

## About Zoo Outreach Organisation (ZOO.) & ZOOS' PRINT (ZPt) from the brain and pen of LAK Singh

Zoo Outreach Organisation (ZOO) successfully demonstrated 29+ years of activity-oriented objectives to strengthen, streamline, popularize and qualitatively upgrade the existing support for captive rearing and captive breeding of animals via ZOOS' PRINT and other projects. It is indeed very sad if there is doubt in anyone's mind about the usefulness of the role played by zoos, biological parks and similar entities.

I was introduced to ZOO and its activities almost from its inception. I have been with ZOO until now and I have appreciated its activities. Foremost, no other organization connected with zoo or animal care was doing the work which ZOO started and sustained with passion and conviction, not just in India but gradually in the entire South Asian region.

The ZOOS' PRINT magazine happened to be one of the most widely distributed publications that carried so much of information and educative material about zoos and to an extent, wildlife, from India and abroad. It provided a platform for publication of field observations by those field personnel who lacked academic guidance or encouragement that could see refinements in research approach. ZOOS' PRINT was then followed with a large number of other publications (e.g., Table of Periodicals published by ZOO, Zoos Print, March 2003, page-4).

ZOO played an important role in creating awareness and bringing about the legislation concerning zoos and circuses. As a result of the legislation several debates started about the Snake Charmers holding snakes or the communities earning livelihood by performing street shows with bear, monkey or mongoose. The Central Zoo Authority of India ensured improvement in housing, feeding, transportation and all other aspects relating to animals in or for captivity.

Because of the Zoo Rules in Wildlife (P) Act no new 'bad zoo' is coming up. It is a difference that has been created. 'Bad zoos' have changed their management approach, and have changed intention with access to numerous sets of guidelines pertaining to landscaping, housing designs, transportations, health care, research, capacity building, visitor education and visitor management, etc.

Closure of any establishment is a very harsh step in developing countries because each establishment is linked with the livelihood of many people. So closure may lead to more humanitarian problem. In spite of this CZA derecognised several zoos and similar facilities (Zoos Print, August 2004, pages 5-6)

ZOO helped upgrade the skills of a large number of officials, researchers and zoo keepers through numerous 'capacity building programmes' held in different parts of the region and overseas. ZOO could

arrange fellowships for such programmes including distance learning from international institutions.

ZOO may be one of the few like-minded approaches or organizations intending to bring qualitative difference in captive management and welfare of captive-held animals. ZOO has pioneered in these fields more than any other. It has also been a stimulant or catalyst for others. Where opinion comes from various kinds of people, groups and interests equipped with high class intelligence certain differences in assessments have to be expected. When the changes are thrust into the society or administration with speed and in a very large scale the administration is cautious as ultimately it is answerable for both the positive and negative sides of a change.

One learns it gradually, if he/she is not born and brought up in the developing country. I was a bit apprehensive about the way at times ZOO was pursuing certain subjects or writing certain pages with good intentions. ZOO has been enthusiastic, even overenthusiastic. Such enthusiasm is natural in those who think of a subject very passionately, 24x7. Very few people or organizations like to be advised, uninvited. Greatness exists with them who like to be told that they were doing a wrong! Some scientists as well as non-scientists who were directly or indirectly concerned with the zoo subject have found some activities of ZOO in bad taste. That is natural and expected.

As an aside, ZOO had had some practice in creating such publications. In the early 1980's the Editor of ZOO brought out the first zoo magazine in India while volunteering in Mysore Zoo. It was called the "**GNU's Letter**", an fully in appropriate title for an Indian publication as Indian has no gnu's in its forests. That publication focused on activities of the Friends of Mysore Zoo (also a first in India) but also created a variety of interviews, articles, humorous and potshots "shots" at certain high level IFS officials. I am told these shots paved the way for the Founder/Editor to be banned from Karnataka State!

Changing the way of thinking or a set of old management approaches in the developing countries is a very difficult task. Making a small dent on this shield at any point of time through sustained efforts is a very remarkable achievement. ZOO. have not just dented the shield but have reshaped it in most possible ways. Changes are difficult to bring in, but the change has come with stability. There is no doubt about it.

Lala ... LAK Singh

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