CZA Studies of Social and Educational Impact of Mini Zoos and Deer Parks throughout India

In 1997 the Central Zoo Authority undertook a project to determine the importance of Deer Parks and Mini Zoos in India. In India, there are more than 250 zoological facilities, of which 200 fall in the category of deer parks and mini zoos. With increased interest in wildlife and protected areas by governmental agencies, both state and municipal, in the 1970's and 80's the number of deer parks and mini zoos skyrocketed in India. Nearly every state saw several of these spring up, sometimes because an ambitious minister or Collector wanted it and sometimes because an animal holding area just evolved into a public facility. By the 1990's there were more than 300 zoological facilities in India of which the lion's share were small, shabby, underfunded, inhumane mini zoos and deer parks.

Yet, invariably, when the Central Zoo Authority inspected these and found them lacking and requested them to close, the administrative authorities and their public, who previously were not sufficiently concerned to see that these zoos were properly maintained, raised a hue and cry. Moreover, there were requests from all over India to the Central Zoo Authority to start new mini-zoos and deer parks.

Therefore CZA commissioned several social research institutions all over India to conduct studies of these facilities so that a decision could be taken on their fate in the future of India's zoos.

Each study was on the Social and Educational Impact of Mini Zoos and Deer Parks in various states. The names of the institutes and the states they covered are below:

1. Orissa, West Bengal and Bihar -- Xavier Institute of Management, Centre for Development Research and Training
2. Hill Areas of Uttar Pradesh -- Association for Environmental and Development Research.
3. Western Uttar Pradesh -- Association for Environmental and Development Research, New Delhi
4. Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu -- Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore
5. National Zoological Park, New Delhi -- Mediastorm

The main objective of these studies was to assess the impact of mini zoos and deer parks on social and educational awareness among the public and the utility of these facilities for conservation of wildlife in the various states. Involving four management institutes and thousands of visitors and non-visitors, these studies make up a vast body of information. As the Reports have not been completely reviewed by the government it is not appropriate at this time to give specific results. However a general idea of what the studies were designed to find out can be learned from the following points.

In every study some hundreds of people were interviewed in every state covered. These were both visitors to deer parks and mini zoos and non-visitors in order to obtain a correct view of the impact of these facilities, or lack of it.

Visitors to several mini zoos and deer parks were interviewed and non-visitors in the same area.

Methodology included conventional research techniques such as personal interviews, group discussions, participatory and observation method, data analysis, statistical tests, collation and interpretation of data with tables, graphical and pictorial representation. Case studies of the mini zoos and deer parks were done to highlight important points of each animal facility.

Some of the types of findings were:

- How people found out about the zoo and deer park, whether informal sources or fomal ones, e.g. whether influenced by friends and relatives to visit the mini zoos and deer parks, from family members or from media.

- The purpose of visit to the zoos and deer parks was ascertained, e.g. whether it was to know about the animals and birds (sic) or otherwise.

- Whether there were previous visits to other mini zoos and deer parks.

- Frequency of visits to mini zoos and deer parks

- Duration of visit and what visitors spend their time doing during the visit, e.g. whether they see animal most of the time or spend time in eating and playing games inside the mini zoos and deer parks.

- Visitors' knowledge about government measures for wild life conservation.

- Reasons why people do not visit mini zoos and deer parks, whether shortage of time, economic conditions, etc.

The impact and usefulness of mini zoos and deer parks was studied in terms of knowledge about the favourite animals and birds; awareness of children; utility for adults; knowledge of relationship between animals. Visitor satisfaction with the type of care taken of the animals housed in these mini zoos and deer parks was also studied.

The studies covered problems of the mini zoos and deer parks also, whether the facilities were good for improving the quality of wildlife, due to restricted freedom and inappropriate environment; whether there is trained staff, scarcity of funds; unsystematic arrangements inside the mini zoos and deer parks like lack of drinking water facility, sitting arrangement, etc.

When the authorities have seen the Reports and they are released, ZOOS' PRINT will publish a summary of all the Reports if Central Zoo Authority permits.