



THE PURPOSE OF ZOOS IS TO SAVE THE ANIMALS

Zoo Education Workshops in Biodiversity and the New Zoo Sciences

M. Whitehead, R. Marimuthu and S. Walker

Four workshops entitled Biodiversity and the New Zoo Sciences were conducted at Pune, Goa, Bombay and Bhopal from 21st January to 1 February 1994. The workshops were organized by Zoo Outreach Organisation / C.B.S.G. India Education Special Interest Group with sponsorship from British Council, Western Region, Bombay and British Airways Assisting Nature Conservation (BAANC).

The workshops at Pune were a collaborative effort between the organisation and the sponsors with Pune Snake Park and Aviary, Katraj Snake Park and the Pune Zoo ; in Goa with the Forest Department of Goa, the Bondla Zoo and Worldwide Fund for Nature, Goa branch ; in Bombay with the Bombay Natural History Society, the Bombay Municipality Corporation and the Bombay zoo ; and in Bhopal with an NGO, the Forum for Forestry Furtherance, the Environment Centre, and the Bhopal Zoo .

The workshops were conducted by one of the writers, Malcolm Whitehead, a zo-

ologist now working as the Training Director, Programmes at the International Centre for Conservation Education (ICCE).

Previous to this he was Director of Education and Research at Twycross Zoo, in England for thirteen years.

David Lawson, a freelance photographer affiliated to ICCE, and Twycross Zoo also accompanied him and gave a presentation of 'photography in the zoo'.

Reasons for the workshops
The spectrum, value, threats to any conservation of biodiversity are major issues facing humanity and are reflected in the national conservation strategies of India as well as other countries.

According to the Global Biodiversity Strategy (Guidelines for Action to Save, Study and Use Earth's Wealth Sustainably and Equitably, 1992)

"Since policy makers, activists and scientists cannot slow biodiversity loss with-

out wider public support, a multi-faceted effort is required to expand public awareness about biodiversity's importance and to strengthen the public's will and ability to act. Whilst the avenues for strengthening awareness vary with place and culture, every society has numerous communication tools at its disposal.

The Strategy identified four major action points as fundamental to increasing appreciation and awareness of the value and importance of biodiversity.

Action 72 - build awareness of the importance and value of biodiversity into popular culture.

Action 73 - use the formal education system to increase awareness about biodiversity and to need for its conservation.

Action 74 - integrate biodiversity concerns into education outside of the classroom.

Action 75 - establish or

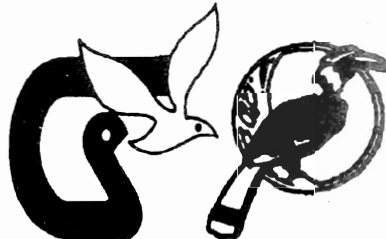
strengthen national or subnational institutions providing information on the conservation and potential values of biodiversity.

Zoos have tremendous potential for communicating educating and training about biodiversity at all levels. In India zoos attract millions of people annually and may be the most popular outdoor venues. Indian zoo audiences come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Zoos are where most Indian encounter their wildlife.

A brief overview of biodiversity was given to the participants of each workshop in the first slide lecture presentation.

We live with millions of different kinds of animals, plants and other organisms, a great variety of species and ecosystems called biodiversity. Scientists have described about 1.5 million species of living things. No one knows how many species remain undiscovered, it may be 10-15 million.

Zoos are concerned with the



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animal kingdom, mostly vertebrates, but in nature 99% of animal species are invertebrates. Scientists have recognised five kingdoms of life. Some think there may be many more. Such things can be taught at the zoo.

