

Nepal Zoo Network - Mini Zoos, Deer Parks, Breeding Centres to Communicate, Cooperate, and Collaborate for better Zoo Conservation

Sally Walker and Sarita Jnawali



First Nepal Zoo Networking Meeting, June 22, 2012. Head table : Mr Krishna Prasad Acharya, Director General, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), Sally Walker, Founder/Director, ZOO and SAZARC, and Sarita Jnawali, Project Manager, NTNC-Central Zoo.

June 2012 the first meeting of the **Nepal Zoo Network** was conducted at the Central Zoo, in Kathmandu, Nepal. It was not the first time the zoos had met but was a first in the evolution of the country's zoos and, for that matter, a quantum leap in the evolution of the region's zoo association, SAZARC, South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation. The Founder/Director of SAZARC had been invited to witness this giant step of a small country's zoos. The creation of a network is the first step towards the animal facilities of Nepal coming together in a sincere and serious effort to work together for the betterment of captive wildlife and of each separate institution. It may also be a first step towards a national zoo association, which is the way most established zoos in the world communicate, collaborate and cooperate. SAZARC Director recently made a decision to put energy into helping zoos create national organisations, either formal or informal, so that all the country's zoos might work together.

For some time the Central Zoo was considered the only zoo in Nepal. Central Zoo was the venue of the first conference of the South Asian Zoo Association and where it was founded and named in the year 2000. In 2006 Zoo Outreach Organisation's Education Officer, R. Marimuthu on behalf of SAZARC conducted a survey of animal facilities in Nepal and confirmed the existence of some captive animal facilities that could be considered zoos for purpose of cooperation. ZOO called attention to this by publishing a long article in ZOOS' PRINT (February 2009). The government authorities and the National Trust for Nature Conservation and Central Zoo itself took rapid action and conducted their own survey and confirmed a wide range of facilities. Also they followed the example of India in formulating zoo legislation for better running of zoos; this is still pending with the government. In 2010 NTNC/Central Zoo hosted the 10th Annual SAZARC conference and invited all their own country's zoos, mini zoos, deer parks, and wildlife breeding facilities so they could get a taste of belonging to a zoo community.

The National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) - Central Zoo is the only official zoo of Nepal. However there are various mini zoos and animal facilities across Nepal established with community or local government participation.

After making their own preliminary assessment of these mini zoos they brought attention of their status to government. Now the Central Zoo is often requested and advised to support these zoos on

mini zoos and animal facilities they can build a platform where owners and staff of mini zoos come together and discuss various aspects of zoo management. With this background, a zoo networking meeting was organized by NTNC-Central Zoo on June 22, 2012 in the premises of Central Zoo.

The Director General Mr. Krishna Prasad Acharya of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) honoured the meeting with his presence and Mrs. Sarita Jnawali, Director of Central Zoo, facilitated and hosted along with her staff. Ms Sally Walker, Founder/Mg. Trustee of Zoo Outreach Organization (ZOO) and Founder/Director of SAZARC came from India as the special guest.

Zoo Personnel present were managers and directors of 4 mini zoos across the country:

Srichandra Sharma from Sahid Smriti Park, Hetauda, Mukta Lal Giri from Mani Mukunda Sen Park, Butwal, Umapati Neupane from Shankarnagar Ban Bihar Tatha, Anusandhan Kendra Rupandehi and Tek Bahadur Tamang from Hariyali Ban, Dharan.

Additionally managers from conservation breeding centers and deer parks were present:

Mr Gopal Pd Bhattra from Godavari Deer Park; Mr. Narottom Baidhya from Pashupati Area Development Trust; and an official from local government, Hon. former Mayor of Lekhnath Municipality and the local development officer from Kaski district.

Objectives of the meeting were generally to know other zoos and their managers and learn about the workings of one another. They wanted to establish a method for networking, share issues and promote animal welfare, conservation, education and recreation as the primary goals.

The meeting commenced in traditionally way by lighting the lamp by the DG of DNPWC.

Ms Sarita Jnawali, Project Manager of NTNC - Central Zoo gave a presentation on objectives of the meeting, the overall situation of mini zoos and animal facilities and opinion on future collaboration. Ms Sally Walker highlighted the importance on zoo networking for better management and sharing of animals, knowledge and

information in order to enable communication, cooperation and collaboration.

Later all participants shared their problems, opportunities and scope of their respective zoos. A comprehensive discussion was conducted particularly on finding some way of solving problems these zoos are facing. The zoo policy and legal status of mini zoos was also a matter of concern. Every participant felt the strong need for collaboration and networking. They agreed that meetings should be organised every year. In the end, the meeting concluded by formally agreeing on the below mentioned two points in addition to other potential collaboration:

All the mini zoos that are present in the meeting have agreed to form a network of zoos in Nepal.

As legislation for rules, regulation and monitoring of zoos in Nepal is still pending in Parliament, the meeting decided to request DNPWC to formulate guidelines about certain aspects of zoo management.

The meeting went on until evening including a zoo visit.

Remarks by Sally Walker, Founder Director of SAZARC, South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation

Congratulations on this meeting. It is one of the first in South Asia to attempt to bring all their zoos together India has done so some years ago. This important event will become part of the history of South Asian zoos.

Why? What's so important about zoos and why should they come together and cooperate with one another? Its important because all zoos need to cooperate with others in order to survive and do their job. You need to communicate with one another, sharing information about all aspects of zoo management; you will benefit by collaborating on projects and coordinating all your activities for the greater good of the country's zoos. That is the purpose of SAZARC as well ... to bring the South Asian countries together, but that has no meaning if countries are not cooperating with one another. SAZARC is now urging all countries to create a national association or network.

Every zoo is important in its own capacity. Your zoos are covering Nepal it seems from the map shown by Sarita Jnawali and thus are giving a very large number of Nepali's an opportunity to know wild animals and their importance to our lives much better. More Nepali's learn about conservation and welfare of threatened and near threatened species



D.G. opens the meeting in the traditional lighting the lamp while Sarita looks on



Manager of Hetauda Zoo signs while Hariyali Zoo Manager looks on.



Sarita Jnawali describes the current status of zoos and other animal facilities in Nepal.



Group photo after a successful meeting, followed by a Zoo Tour and then more discussion. Photo courtesy of Central Zoo.

and how they can help. They learn this if your zoo is running an active education programme.

Good zoo management or "best practice" method management is crucial to the health and lifespan of your animals, and even to your health and that of your workers. If your animals suffer and die you will want more animals and -- without the cooperation of other zoos -- you will be tempted to take them from the wild. If you take animals from the wild, you may be contributing to extinction of species rather than conservation.

Your wildlife is your national wealth. Wildlife keep ecosystems working and ecosystems keep us all alive and comfortable.

Good zoo management is a lot of work but it has to be done. Even a small zoo must have the basic tools, infrastructure and staff to maintain clean, comfortable and safe enclosures, designed so that visitors can't harass the animals. Scientific diets and clean storage area for food is also crucial to animal health. Zoo Education is now a big part of good zoo management. Small zoos particularly could benefit by enlarging and highlighting their education programme as they may not have funds or capacity to manage a large number of animals.

Also if your zoo is the same all the time, visitors will not come back frequently. You want frequent, multiple visits to make enough profit to live and maintain your animals properly. Education programmes, rather than new animals, are one answer to this. If you focus on conservation education, you can make something new for every day and people will want to return over and over.