

News Bits and Pieces

from the press

ZOO NEWS

Delhi High Court asks mobile zoos to surrender animals

The Delhi High Court directed (19th May 1998) owners of all mobile zoos in the country to surrender animals in their possession to the chief wildlife warden of their respective states by 21 July 1998. The judgement was made on hearing the petition by the All India Mobile Zoo Owners Association (AIMZOA). The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has refused to grant recognition to these mobile zoos after finding them violating the Wildlife Protection Act. The zoo owners had challenged the order (CZA) on the plea that the owner were basically poor people and the zoos were the sole mode for them to earn their livelihood. Justice Singh of the Delhi High Court asked the counsel for the owners to consult CZA on compensation terms and report on 21st July 1998. Till then, the owners cannot exhibit their animals to the public. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 20th May 1998.*

Heat claims lives of zoo animals

Extremely hot weather this summer has taken a toll of animals and birds at the Nandankanan zoo near Bhubaneswar. Three squirrel monkeys died presumably of sunstroke and ten small birds died due to heat wave condition. As a temporary measure, cages have been covered with straws to beat the heat. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 24th May 1998.*

Vandalur Zoo to be opened on Tuesdays

During the school vacation this summer, Vandalur Anna Zoological Park remained open even on Tuesdays (weekly holiday). This Park with 157 species of birds, animals and reptiles, 39 breeding species and 37 exotic ones has 3,70,923 visitors from April to September 1997. On an average, there are more than 2,000 visitors during this period. More than 35,000 persons visited the Park on a Pongal day. Repair work is in progress in the aviary. Zoo will receive a female Chimpanzee in exchange for a young male one by August this year. *The Indian Express, Chandigarh, 26th April 1998.*

Vandalur zoo gets one more Royal Bengal Tiger

Vandalur Anna Zoological Park as 'a centre for captive breeding' of a variety of animals has purchased recently from the Nandankanan Zoo (Orissa) a 7 1/2 year old Royal Bengal Tiger, said to be carrying 'White gene'. This zoo has a tigress carrying 'the white gene' with which the authorities hope to mate to produce white tigers. Normally in one litter, a tigress delivers three or four cubs. The chance of getting a white tiger will be one out of four, according to Mr. N. Krishnakumar, Deputy Director of the Park. The new tiger is being monitored on its behaviour. At present there are four Royal Bengal tigers, a equal number of tigress in the Park. Most of them were bred in captivity. The Park has also received a Japanese fowl (with Brownish grey feathers and short stature). *The Times of India, New Delhi, 3rd May 1998.*

Ayurveda comes to the aid of ailing Delhi zoo inmates

Ayurvedic treatment of animals on specific animals has some happy results in the Delhi zoo. The drugs are easy to administer and do

not cause side-effect. The only problem is the extended healing duration as compared to allopathic drugs. The successful treatment of an ailing white tigress has inspired the zoo authorities to cure a sulphur-crested cuckatoo which was suffering from a skin infection. The medicine is mixed in water for easy ingestion. A hog deer was also cured by this from intestinal disorders. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 20th May 1998.*

Female rhino calf is zoo's pride

In November 1997, was born in Delhi Zoo, Maheswari, the female rhinoceros - a rare event in any zoo in India. It was not let out in public for the first three months as the zoo authorities did not want to take 'any chances with its health'. Initially fed by mother's milk, Maheswari has begun to munch grass now. In Delhi zoo, there are five rhinos - three males and two females including this calf. Mr. B.R. Sharma, the zoo Director says "It is the rarity of she-rhinos born in captivity, that makes it special. This unusual trend is attributed to the declining male-female ratio. 'Space conditions in captivity might have something to do it' says Mr. B.R. Sharma. Out of about 27 rhinoceroses in zoos over the country, only eight or nine are females. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 2nd April 1998.*

Battery operated vehicles at zoo to be replaced

At the Vandalur Anna Zoological Park, the old Battery Operated Vehicles (BOV) are being replaced to provide better facilities to the visiting children and their parents. Under the auspices of Rotary Club of Ambattur (Chennai) many programmes for children like 'Save the tiger' workshop 'Nature trail' inside the Guindy National Park (a trekking programme for a distance of four kms) have been organised in May. *The Hindu, Chennai, 23rd May 1998.*

Rare macaws lay eggs for the first time in Delhi Zoo

Delhi zoo will soon witness the hatching of eggs laid by two exotic Mexican birds - the Eclectus parrot and the blue-yellow macaw - after eight long years of waiting. According to the veterinary officer (Dr. N. Pannir Selvam) it is difficult to breed these birds in captivity. These are strict vegetarian. But it was found last year two of the Eclectus parrots laid two eggs and consumed them due to 'mineral shortage'. So the diet has been supplemented with calcium and phosphorus. The officials are hoping that the four eggs will hatch into chicks. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 9th April 1998.*

