

# Changing Zoos in a whole country – Nepal as a Case Study

Sally Walker\* and R. Marimuthu\*\*

*This paper relates how zoo associations can promote the improvement of zoos and catalyze zoo legislation using the framework of WAZA's "needy zoo" Initiative, WAZA's Assessment Tool, as well as a little patience and creativity.*

Central Zoo was the "only zoo" in Nepal but over time, several captive wild animal facilities zoos, mini zoos, deer parks and breeding centres materialized, some spurious and some with a genuine purpose. The Zoo Outreach Organisation (ZOO) representing the South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation (SAZARC) encouraged law ministry personnel and also Central Zoo, then under the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) to act for inspection and some form of regulation of these facilities, but at that time it was in the interest of Central Zoo to maintain that their zoo was the only zoo, so nothing was done.

In 2008 when the Nepal Royal Family handed over many of their interests to a newly formed Communist government, KMTNC morphed into the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), ZOO and SAZARC decided to address the issue of proliferating and spurious wild animal facilities in a manner that could not be ignored, thinking perhaps that an organization outside the country might more politic and practical in raising the issue.

The Zoo Outreach Organisation had experience in such matters, having politely nudged the concerned Ministries and Departments in the Government of India towards a solution to the same, but much worse problem in the country from about 1985 – 1991. In India, where maharajas and zamindars had kept wild animals in captivity for their personal use for centuries, Indian zoo history can be said to begin in 1806 when the Government of Bengal provided funds for an Indian Natural History Project which was the brainchild of Governor General Lord Arthur Wellesley who proposed to collect, describe and draw all the vertebrates of the Indian Subcontinent. The Project was housed about 30 km outside Calcutta at the Governor General's summer residence, which boasted beautifully landscaped grounds with undulating contours, large trees and a nearby river. Before long the many foreign guests of the Governor General were joined by denizens of Barrackpore Cantonment and even the people of Calcutta in enjoying a stroll in what quickly came to be called the Barrackpore Park Menagerie. The Barrackpore Menagerie was known also as the "zoo in the park" and boasted many exotic as well as indigenous animals.

The Indian Natural History Project lasted only five years but the Menagerie as a public facility was to endure until 1888 and hosted many prestigious guests. Sir Stamford Raffles visited about three times and is believed to have been strongly influenced by it when he founded the famed London Zoo. The number

of zoos in India grew very slowly. From 1806 – 1972, a span of 166 years which saw the formation of 44 zoos. After the passage of the Wildlife (Protection) Act in 1972 and the start of Project Tiger in 1975, however, India experienced an unprecedented interest in wildlife, and with it came an unprecedented inclination to start zoos. Between 1972 – 1990 a total of about 300 animal facilities ostensibly for the purpose of public recreation were set up. Somehow the government had not been able to keep up with this trend as evidenced by the DOE having published a booklet entitled Zoos, Botanical Gardens and National Parks in India which listed 44 zoos of varied quality and description. These were considered the "genuine" zoos but many of them were inferior to several unlisted zoos, also government initiated and owned.

In 1985, Zoo Outreach Organisation ZOO was founded at the request of and fully funded by DOE with a mandate to provide technical and educational support to zoos. ZOO followed up any deserving issue and in a couple of years, after a relatively simple postal card survey, published a list of 151 zoos. About a year later a big government zoo, the Nandankanan Zoological Park, brought out a booklet listing 49 zoos. It was difficult for DOE to completely ignore these listings, one by an NGO set up and funded by DOE and another produced by a government institution. Therefore this information got considerable attention.

***Thus, when concerned about zoos in a country, one method of creating government interest is to count the existing wild animal facilities open to the public regardless of size or quality and publish the result.***

Over next few years the inclination of the Department of Environment and later the Ministry to address the issue of their dramatically proliferating animal facilities waxed and waned. ZOO Founder supported herself by writing articles on zoos in an array of publications with a direct or indirect hint for regulation. About 300 articles over a period of 4-5 years also gets attention. ***Therefore, when concerned about zoos in a country, write positive and constructive articles about zoos generally, without criticizing their on site-managers but focusing responsibility where it belongs, e.g., the government.***

In case of the Central Zoo, ZOO adopted a similar strategy for catalyzing the improvement of zoos in Nepal, sending a staff member, R. Marimuthu, to visit and collect information about the wild animal facilities which were open to the public. He collected names, location and vital information on 26 wild animal facilities, of which some were forest and wildlife

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\*Director, SAZARC & ZOO <sallyrwalker@aol.com>

\*\*Education Officer, ZOO <marimuthu@zooreach.org>

department breeding centres and deer parks. Others, however, were spurious institutions with suffering animals, poor visitor facilities, insufficient staff, budget, etc ; in short, zoos needing improvement. ZOO then took a somewhat radical step and published the list of Nepal's wild animal facilities and statistics (as a complete surprise to everyone in Nepal) in the monthly magazine ZOOS' PRINT.

