

National Zoological Park, New Delhi -- the Turn-around Saga

Amitabh Agnihotri*

The National Zoological Park (NZN) is one of the premier zoos of India. NZN has played an important role in wildlife conservation over the years. It has not only bred numerous endangered species but also has lent valuable support to other zoos as well. NZN continues to play an important role in generating awareness among the general public about wildlife conservation. However since more than 55 years of its existence, today the National Zoological Park is merely a poor shadow of its glorious past. While some exhibits and designs are no less than a work of art, despite all noble intentions, in the absence of the approved Master Plan to guide the future development, the zoo has had facilities coming up on a rather *ad-hoc* basis as per the immediate requirements.

The visitor area, the animal holding area and the service areas have become inseparable over the years. Still there is no visitor centre in the zoo which could brief the visitors about the importance of wildlife conservation and the very purpose of NZN being in the heart of the capital and the contributions it is making to bringing people and nature closer.

The state of infrastructure of the zoo could best be described as crumbling. The walls of many animal cells have developed cracks; the zoo staff was reluctant to work in certain animal houses as the structure had become very weak. There was hardly any surface drainage and during the rainy season the water remained logged at many places rendering it impossible for the visitors to walk around without getting their feet wet. The flooded moats and streets have to be pumped out, practically putting the zoo on dialysis in the rainy season. The situation became so serious that the zoo had to be closed for visitors because of water logging in the year 2011 and the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi had to intervene and direct line agencies such as MCD, DJB etc. to address the issue of water logging in the zoo. In a nutshell the dilapidated buildings, roads, sewerage, water supply and other infrastructure all need a thorough refurbishment.

The following factors have been responsible for the poor state of infrastructure at the National Zoological Park:

1. Lack of adequate financial resources

Over the years the maintenance of NZN has been the responsibility of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) who did not have sufficient funds to address the maintenance requirement of the National Zoological Park as the funds for maintenance came from Ministry of Urban Affairs and that too, not exclusively for the zoo but for the entire zone under the CPWD. The annual expenditure by CPWD on maintenance of NZN was about Rs. 14.00 lakhs per

annum in the year 2010 which was grossly inadequate.

The NZN used to get Rs. 2.00 lakhs per annum from MoEF for maintenance of animal holding facilities in the year 2010 which was also no match to the requirement.

2. Lack of coordination among CPWD and CCU.

Two agencies namely CPWD and Civil Construction Unit (CCU) were responsible for creation and maintenance of infrastructure. This dispensation resulted in conflict among agencies about their roles which brought about inefficient infrastructure management at the NZN.

3. Director, NZN having no control over the agencies working in the zoo

The Director, NZN does not have any administrative control over the agencies namely CPWD and CCU to monitor the creation and maintenance of infrastructure in the zoo. This has affected speedy and effective implementation of the projects by these agencies in the zoo.

Hardly any session of Parliament passed by without a question on upkeep and the quality of maintenance of the zoo. In order to overcome these shortcomings a variety of measures have been taken by Ministry of Environment and Forests to improve the infrastructure and services for better visitor experience at the National Zoological Park which include:

- A landmark decision to provide gate receipts collected as entry fee on back-to-back basis to National Zoological Park for minor works, maintenance etc. through budgetary support to end the perpetual paucity of funds for maintenance. Decision to entrust the Civil Construction Unit (CCU) of MoEF with full responsibility to build and maintain the civil and electrical infrastructure of National Zoological Park in order to end the perpetual conflict between CPWD and CCU although still Director, NZN has no control over the executive agency. The preparation of Master Plan of the National Zoological Park has been undertaken to guide the developmental process of the National Zoological Park in the next 20 years, in order to realize the vision incorporating the objectives and strategies for future action.

The process of preparation of Master Plan has been a long and tedious one. A complete and thorough appraisal of the existing infrastructure and facilities

*Director, National Zoological Park, New Delhi.
Email: nznnewdelhi@gmail.com



The welcoming sign and the famous Red Fort buildings lead into many new innovations for the National Zoo, such as immersion exhibits (below) that focus more on naturalistic environment which is good for both animal and man living or visiting the zoo. It extends beyond the enclosure as such to convey the beauty of nature to strolling visitors.