Cleanliness drive gains momentum

The six months old drive of disallowing eatables and polythene bags by visitors to the Delhi Zoo, has resulted in the zoo appearing cleaner than before. Visitors, violating this are fined Rs.50/- and inside the campus, there is constant vigil on the erring visitors. This is the sequel of death of some animals due to stomach pain or asphyxiation. In 21st March 1987, a male zebra died after swallowing the polythene bag and its female partner died three days later, apparently due to separation. There are critics to this policy as they feel that people visit to enjoy the green surroundings by having picnic inside the premises. Even carrying food out of the zoo canteen is not allowed. The drive of converting several wet moats into dry moats make the premises

look clean without dirty and stagnant water. *The National Herald*, 3rd May 1998.

Relief is at sight for flood-prone zoo

During monsoon season, the Delhi zoo has been experiencing unusual flooding. This has resulted in animals experiencing discomfort. The rhinoceroses, monkeys, barking deer and the cheetal suffer the most with their enclosures situated in low lying area. In the present situation, pumping out water takes hours, leaving the animals stranded. So the zoo authorities have made a proposal a kilometer long channel (number 15), joining the zoo to the Yamuna river be made a 'pucca channel', making it flush water into the river quickly. As it involves three agencies - the Delhi Vidyut Board, the Municipal Corporation and the Northern Railway, there has been delay in implementation. The proposal has finally passed by the Delhi government irrigation and flood control department. The project will take at least one year to complete and the zoo authorities hope that this will solve the problem before the next monsoon. *The Tribune, Chandigarh*, 4th May 1998.

Health camp at Assam zoo

At the Assam State zoo, a health care camp was organised on 17th May 1998 by the Wildlife area development and Welfare Trust (WWT) where the staff member of the zoo and their family members were examined. The camp was attended by many important personalities of the state connected with the forest and zoo administration. *Assam Tribune, Gauhati*, 19th May 1998.

Lucknow zoo apes a marriage

A strange spectacle of a marriage with usual pomp and ceremony between two monkeys - Shyam and Radha Rani - was solemnised in front of a good gatherings which included Mr. R. Singh, Chief Forest Conservator, (U.P) and Mr. Raghuvar Dayal Varma, the minister for forest. The Minister, while praising the zoo officials for their efforts, pointed out that it was one of the four best zoos of India, the others being Thiruvananthapuram, Calcutta and Ahmedabad. Animals seized from illegal mobile zoos are treated for the various diseases in special protection homes (20 in number). Once their conditions improve, they are sent to other zoos of the country as per the directions of the Central Zoo Authority of India. *The Pioneer, Lucknow*, 29th March 1998.

Rogue tusker to find home in Delhi Zoo

A rouge elephant, abandoned by its owner, created a stampede in a place (in Sonpet district) resulting in the death of a child. The Haryana Wildlife Department could not control it, despite tranquillising it several times. So it was handed over to Delhi Zoo and is presently chained in a small zoo in Haryana Tourism Tilyar resort at Rhotak. The elephant, called Rajmangal developed roguish tendencies in February. This year the group of sadhus who owned it could not control. A case has been registered in the Environmental court at Hissar. *The Hindustan Times, New Delhi*, 15th April 1998.

PLANT NEWS

New frontiers: Plants show ways to boost solar energy

The researches at the American Department of Energy's Low Alamos Laboratory believes the sun's power could be harnessed better by copying the photosynthesis process used by plants and have pinpointed a plastic that allows the molecules to remain stimulated for a billionth of second long enough for the energy to flow through. They have built a red film made with the plastic. The ideal product would have a film for every colour of light, both visible and invisible. *The Times of India, New Delhi*, 6th May

1998.

Winner once, wonder plant leucaena is a villain now
Leucaena, an Indonesian plant, introduced in vast areas of Jammu region over 15 years ago, is creating problems, especially to those who rear sheep. This plant was encouraged to grow by the farmers as a fodder plant. However, it has been found this to cause dermites (skin diseases) and dysentery. The government sheep husbandry farms stopped using it as fodder. But the Divisional Forest Officer of Billawar defended the raising of this plant as it would reclaim degraded land and conserve the soil. However, experts of the Jammu University warns the danger of an epidemic (due to the introduction of new pests of this plant) engulfing as real. *The Times of India, New Delhi*, 4th May 1998.