The article also encouraged the Central Zoo, as the best zoo in Nepal to take up the issue of proliferating and poor zoos in their country with help from their administrator, the National Trust for Nature Conservation which could, in turn, more effectively approach the government. This publication of data, statement of confidence in the Central Zoo and NTNC and appeal for Central Zoo/NTNC to take the issue forward, made it easier for them to do so. In a short time the National Trust for Nature Conservation approved funds for conducting their own inspection of these facilities and this taking the lead in the issue.

***Thus, when trying to help a zoo, it is important to do so in a way that they and their officers take the lead. In this instant, ZOO maintained a very low profile in the country, and the ownership of the project and product is clearly that of Nepal.***

What ZOO & SAZARC could do at this juncture was to provide training to help the Nepal zoo carry out its project with more information, which was done during the Eighth SAZARC Conference with intensive training on zoo Legislation, including Norms & Standards.

#### **Training in Zoo Legislation**

SAZARC (South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation) conducted its 8th Annual Conference with a training in Zoo Legislation including Norms & Standards, Tools featured WAZA's Assessment device, Central Zoo Authority's Norms and Standards and South Africa's zoo legislation. The trainers were Dave Morgan, one of the Drafting Committee for the Assessment Tool, Brij Kishor Gupta, Evaluation and Monitoring Officer of the Central Zoo Authority and Mike Jordan, then Curator of Chester Zoo. SAZARC invited and sponsored policy makers in government as well as zoo personnel. Nepal was represented at the meeting by Zoo In-Charge Mrs. Sarita Jnawali and Ravi Aryal, a staff member from the Nepal Law Ministry. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh also were represented by senior policy makers accompanying their zoo managers and vets to the meeting, all of whom absorbed the training information.

After presentations, demonstrations, and working group discussions country by country with facilitation by a Resource person or ZOO staff, all the groups agreed to accept the WAZA Assessment tool as an official SAZARC aid and instrument for creation of standards and norms for zoo legislation and inspecting their animal facilities. It was particularly effective to have the policy makers in the groups as they can take

the legal issue back to the country and make it happen.

Upon returning to Nepal an inspection team prepared to tour the established zoos. The team consisted of Central Zoo, NTNC Project Manager, Veterinary Officer, Administrative Officer and Accounts Officer between April and May 2008.

On beginning the inspection tour, the inspectors found that it was not possible to use the detailed tool. They developed an abridged version of the tool which fit their facilities better. According to their Report, the survey was to establish baseline information about the animal facilities which were established and operational in Nepal. It was felt that the survey would be helpful in designing strategy and creating a management plan and guidelines to meet criteria set by WAZA.

Again quoting from the Report, the survey methodology was 1. direct observation of facilities and 2. interaction with management authorities and animal keepers. The animal keeping records (wherever available) were also studied and discussed with the concerned authorities. During the visit, interaction with managers, keepers and the management team was done to gather the necessary information and share management experience gained by the Central Zoo. The inspection team inspected 9 zoos (see table and sample survey form below).

#### **List of Facilities inspected first tour Zoo like facilities:**

1. Fulbari Resort, Pokhara
2. Sahid Smarak Park, Hetauda
3. Mani Mukunda Sen Park, Butwal
4. Nepalgunj Zoo
5. Yalambar Park, Dharan
6. Hariyali Community Forest, Dharan
7. Panchakanya Mini Zoo

#### **Breeding Centres:**

1. Gharial Breeding Centre, Kasara, Chitwan
2. Elephant Breeding Centre, Khorshor, Chitwan

#### **Other facilities**

1. Mrigasthali Deer Park, Kathmandu

#### **Selected Recommendations from Report**

- Initiate preparation of zoo legislation and lobby for official endorsement.
- Prepare Zoo Management Guideline from Legislation.
- Establish network for facilities with Central Zoo as custodian of all
- Help other facilities lobby to come within the legal framework
- Develop mechanism to upgrade information of all zoos in Nepal
- Find out all privately owned zoos
- Establish good animal hospital at Central Zoo for health services to other Nepal zoos.
- Assist facilities to upgrade existing established zoo based on criteria set by WAZA.
- Regularly organize technical interaction sessions for all facilities.
- Make efforts to expand zoo areas.

## Sample Survey Form

### Nepalgunj Zoo, Nepalgunj

**Location:** This zoo is situated at the centre of Nepalgunj city which is 450 km west of Kathmandu.

**Area:** 1.36 hectore

**Establishment:** The Park was established in 1964 and the animal exhibit started in 1997 by bringing few pairs of Spotted Deer and Black Buck from the Central Zoo, Kathmandu.

**Staff:** One full time staff. He was trained at the Central Zoo.

**Management:** The zoo is run by municipality. Until last year municipality used to lease the park to private parties each year through open tender.

**Condition of enclosure and enrichment:** Spotted Deer and Black Buck enclosures are overcrowded. Aviaries are in good condition but enrichment arrangement is poor.

