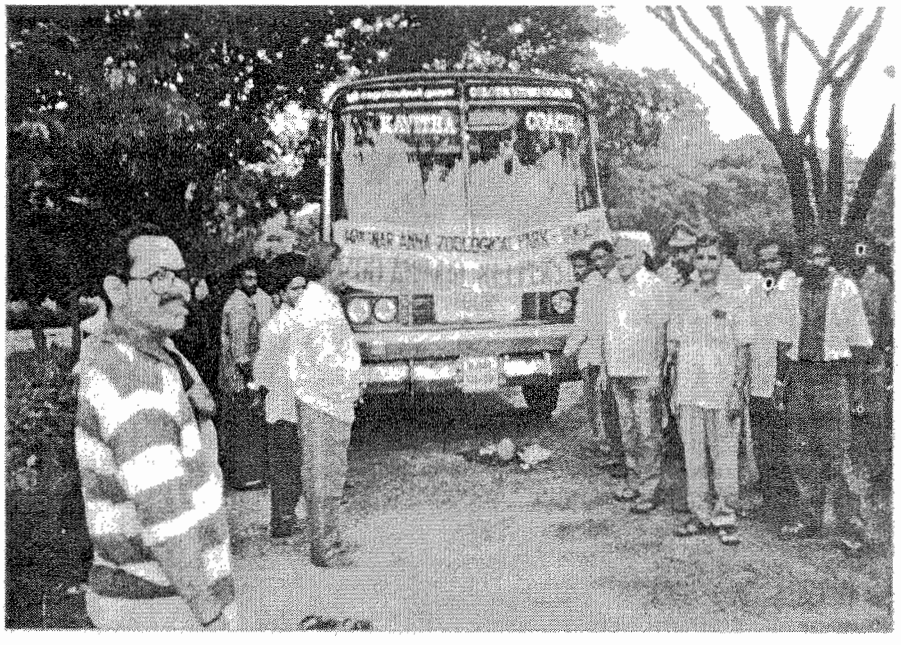
Unique Training Opportunities For Animal Keepers at Arignar Anna Zoological Park

N. Krishnakumar, I.F.S., Director & M. Sekar, Biologist*

Training for animal keepers is the need of the day. Now that we have entered the new millennium and with the emergence of the recent National Zoo Policy guidelines, zoo management has taken a renewed outlook and there is need for attitudinal changes in animal keepers towards animal upkeep and management. With this intention in mind a unique animal keepers training programme was organised from 22-29 November 1999 organised by Arignar Anna Zoological Park with technical assistance from many institutions and financial assistance from Central Zoo Authority.

Forty-six animal keepers from various animal sections were exposed to modern concepts in zoo management. On 22 November the programme was inaugurated by Thiru. B. Vijayaraghavan, Chairman Snake Park Trust, Chennai who stressed the need for continuous education and training for zoo personnel.



Enthusiastic animal keepers proceeding to Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad. Photc courtesy A.A. Zoo, Chennai

Subject matter covered

Resource persons from various faculties were invited to discuss specific subject matter with zoo keepers. Subjects like Animal Keeper visitor interaction, Taxidermy, Management of invertebrates in captivity, Management and care of birds in captivity, Management and care of Amphibians in captivity, Animal Nutrition, Specialised Care of Animals in Pregnancy, Animal Record Keeping, Captive Animal Diseases and Cure, Management and care of Reptiles in Captivity, Planned Breeding of Wild animals etc. were discussed.

Subject matter specialists from CPR Foundation, Chennai, Centre of Knowledge Systems, Chennai, Government Museum, Chennai, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, Zoological Survey of India, Chennai, Madras Veterinary College, Chennai, Wildlife Department, A.V.C. College, Mayiladuthurai, Snake Park Trust, Chennai, and retired veterinary officers and others spoke on the above subjects to the trainees.

Field visit to zoos in Andhra Pradesh

The most interesting feature of the training programme was the visit to the Nehru Zoological Park, Hydrabad, and Lord Venkateswara Zoological Park Tirupathi. Never before had such a large contingent of zoo personnel from Arignar Anna Zoological Park visited any other zoo. The animal keeper trainees along with a biologist, Ranger and Forester visited the zoos and interacted with the Director and Curator of the Nehru Zoological Park.

The keen interest of the animal keepers to learn and also exchange their knowledge with their resource persons was really interesting. The animal keepers were happy with the exposure obtained in the classrooms and their field visits. We find an energetic and motivated group of animal keepers now in the zoo.

Interactive exercises

We also organised many interactive exercises an zoo management with the animal keepers. Excellent charts and posters were prepared by the trainees in various subjects. Group discussions were organised every day to discuss subjects like Environmental enrichment, animal nutrition, zoo cleanliness and visitor interaction etc. On the concluding day animal keepers came out with interesting experience and shared new thoughts with the management.

