

# International Conference on “India’s Conservation Breeding Initiative”

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A groundbreaking International Conference on “India’s Conservation Breeding Initiative” was conducted from 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2008 on the campus of the NASC, New Delhi (India) by the Central Zoo Authority of the Ministry of Environment and Forests. It was well attended by Directors of Indian zoos of a selection of the Large, Medium and Small zoos and by zoo personnel from a wide range of zoo science disciplines and managerial positions from around the world.

This conference was groundbreaking in several ways. Foremost it was an invitation to the organized zoos of the world to communicate, cooperate, and collaborate with India, most particularly on the topic of conservation breeding of Indian fauna. This was the first time in 15 years that the Indian zoo community has actively sought such interaction, since 1993 when a senior official announced in an international symposium & PHVA for Lion-tailed macaque that assistance and particularly Indian animals from non-Indian institutions and zoos were not wanted.

The conference was the brainchild of Dr. Brij Raj Sharma who had been planning such an event for some years. Dr. Sharma, having served as Director of Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, Darjeeling as well as National Zoo, New Delhi in the past, has been Member Secretary of Central Zoo Authority for the past three odd years and has at least two more years to serve before his term is officially over. He can then apply for an extension also. Bearing this in mind Dr. Sharma made an immense effort to conduct such a conference which would bring Indian and external zoo personnel together for the purpose of improving India’s conservation breeding efforts, specifically of Indian taxa. The conference will be followed up assiduously in the remaining period of Dr. Sharma so that India will get on track with *ex situ* conservation.

The conference was first in other ways as well. It is perhaps the first large international conference organization exclusively by the Central Zoo Authority and certainly the first to fund foreign travel and hospitality of invited resource persons and hospitality for other invited participants. Hospitality was outstanding and made an impressive statement about India which did not go unnoticed by a single participant.

Some of the groundwork for the conference was laid at the 2008 Annual Conference of the IUCN SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group held in Budapest where a Working Group for Indian Conservation Breeding was organized and Dr. Sharma laid out the plans for his meeting and explained what it should achieve. A very good

group of participants from around the world helped put together a list of experts in disciplines and taxon groups which Dr. Sharma had listed. Again at the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums meeting held immediately afterwards, Dr. Sharma was given a slot on the programme to describe India’s vision, plan and hopes for the conference. Many zoo directors came forward with advice and help for selecting useful persons for the project. Also Dr. Sharma attended a meeting of the Board of the International Species Information System ISIS and discussed with members how Indian zoos could become members of ISIS and ZIMS.

For the conference ISIS/ZIMS, Conservation Breeding in all its aspects and Environmental Enrichment were the topics selected as crucial to the improvement and success of Indian zoos.

On the first day foreign invitees were treated to a tour of the Taj Mahal and the Agra Bear Centre. A late start due to early morning arrivals of final participants, traffic and crowding at the Taj conspired to lead to cancellation of the visit to the bear centre but the following day arrangements were made to return to Agra for particularly interested persons.

In the morning session of the first day, Dr. R. B. Lal, IGF (WL) & Director, Wildlife Preservation, Govt. of India enlightened the Indian Directors with Indian *in-situ* & *ex-situ* linkage-Wildlife Conservation in India and afterwards Dr. B. R. Sharma, Member Secretary, Central Zoo Authority, India reviewed “Zoos in India – legislation, regulations, policy & guidelines”. After tea Dr. S. Shivaji, Deputy Director, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, and In-Charge, Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), Hyderabad presented on “LaCONES and biotechnological interventions in Conservation Breeding of wild animals” while Dr. D. Swarup, Coordinator, National Referral Centre, Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Bareilly related the mandate of the National Referral Centre and Physical Health Check-up/ care of wild animals in Indian Zoos. For Environmental Enrichment, Dr. David Shepherdson, Conservation Programme Scientist, Oregon Zoo and Dr. Valerie Hare, Assoc. Editor, The Shape of Enrichment, USA were Resource Persons and the whole afternoon of the first day of the conference was allocated for presentations on this important topic.

On and 2<sup>nd</sup> day, foreign delegates were taken to National Zoological Park and other sites of historical and other sites, including a group which returned to Agra to see the Bear Centre. In the morning session of 22 February, Dr. Nate Flesness, Executive Director, International Species

information Systems (ISIS), Minnesota, USA introduced the Modern record keeping systems for Indian zoo directors Managing Zoos. Sri B. C. Choudhury, Wildlife Institute of India talked about the National Stud/ Herd Book of identified wild animals species in India. After that Dr. Flesness spoke on the Use of Zoological Information Management System (ZIMS) in Indian Zoos and led a discussion on Indian Zoo's joining of ZIMS. In the afternoon the Small Population management session began with Conservation Breeding – Challenges and Protocols by Dr. Robert C Lacy, Chairman, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (SSC/IUCN), USA followed by Managing populations for Conservation Breeding by Dr. Jon D Ballou, Research Scientist, Smithsonian's National Zoological Park, Washington DC, USA. After tea there was a short Discussion and the Conference Recommendation Draft was read out. In the evening there was an Ice Breaker followed by an excellent dinner hosted by Thiru S. Regupathy, Hon'ble Minister of State for Environment & Forests and Chairman, Central Zoo Authority and Ms. Meena Gupta Secretary, MOEF both of whom could meet and talk with many of the participants

