Gorilla Keeper Grant to Sri. Shankara, Gorilla Keeper of Mysore Zoo

Kumar Pushkar *

Mysore Zoo is happy to announce that the Gorilla Haven Board of Advisors and Special Friends, U.S.A. have voted Sri. C. Shankara, Gorilla Keeper of Mysore Zoo, as one of the joint winners of the First Annual Debbie McGuire Gorilla Keeper Grant.

The grant carries 500 US Dollars to Sri. Shankara to use towards improving the life of the Gorilla in his care or to travel and learn more about ways of improving care of Gorillas in captivity. The above organization has suggested ideas to Sri. Shankara for using the Debbie McGuire grant to produce educational material and also create Zoo graphics and art work to help educate the visitors about the difficulties faced by Gorillas around the world.

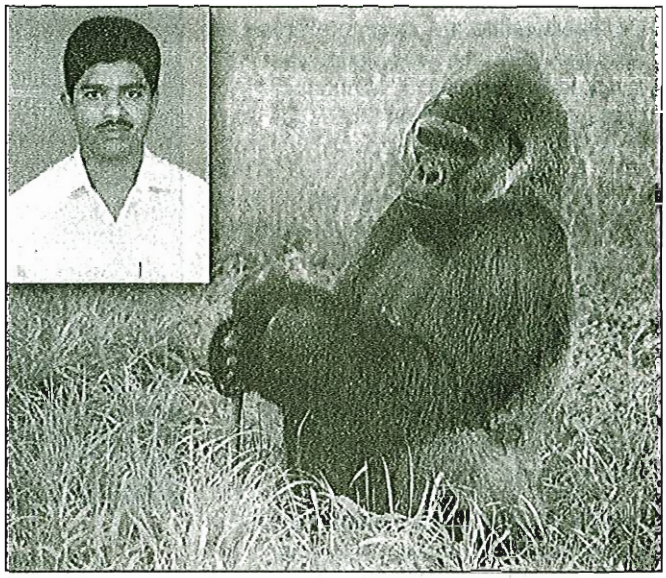
Further, the Board has advised that since Sri. Shankara is one of the first recipient of the grant, he will have great responsibility not only for inspiring other Gorilla Keepers, but for making sure this grant is put to the best possible use. Recognition of the services of Sri Shankara will go a long way in the history of Indian Zoos, and also a sort of inspiration and encouragement to others, for better upkeep and health maintenance of animals. It will be worthwhile to mention that Sri. Ravi is also working with the same devotion for the Gorillas and Chimpanzees and shall be recommended next time. The entire Mysore Zoo staff congratulates Sri. C. Shankara for the recognition and also thank the Gorilla Haven Board of Advisors on behalf of Mysore Zoo.

Sri. Shankara wrote to the Gorilla Haven Board of Advisors: "Thank you for your e-mail, informing about the decision of the Board to vote me, as one of the joint winners of the First Annual Debbie McGuire Gorilla keeper Grant. I am extremely thankful to your Hon'ble Board for recognizing my services. Of course, I am one of the dedicated keepers along with my colleague, Sri. Ravi.

The term 'visitor interaction' actually means that visitors will be highlighted about the animals in front of the enclosure. The visitors will not be taken either into the enclosure or the animal will made accessible to the visitors. The main purpose of interacting with the visitors is to change their behaviour and to evince more interest in knowing and join hands in conservation. Printing of educational materials for educating the visitors will be explored shortly.

Further, I shall assure you that the Grant will be put to the best possible use and also I will inspire my colleagues and other Gorilla Keepers. Also I shall try to travel to any of the leading Zoos to learn more about ways of improving the lives of Gorillas in captivity."

Editors' Note:
The Dewar Wildlife Trust Inc. (Gorilla Haven) has announce the first winner of the Debbie McGuire Gorilla Keeper Grant in its monthly newsletter for zookeepers Animal Keepers' Forum *Vol. 29, No. 12 , December 2002.*



There were six applications from around the world – from Mysore, India; Miami, Florida; Madrid, Spain; Johannesburg, South Africa; Jakarta, Indonesia; and Buffalo, New York. All six applications were reviewed by the Gorilla Haven Board of Advisors and others which included a zoo director, an AZA official, an Animal Protection Activist and a lawyer. Twenty-nine of the 35 people asked, voted, rating each applicant from first to sixth choice. Since the two top vote recipients had such close numbers, it was called a tie.

Grants were awarded to: C. Shankara of Mysore, India and Juanvicente Martinez Santana of Madrid, Spain. To learn more about Gorilla Haven, log on to: http://www.gorilla-haven.org.

The Zoo Outreach Organisation also congratulates C. Shankara for this honour. We hope that other zoo keepers in the Indian and South Asian zoo scenario will be inspired to apply for grants and honours. Z.O.O. will do our part by trying to make information about such grants available to the zoo personnel.

Mysore Zoo has been keeping gorillas for over four decades when two gorillas were imported from Germany. The male expired in a few months but the female lived a very long time. Over the years, Mysore Zoo has imported other gorillas. The Zoo has an excellent enclosure with a large open space with trees and undulating landscape. Mysore Zoo is the only zoo in South Asia to have exhibited gorillas.

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