We are encouraged that the zoo keepers have enough potential and if tapped rightly they can be put to good use for the management of animals as envisaged in the National Zoo Policy. We found that the animal keepers can not only dream for a good future zoo, but also make possible many things that are being discussed today by zoo managers. We are convinced that there is need for more training for animal keepers. All sections of zoo staff like plumbers, gardeners, electricians, assistant animal keepers and others need training. So that the zoo personnel can work as the team to promote zoo education and achieve conservation goals set for the zoo. Let the training component be made compulsory for all zoos in the country.

Arignar Anna Zoological Park, Tamil Nadu Forest Department, Chennai 600 048, Tamil Nadu.

Subjects and list of guest lectures

Day one :
Animal keepers – visitors interaction
Dr. T. Sundaramoorthy, C.P.R. Foundation, Chennai

Management and care of Invertebrates in captivity.
Mr. V.S. Venkataraman
Centre for Knowledge Systems, Chennai

Taxidermy
Mr. Jawahar, Government Museum, Chennai.

Day two :
The role of Animal Keepers in Achieving zoo objectives and Central Zoo Authority.
Mr. N. Krishnakumar, Director
A.A.Z.P, Chennai

Management & Care of Birds in Captivity.
Dr. Ranjit Daniel
Dr. M.S. Swaminathan.
Research Foundation, Chennai.

Management and Care of Amphibians in Captivity.
Dr. Ravichandran
Zoological Survey of India, Chennai.

Nutritional diets for Captive animals.
Dr. V. Balakrishnan
Dept. of Animal Nutrition, Madras Vety College, Chennai.

Day three:
Specialised care of animals in pregnancy.
Dr. M. Varadharajan.
Wildlife Department A.V.C. College, Mayiladuthurai.

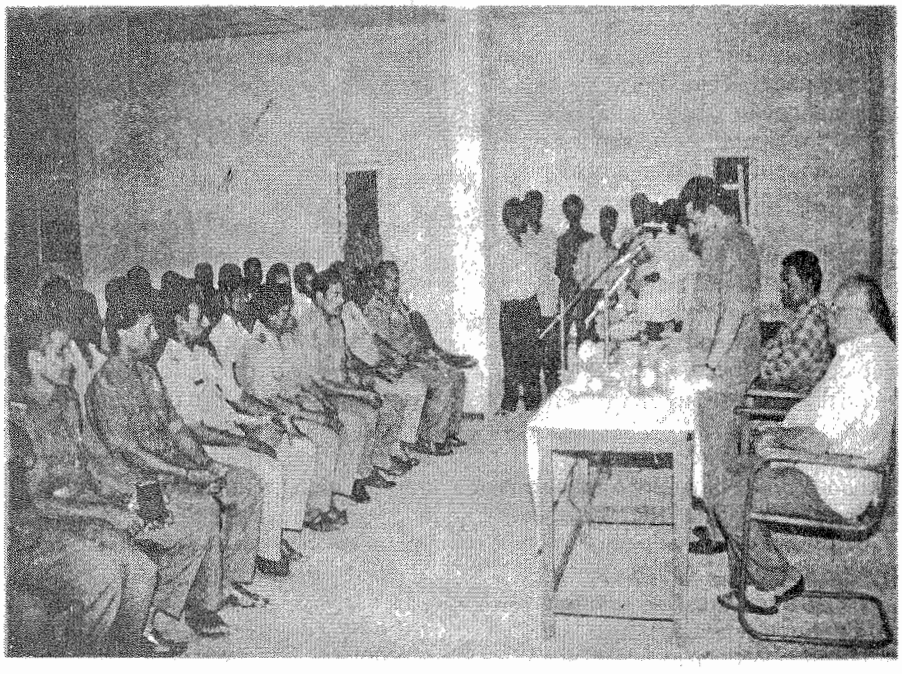
Animal Record Keeping.
Dr. K. Theyakesan
Wildlife Department, A.V.C. College, Mayiladuthurai.

Captive Animal Diseases and their cure.
Dr. Jayathangaraj
Wildlife Department, Madras; Veterinary College, Chennai

Day 4 :
Management and Care of Reptiles in Captivity.
Dr. V. Kalaiyarasan.
Snake Park Trust, Chennai.
Dr. G. Ramaswamy.
Wildlife Department, A.V.C. College,Mayiladuthurai.
Management and Care of Mammals in Captivity.
Dr. V. Krishnamoorthy
Retd. Veterinary Officer. Chennai

Day 5 & 6
Field visits to Nehru Zoological Park, Hydrabad, and Lord Venkateswara Zoological Park Tirupathi.

AA Zoo Animal Keepers at Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad.
Photo courtesy A.A. Zoo, Chennai



Validictory Function at Arignar Anna Zoological Park, Chennai.
Photo courtesy A.A. Zoo, Chennai

Acknowledgement:

We wish to thank Central Zoo Authority who allotted 1 lakh for this useful programme as well as the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department and their zoos which hosted our animal keepers. We also thank our Chief Wildlife Warden, Chennai for all support and encouragement.