BIO NEWS

Patenting human life? Should life scientists and companies be allowed to claim the blueprint of a species

(Kaumudi Marathe reports) Dr. Stuart Newman, Developmental Biologist and Jeremy Rifkin, a social critic, filed for a patent in the process to create part-human, part-animal creation ('Chimera'). His application describes how human embryo cells can knot with embryo cells from chimpanzees, apes and other animals forming a single embryo. This would grow in a surrogate mother's womb. This will serve scientific researcher. A US non-profit bio-ethic group-the Council for Responsible Genetics (CRG) applauds this application. 'Diseases about life patents are too important to be made by patent bureaucrats, they must be by the citizenry.

What are our genetic rights? Where do we draw the line? How can we prevent the misuse of human parts in the name of research. According to CRG the patents make important products more expensive and less accessible. They promote secrecy and hinder information exchange. An American company was granted a patent on its compound 'azadirachtin', derived from the neem trees. India may soon be forced and pay royalties on neem products. CRG consider it absurd that by modification of organism's genes, a scientist can claim to have 'invented life'. Rifkin hopes that India would challenge life patents. *The Times of India, New Delhi*, 24th May 1998.

Pig cells may help cure Parkinson's disease

With the help of cells from fetal pigs there is a possibility of treating effectively Parkinson's disease. Mr. James M. Schumacher, a neurosurgeon with neurological associates in Sarasota, Florida (U.S.), has successfully transplanted pig cells into the brains of 11 patients and mostly improved to some degree. The surgeon drills a hole (size of a pencil eraser) at the top of the patients' skull and the pig cells are suspended in a liquid that slowly seeps into the brain through a tube. The operation takes about three hours under local anesthesia. Out of 11 patients, about 20 per cent recovery was registered in a year and they continue to improve. The results are only preliminary. *The Times of India, New Delhi*, 15th April 1998.

WILDLIFE NEWS

A new threat to the tiger - depleting prey base

Depletion of the prey base of the tigers is an insidious threat to them in India. A marked fall in the population of swamp deer, sambar, cheetal and wild boar has been noticed in recent time. Hunting of these herbivores goes on without much of protest. All efforts to save the tiger will come to naught if it has no sustenance. The important environmentalists who visit tiger reserves have not

noticed much of the herbivores. In Dudhwa, the barasingha population has crashed because of large scale poaching. Blackbuck, sambar or cheetal meat are available in Patna markets for a good price. The meat of cheetal poached in the Sundarbans are sold in South Calcutta markets. The Swamp deer in Keterniaghat (between Dudhwa and Bardia National Park) has been wiped out. Ulhas Karant, a reputed wildlife scientist says that a male tiger may require about 2200 to 2500 kg. of meat and a female a little less. To meet its requirements, a tiger has to kill 40 to 50 animals a year. To support a single tiger about 400 ungulates may be needed. Mortality rate of tiger, according to him, is quite high and only about 50 percent survive through the first year and the average age of a tiger is 12 to 15 years. If the prey base is inadequate, tigers cannot survive without its basic meat. The construction of a dam in Swaheli river in Dudhwa has resulted in slaughter of swamp deer outside the park. *Reported by Usha Rai. The Times of India, New Delhi, 21st April, 1998.*

Supreme Court notice to Centre on tiger poaching

A petitioner (Navin Raheja) sought a direction from the Supreme Court to the Union of India, Project Tiger director and the chief secretaries of the states where tigers are found to stop widespread poaching. The demand of tiger bones in China and some south east Asian countries has increased considerably. As these countries lost tiger population, they procure supplies clandestinely from India. The petitioner further claimed that "the project Tiger" failed to deliver the goods with the tiger population declining. The present population of tiger is a meagre 2500. It is said that on an average one tiger is poached every day in India. A bench of Supreme Court judges (Justice A.S. Anand and Justice S. Rajendra Babu) issued notices to the relevant agencies. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 26th April, 1998.*

Monkey menace

Monkey menace has become a serious problem in some colonies of North and South Delhi. Efforts of civic officials appear to have failed to curb it as the remuneration given to monkey trapping fails to attract them to the job. There are many instances of monkeys biting people and tearing the seat covers of the scooters parked outside the garage. Unlike stray dogs, monkeys cannot be shot as law prohibits it in deference to the Hindu religious sentiment. The Wild life Department cannot help because it pleads staff shortage. 'So, monkeys rule the roost in Delhi'. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 16th April, 1998.*

Romancing monkeys

Yushan National Park (Taiwan) is the home of Formosan rock monkeys, a species belonging to ground-dwelling macaques. There is a mountain road to join a highway north of the Park and the monkeys often jaywalk across this busy road, resulting in death in traffic accidents. So the zoo authorities have decided to design and build a rope bridge for the monkeys this year. Stringing the bridge between two sturdy frames will create what may be called the worlds first overhead monkey crossing. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 14th May 1998.*

