems of male aggression which was responsible for a great many deaths during rut and that of T.B. in the herd.

Suggested management policy included identifying individual animals so that inbreeding can be controlled, starting a "Herd Book" to serve as a basis for a Studbook when individual animals are identified, examination of data on aggression and injuries,

redesign of enclosures for easier handling, safety and comfort of animals (including detailed points), formation of joint management group on a national level, ensuring the containment of disease before moving or examining the animals to reduce stress.

After Mr. Ellerton's departure to Delhi, Mrs. Wright requested Ms Crukshank to take the assistance of the Calcutta zoo staff in preparing a model "Herd Book" suggested by Ellerton. This will be donated to the zoo and can serve as a model for zoos and other herd books involving species which are not individual identified.

Ms. Crukshank, will photograph each animal and collect all possible information from Calcutta zookeeper Subash Buch as well as Director A.K. Das and other staff. It was noted that Mr. Buch could approach the animals without alarming them and was keenly interested in his work.

One problem we noted in the recent Sangai census of zoos last year was that some zoos had not had identified the sex of the animal at birth which has created lacunae in later analysis of data. Since animals are not generally examined here at birth it was said to be impossible to identify the sex until appearance of antlers some months later.

Mr. Ellerton sorted out that problem in four succinct and simple words: "See how they pee." In females the stream of urine normally points backward or straight down and in males, forward as a result of placement of sex organs. This can be observed from day one.

Sometimes the word "expert" is resented and particularly "foreign expert". Rightfully so at times. Ellerton himself was adamant in rejecting the word. Ellerton was quick to admit that western zoos didn't have the problems to contend with the same as we do in India and to say that he and his staff could learn so many things from Indian zoo personnel.

What Indian zoos need more than foreign or even domestic "experts" can be better expressed as global interaction and sharing of experience with zoo personnel from every part of India and the world over. Ellerton's attitude exemplified that attitude.

The point is that Indian zoos have been largely isolated from the world zoo establishment and even each other. Zoos in some continents have the definite advantage of tremendous communication and cooperation which Indian zoos are lacking. This year a great many zoo personnel from other countries are coming over. Instead of saying they are "experts" coming to "advise", let us say they are "colleagues, coming to communicate" ... about our common problem as world citizens in the area of captive breeding and conservation.

Some Recommendations from Mr. Nick Ellerton, Curator, Chester Zoo, for the Herd of Manipur Deer at Alipore, Calcutta, April 1988

Anon

Nick Ellerton handed over a report in which he stressed the value of the deer which he felt was not only the rarest deer but one of the rarest mammals in the world. He described the system in Britain where monetary value would not be put upon such a rare species and where a Studbook would be kept by the concerned Zoo and Species Coordinator would be elected. A Species Coordinator would plan the breeding management in order to save the species.

Several healthy herds could thus be built up in different Zoos, the ultimate aim being to reintroduce the species to its natural environment. An example of this being the Pere David's Deer which was saved from extinction through captive breeding and reintroduced into China last year.

Nick went on to recommend the establishment of a Herd Book to keep detailed data and records of every animal and later a Studbook. Since the Keeper at Alipore Zoo, Subbash Bunk, considers that it is possible to handle the newborns until the age of approximately one month, he advised the weight recording and ear tagging be carried out then. In this way, individuals can be accurately and permanently identified and a proper breeding management be followed, thus ensuring that a father does not mate with a daughter, and a son with a mother, etc.

He also felt that inbreeding was a major problem and offered to assist a planned breeding programme by sending ear tagging equipment and ear tags through the British Council. Also a stungun, blow pipe and appropriate drugs could come via the British Council. He said the blow pipe is a simple piece of equipment and providing the right diameter was available, even a curtain rail would do. The latest drugs are much improved, he said also.

Immobilisation equipment is required for the ear-tagging of older deer and for veterinary purposes such as blood sampling and transportation. A small amount of the drug can sedate a deer sufficiently to allow it to be lead from one paddock to another without undue stress, as will be required for the breeding management process. The non-availability of drugs was discussed and Nick agreed to contact the manufacturer in England with a view to obtaining an import licence through the Company's offices in India. WWF, Eastern Region could help obtain the drugs and assist in getting them through Customs. The recommended drug Rompon is manufactured by Roche & Company.

With regard to the problem of diseases such as TB, Nick queried the wisdom of housing the more common Eland and Axis deer, both carriers of the disease in the enclosure adjacent to the rare Brow-antlered deer. Sri A.K. Das, Director, Alipore Zoo considered that it would be possible to move the Eland.

Nick felt that to ensure an epidemic within the zoo did not wipe out the entire breeding stock, it would be safest to establish a herd outside the zoo or in the proposed new zoo premises.

He also considered that the low infant mortality is not a problem but death due to injury (which IS common) should be researched. Cause of death should, therefore, be immediately established in order that repetition can be prevented. Injury due to fighting between paddock fences could be reduced by replaced the present wiring with a smaller and finer mesh.

Closing the discussion, Nick recommended that a minimum of three paddocks and, therefore, three breeding herds be maintained under this proposed breeding programme. Ultimately, excess animals, e.g. males, will have to be housed separately in adjacent enclosures.