Painted storks parked in trees are a lovely sight with the Red Fort building in the background



has been carried out and recommendations were made on the basis of the outcome of the appraisal. The proposals in the Master Plan have been thoroughly scrutinised by the Central Zoo Authority which include three meetings and a field visit by the experts of the Designing Committee of the Central Zoo Authority.

Some of the salient features of the Master Plan include a new set-up to accommodate more than 200 species and 2000 inmates, e.g., 39 numbers of existing enclosures are proposed to be upgraded while 30 new enclosures are proposed. The park shall have one way movement, clear segregation of visitor and service pathways incorporating simplicity in way finding at the same time.

About 65% area will be brought under woodland water bodies and maintained green areas. The display themes have been re-arranged imparting a national character to the park which include themes such as Central Indian Highlands, Peninsular India, Himalayan foothills etc. while incorporating some exotic themes such as Africana, Exotica as well. New facilities such as Aquarium, Insectariums, Butterfly Park and Rain Forest have also been proposed.

A new Visitor Centre has been proposed which will provide a brand image to the National Zoological Park as an important landmark in the area. The visitor centre includes education centre consisting of gallery, activity hall, amphitheater and auditorium, food court, souvenir shop, ATM, public conveniences, parking, forecourt to main entry, lawns, ticketing office, security control room and cloak room.



Indian Rhinoceros in National Zoological Park

1. A short term action plan regarding upgradation of infrastructural facilities such as animal holdings, road network, water supply, surface drainage, power supply as well as visitor amenities such as toilets, dairy parlours, kiosks, restaurants, shelters has been prepared which is still under execution.

2. On account of these initiatives a number of milestones have been achieved at NZP which include:

3. For the first time total number of visitors who arrived at the National Zoological Park has crossed 2 million mark as 20,40,867 visitors arrived in the FY 2011-12.

This is an all time record and an impressive growth of about 25% over 16,42,357 visitors who visited National Zoological Park in the previous year i.e. FY 2010-11. Since then the NZP continues to receive more than 2 million visitors every subsequent year. This is a clear indication of the growing popularity of the National Zoological Park in the country in general and NCR region in particular.

4. The gate receipts from entry fee has increased from Rs. 391.96 lakhs in the FY 2010-11 to Rs. 913.02 lakhs in the year 2013-14 which is a significant increase of about 233%.

5. The National Zoological Park has been recognised by Hindustan Times a reputed News Daily of Delhi as one of the New Delhi's 100 icons on the occasion of 100 years of Delhi (1911-2011).

6. The Master Plan of the National Zoological Park, New Delhi has been approved by the Central Zoo Authority

7. The National Zoological Park, New Delhi has also been awarded institutional membership of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) on 10th January 2012 with support from Central Zoo Authority.

8. The chronic water logging problem has been resolved to a larger extent and there has been no area logging in the National Zoological Park despite water logging in the adjoining area outside NZP.

9. Upgradation of infrastructure including animal holding facilities, visitor amenities and other facilities have been undertaken to enhance the visitor experience.

10. A range of services such as Sanitary services, Security services, Horticulture services have been outsourced for management effectiveness.



New, clear signage is being created and kept in areas where visitors need a hand. The names of the animals are clear, in English and in Hindi with a pointer and a small drawing.

The National Zoological Park, New Delhi is the National Zoo of the whole country. It is the only zoo directly under the Ministry of Environment and Forests. As on today the NZP may not to be on par with its European and American counterparts in

terms of infrastructure and resources. Nonetheless, on account of these initiatives and reforms it is well on its course to fulfill the expectations of people of Delhi and very well poised to meet the future challenges.



Even the toilet facilities and drinking water are being improved to make a visit to the zoo more pleasant and safe and the surroundings more attractive.





These happy Hoolock Gibbons get both enjoyment and exercise with their close to naturalistic environmental aids.