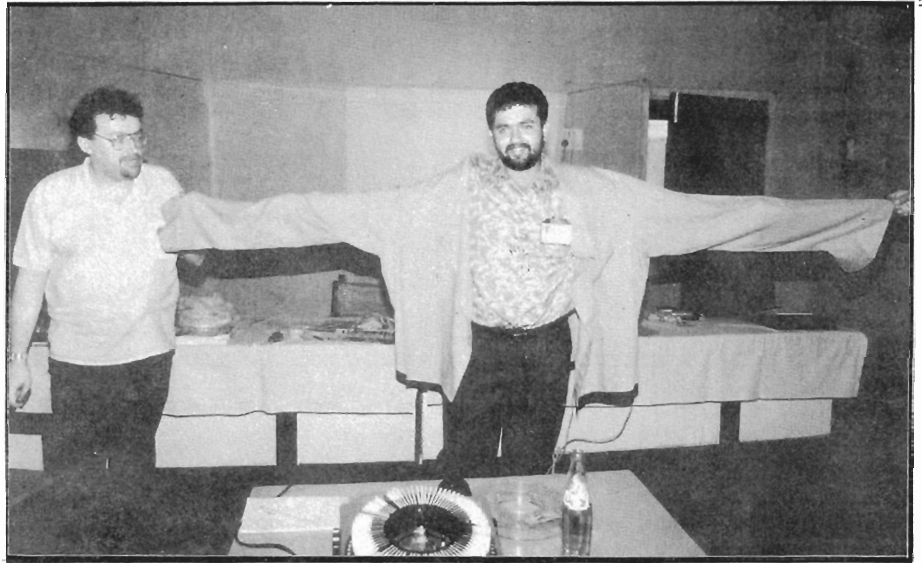
The New Zoo Sciences:

The zoo's main function is to save species. The New Zoo Sciences are making this more certain with the application of a variety of technologies which end in the survival and recovery of populations. The list of biotechnological processes and management techniques which have been enhanced in zoos and related institutions grows longer and longer. Many of these techniques are inherently fascinating and can be used to teach many conservation principles in zoos.

The Unique Niche of Zoo Education:

Zoos have a live animal collection which is always fascinating to people. Zoos are considered "safe", healthy recreation usually located conveniently and priced so that most people can enjoy. It is up to the zoo and its educators, whomever they may be e.g. dedicated education official, director, keepers, volunteers, to create a more profound experience for the visitor than simply coming for fun and relaxation. A good educator can "fool" the visitor into thinking he is having a good time while he is learning about the most pertinent issues to his life today.

In India, the zoos by and large, do not have structured education programmes although there is awareness of the need for education and enthusiasm for fulfilling this important role of the zoo. Zoo Outreach Organisation has identified the need for regional workshops that enhance the capacity of the



Participant at Pune Workshop models the famous "gorilla shirt"

trainers to strategically plan, design and implement zoo education programmes with particular reference to.

formal and informal programmes promoting community awareness of local habitats,

formal programmes linked to school curricula.

training of forestry, wildlife and zoo officers about methods for teaching biodiversity

centres of research and training about biodiversity.

The specific Aims and content of these workshops were

to define biodiversity and explore biodiversity issues which are relevant to India.

to outline the role of zoological gardens in biodiversity conservation through the interactive management of small populations, cooperative networking and the development of new biotechnologies.

to discuss the unique niche and potential of zoos as education and training centres about biodiversity

to review cross-curricular approaches to zoo education

to demonstrate several low-tech, interactive teaching devices (such as birdy bags, gorilla shirts etc) for formal and informal pres-

entations.

to discuss how to educate best in each situation

Sessions, discussions and practicals were conducted by M. Whitehead, S. Walker (in Bombay and Bhopal), and David Lawson as well as by staff members of the host institutions.

All the workshop participants were given a briefing book of relevant material, including resources material gleaned from the southern regional workshops held last year.

The Workshops last year were planned for three days while these were for one day. In assessing the efficacy of these, it seems that zoos and participants find three days a little too long for an education workshop and one day a bit too short. Next year we will stick to a two-day formula which worked out very well in Bhopal.

These capsule workshops have many advantages over longer and more elaborate Education Training Courses, the greatest of which is that far more people of different levels in the zoo can be

exposed to training techniques than for a long-term course some distance away. Also there is advantage in conducting the course right in the venue where zoo education is to be carried out as many ideas and plans can be conceived and discussed on the spot. Finally, as can be noted regional workshops are, and are designed specifically as, a means of assisting the zoo in bringing together related governmental and non-governmental individuals, organisation and institutions which might not otherwise recognise the value and potential of the zoo as an educator and conservator of species and species diversity.

Readers who did not get the July 1993 ZOOS'PRINT may like to order this BriefingBook, with its very relevant and entertaining interpretive material. Ask for SAVE THE ANIMALS for Rs.60.