The Third day of the conference and the first day when all delegates came together, the event was inaugurated at the lavish Symposia Hall of NASC first with welcome to guest and lighting of the Lamp. Dr. B.R. Sharma gave the welcome address followed by addresses by Sh. P. R. Mohanty, DGF & SS, Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India, New Delhi, Dr. Robert Lacy, Chairman, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, SSC/IUCN, Dr. Gordon Mc Gregor Reid, President, World Association of Zoos & Aquariums, and the Inaugural address by Chief Guest, Thiru S. Regupathy, Hon'ble Minister of State for Environment & Forests and Chairman, Central Zoo Authority.

At the event, the Release of CZA's Publications on Barrier Designs for Zoos by Dr. Brij Kishor Gupta & the Indian Zoo Year Book, 2008 was done by the Hon'ble Minister of State for Environment & Forests and Chairman, Central Zoo Authority. After a vote of thanks by Shri D. N. Singh, Director, National Zoological Park, New Delhi and Secretary, Indian Zoos Association and tea, participants gathered for the first Technical session.

Sh. S. C. Sharma, Chaired the first technical session where Dr. Sharma gave an address on Conservation Breeding – India's initiative followed by a World perspective of conservation breeding of wild animal species of Indian Sub-Continent by Dr. Gordon McGregor Reid, President, WAZA & DG, Chester Zoo, UK. Following lunch the Second Technical Session was Chaired by Dr. Gordon Reid, featuring the Need for Global co-operation in management of small populations in Zoo for wildlife conservation by Dr. Jon Ballou, Research Scientist, Smithsonian's National Zoological Park, Washington DC, USA, following which Working Group Coordinators for different Taxon Groups gave introductions to the topics, eg. Conservation

Breeding of Carnivores, Naim Akhtar; Herbivores, Kartick Satyanarayan; Primates and Omnivores, Brij Kishor Gupta; Birds, Vibhu Prakash, and Reptiles & Amphibians, B. C. Choudhury

Sally Walker, Zoo Outreach Organization (India), Working Groups Facilitated and provided a few guidelines for the groups and their Coordinators, Presenters and Recorders.

In the Herbivore group species to be undertaken were Nilgiri tahr, Rhinoceros, Himalayan tahr, Gaur, Markhor, Wild ass, Blue sheep, Serow and S. C. Sharma, Kartick Satyanarayan and Manoj Kumar managing the group. Carnivore group managers were S. K. Patnaik, Naim Akhtar and Sunita Pradhan with species to be undertaken Asiatic lion, Snow leopard, Bengal tiger, Clouded leopard and Asiatic Cheetah. The Primates and Bears group was managed by Brij Kishor Gupta and Ravi Kumar Singh taking up Lion-tailed macaque, Nilgiri langur, Pig-tailed macaque, Golden langur, Stump-tailed macaque and Capped langur. The Birds group was managed by Vibhu Prakash and Anupam Srivastav undertaking Cheer pheasant, Scalter's monal, Hume's pheasant, Himalayan monal, peacock pheasant, Tibetan eared pheasant, Blood pheasant and Bustard. The Reptiles and Amphibians group was managed by Vinod Rishi, B. C. Choudhury and Kartick Vasudevan for King cobra, Water monitor, other species of snakes, lizards and Turtles/ Terrapins. The evening programme was hosted by the Indian Zoos Association and held on the Lawn of International Guest House, NASC Complex, featuring Rajasthani dancers, fire eating and regular good food.

The final day Technical Session was chaired by Sally Walker, ZOO and was entitled Conservation breeding scenario of wild animal species of Indian Sub-Continent and possibilities with speakers Sh. S. K. Patnaik, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Retd.), Orissa on Indian Conservation Breeding overview and Dr. Robert C Lacy reflecting a global Conservation Breeding overview with a special presentation on the Amphibian crisis.

Working Discussions continued on third day with new species, eg, herbivores Swamp deer, Pigmy hog, Manipur Brow-antlered deer, Hangul, Mouse deer, Chiru, Musk deer; carnivores were Golden cat, Binturong, Tibetan wolf, Pangolin. Wild dog, Malabar giant squirrel; Primates and Bears: Hoolock gibbon, Brown bear, Phayre's leaf monkey, Sun bear Crab eating monkey, Red panda; Birds: Western tragopan, Nicobar pheasant, Blyth's tragopan, Malabar grey hornbill, Temminck tragopan, Malabar pied hornbill, Satyr tragopan, Falcons, Eagles, Kestrels, Harriers, Accipiters etc and vultures; Reptiles and amphibian : Himalayan salamander, *Nyctibatrachus* species and other frogs. Following lunch there were discussions on individual species of interest by working sub-groups.