**Animal Care/ Veterinary care:** Food preparation and formulation is done in a similar way as at the Central Zoo.

**Record keeping:** Records of individual animals are not kept and the system of recording information is not suitable for ready examination. Records are kept at municipality head office rather than at the park. The facility is not under the supervision of veterinarian. Veterinary facility is provided by District Livestock Service Office upon the request from park authority but the supervision and care is not adequate.

**Signage:** The animals are not properly identified and interpreted for the visiting public.

**Educational Program:** None

**Additional attraction:** This animal facility is a part of a beautiful Park and a popular picnic spot.

**Annual Visitor:** 100,000 -

**Entry Fee:** Adult: Rs: 5/-  
Children/ Student: Rs 2/-

### Animal Inventory

S.N	English Name	Scientific Name	Number			Total
			Male	Female	Unknown	
1	Spotted Deer	<i>Axis axis</i>	15	8	0	23
2	Black Buck	<i>Antelope cervicapra</i>	0	12	0	20
3	Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	1	1	0	2
4	Ganges Fox	<i>Ursus melleogris</i>	1	1	0	2
5	Budgerigar	<i>Melopsittacus undulatus</i>	0	0	20	20
6	Rabbit	<i>Cuniculus cuniculus</i>	2	3	0	5
7	Ganges pig	<i>Cavia aperea</i>	2	2	0	4
8	Red collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	0	0	12	12
9	Japanese Bantam					
Grand Total						86

## Current situation Nepal

According to information collected by our researcher, there are more facilities that need to be inspected and listed. However, many of them are located in remote places and time and resources are limited. The recent official Survey and Report by the team appointed by the National Trust for Nature Conservation NTNC have, for all practical purposes, served the purpose of calling attention to the problem and the need for zoo regulation and legislated standards.

Recently the Director, Central Zoo with the survey report to hand spoke to appropriate government officials from the Minister on down who now understand the need for legislation which would regulate the setting up of zoos, lay down standards for operation and provide for inspection. In November, Director set up a meeting with the NTNC and zoo lawyer on zoo legislation with representation from the Forest Ministry, The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation DNPWC and National Trust for Nature Conservation NTNC. It was the first meeting of this kind and there was very serious discussion on the legal aspects of the zoo. This team now was clear on the urgency of the zoo policy, act and legislation and another discussion with the same representatives is to take place shortly.

Zoo Outreach Organisation and SAZARC are in touch with several members of NTNC and Central Zoo staff in connection with other projects as well as this one and will be visiting Nepal again within a few months to conduct a major educator training series. Before that visit, the Annual SAZARC Conference training will again focus on zoo legislation, fine-tuning and

wording, standards and inspection. We feel Nepal is very much on track and will follow through to the achievement of the goal.

## Brief update of other South Asian countries

**Bangladesh** - After SAZARC legislation training Bangladesh zoo persons formulated a draft document using the WAZA assessment tool. They sent their document to SAZARC Director who provided an expert in animal law to vet the document for them before sending to Government.

**Sri Lanka** - Sri Lanka already has a very simple legislative document, that is, the "National Zoological Gardens Act," giving all powers to NZG. At the SAZARC Zoo Legislation Training, the attending Sri Lankan ministry official, an Additional Secretary in the concerned Ministry and zoo personnel decided to formulate norms and standards and add as amendments to their existing act. This is how it was done so quickly in India and is a very good strategy. As the SAZARC Annual Conference is being held in Sri Lanka in February, if they have not been able to formulate their amendment due to time constraint, etc., there will be people such as Chris Vehrs, Miranda Stevenson and Dave Morgan to help them with a document and public pressure due to press coverage of the conference to give a polight nudge.

**Pakistan** conducted a national level meeting on legislation some years ago. Directors were interested in legislation for zoos and willing to take it farther, but there were formidable obstacles to national legislation. Provincial legislation may be the only form of regulation practicable in the country.

**Bhutan** has been invited to SAZARC on the basis of their so-called "mini-zoo and gharial breeding centre" last 3-4 years but could not attend. Also until now, ZOO and SAZARC did not have a useful contact in Bhutan, a situation that has been rectified in the last few months. ZOO is now providing training in education and field survey techniques to the Bhutan Wildlife Department as fast as funds can be raised and technical people freed to do so. In November two ZOO staff made a visit to Bhutan as a courtesy and interacted with the department staff and explained zoo's activities. Their report is that there are now two animal facilities there called the Takin Preserve which is a rehabilitation center maintained by Nature Conservation Division, Thimphu and the Gharial Conservation Program Centre, maintained by Forest Department of Bhutan at Phuentsholing, Bhutan. We have invited a relatively senior Wildlife Department officer to SAZARC with its zoo legislation training and follow up as we visit Bhutan on other training missions.

**Afghanistan** - government in no position to entertain legislation at this time; however, the zoo has many friends who are helping in any way they can.