The closing session valedictory was chaired by Ms. Meena Gupta, Secretary, MOEF with Sh. P. R.

Mohanty, Dr. Robert Lacy, Dr. Gorden Reid, Sh. S. C. Sharma, Sh. S. K. Patnaik, Ms. Sally Walker & Dr. B. R. Sharma on the dais. Working group presentations were given with discussion & recommendations drafted earlier were read out. There was an overwhelming view that reports and recommendations should be circulated to all participants for comment and before 24 hours was up, it was done by email.

A gala farewell dinner hosted by the Indian Zoos Association was held at Orchid Hotel, New Delhi where guests were presented with an attractive souvenir gift and enjoyed an excellent meal and good conversation with their new friends and colleagues.

Following the conference, many participants with special interests visited the zoo and natural habitat of their species of interest. Dr. Robert Lacy, Chair, CBSG wrote a very nice report which is included here. Hopefully we will get some trip reports for further publication in ZOOS' PRINT in course of time.

From this reporter's perspective, much was achieved. I represent South Asia on the Committee for Inter-Regional Cooperation in Conservation and one of my tasks has been to find an International Studbook Keeper for three Studbooks of endemic threatened species that have been lying idle for some time, e.g. Lion-tailed macaque, Asiatic Lion and Sloth Bear. In fact, these Studbooks were officially retired at the end of the year. I had felt that the appropriate place to get this done was India, home of the target species, and had been waiting for an appropriate time or event. This conference provided both plus people, who could

be encouraged to attend for the sake of the species. In the end the meeting as a whole recommended that these Studbooks be resuscitated with experienced Studbook Keepers who volunteered to apply and also to mentor or train an India designated by CZA in Studbook theory and practice so that after some time Indian can be Studbook Keepers at least for their endemic, threatened species. This concept has been a dream for some years and the conference made it possible to make a realistic beginning. The idea was suggested also by no less than WAZA President, Gorden Reid in the Inaugural address as well as during his Keynote presentation.

For the time being, Dr. Scott Carter, Conservation, Detroit Zoo, Dr. Neil Dorman, Curator, Twycross Zoo and Drs. Jose Kok, Director, Alertis, based at Owehands Zoo and Lydia Kolter of Koln Zoo will apply for the position of LTM, Lion and Sloth Bear respectively. These requests have been sent to CIRCC by the Regional Representative and will hopefully be approved by mid-April when the next meeting of CIRCC will take place. Watch this space for further news of the output of this conference.

Another achievement which can be mentioned now is that the Central Zoo Authority has decided to sponsor most of the Large, Medium and Small Zoos to become Members of ISIS, obtain ARKS, SPARKS and MedARKS immediately and ZIMS whenever both the new programme and the zoos are ready.

All in all, it was a most worthwhile event. Congratulations to Central Zoo Authority and the Ministry of Environment for its creative and timely action and new perspective.

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## **International Conference on India's Conservation Breeding Initiative, New Delhi, Dr. Robert Lacy\***

At the 2007 Annual Meeting of CBSG in Budapest, Dr. Brij Sharma, Member Secretary of the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) of India described an ambitious and praise-worthy plan for India's zoos to establish conservation breeding programs for many threatened Indian species. Some 61 candidate species were identified for the program, with the recognition that the initiative might start with fewer or somewhat different species, and more species might be tackled as the zoos gained experience with the first set. For each species: a studbook would be maintained; a zoo near the wild habitat of the species would be identified as the Coordinating Zoo; a conservation plan would be drafted in conjunction with managers responsible for the wild populations; other zoos willing to participate in cooperative breeding would be identified as Participating Zoos; the CZA would provide funds to assist with ISIS membership, training, and development of needed facilities; and CZA would request that CBSG and WAZA consider making the breeding program into a recognized Global Species Management Program. To start this initiative, the CZA convened an international conference to which were invited the directors of all of the major zoos of India, some colleagues from the Wildlife Institute

of India and a few universities in India, a handful of "resource persons" from overseas to provide global perspectives and information on programs in other regions, and zoo professionals from zoos around the world who are involved in breeding species from India. The conference was held at the National Agricultural Science Center in New Delhi – a very nice facility with excellent meeting rooms and audio-visual equipment. The meeting was sponsored by the Central Zoo Authority, which paid all costs for the resource persons and the within-India costs for other overseas participants. It was co-hosted by the Wildlife Institute of India, and the National Zoological Park (in New Delhi).

The conference was attended by about 50 zoo directors and other senior officials from Indian zoos and by foreign participants from France, UK, Sweden, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands, Hungary, Russia, Finland, Estonia, Kazakhstan, USA, Japan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, UAE, and probably some other countries that I am forgetting. Organizations represented at the conference included ISIS, WAZA, CBSG, EAZA, JAZA, AZA, Thai Zoo Organisation, World Pheasant Association, Peregrine Fund,