Corbett high-speed road claims four leopards, tigers could be next

The speeding vehicles on the newly built 19 Km. road passing through the Corbett Tiger Reserve, have killed four leopards since March this year. The PWD built this high speed road and a dozen old resorts can now easily be reached. None knows who allowed the PWD to built this road. Forest department has no control over the PWD. Result are 1) Chances of tigers being run over by speeding vehicles. 2) Pushing the tigers further into the bush. *The Indian Express, Bangalore, 11th May 1998.*

Fresh delicacy: Crocodile meat

The latest gastronomers fad in Singapore is Crocodile meat dishes. More than 80 Singapore food outlets are now serving these dishes (Straits Times report). The sale of the dishes has tripled since 1995 at the snack world restaurant with customers both local and outside. Dishes are made from Crocodile ribs to the private parts of the crocodiles. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 30th April 1998.*

Redford's passion for wildlife

The American actor, Robert Redford has donated 850 acres of land, watershed and alpine meadows to Utah Open Lands to protect it from development. This organisation works for the preservation of open spaces and farming land. The Redford Family has strong feelings for the need of preservation of land without any development. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 16th April 1998.*

Space odyssey for 1500 crickets

A report from Cape Canaveral (Florida, U.S.). In order to make a most exhaustive study of how the nervous system changes in space, the space shuttle columbia of NASA will carry aboard 1500 crickets, 135 snails, 152 rats and 223 fish. This shuttle will orbit the earth with the purpose of studying them in space. This will make it easier for humans to colonize the moon or travel to space. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 19th April 1998.*

TRADE NEWS

Wearing shahtoosh shawls can land you in jail

The purchase of the shahtoosh shawls, made of wool obtained from 'chin', an endangered species of Tibetan antelope may land one in jail as this animal is protected under the Wildlife Protection Act since 1972. An American and a Non-resident Indian were apprehended at the Indira Gandhi International airport for their bid to smuggle out these shawls. It is reported that the raw wool of this animal is bartered against other Indian animal articles like tiger bones. This smuggling is said to take place in Kashmir. *The Times of India, New Delhi 3rd May 1998.*

Money from shahtoosh smuggling was being used to fund militancy in Kashmir

The city police of Delhi found some indication that the money generated through smuggling of shahtoosh wool was being used to fund the militant activities in the Kashmir valley. Police seiged from a shop in the Hauz Khas area of South Delhi 46 shahtoosh shawls and a scarf. The manufacture of shahtoosh shawls, banned throughout the world, is carried out after the slaughter of the highly endangered Tibetan antelope. Each antelope yields around 150 gm of wool, which fetches very high prize abroad. *The Times of India, New Delhi 30 May 1998.*

US will continue to import shrimps from 39 nations, despite WTO rating. India among countries banned from selling in US

World Trade Organisation (WTO) complains the violation of global trade rules by US. The state department (US) certified that 16 countries met its standard to prevent the accidental drowning of sea turtles while catching in nets the shrimps. US public law 101, 162, see 609 violated the international trade rules which ban countries from making distinction among products based on the way they are produced. A US trade representative criticised the WTO decision arguing that the US law was consistent with the WTO decision exceptions which allow countries to improve restrictions to protect human, animal or plant life. Shrimps harvested by aquaculture in cold water will alone be imported in US after 1st May 1998. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 6th May 1998.*

Convention favours comprehensive law on endangered flora and fauna

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of world's Flora and Fauna (CITES) has 143 member countries, India being one of the earliest ones to sign on in 1976. WWF and IUCN established a joint programme to help implement global wildlife trade of CITES throughout the world. The outcome is TRAFFIC, the acronym for Trade Record Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce. The Indian wing of TRAFFIC was established in 1992. The world-TRAFFIC India is hosting the next meet (14th May 1998) at New Delhi and then shifts for a week of discussion to Corbett National Park (UP). Despite India being a signatory to CITES, this has yet to be made part of the laws protecting wildlife. Enforcement is through customs and exports rules only. Manoj Mishra who directs TRAFFIC India's work says another problem is the lack of a clear, coordinating centre on the matter. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 27th April 1998.*

ENVIRONMENT NEWS

Environment projects for 15 colonies

The three NGO's - Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) Srishti and the Jiva Institute - have joined hands for a project to create environmental awareness among the residents of 15 communities (colonies) in Delhi. USIS has also associated with this project 'Community adoption and monitoring programme' for schools in the seven designated colonies have been shortlisted. TERI will identify the air/water pollution problems of specific localities and provide students with technical knowhow and training to measure pollution. Srishti will offer training in solid waste management and Jiva will develop the curriculum and transmit the message to wider groups through media like the internet. Even materials like the litter bins, bicycles, signboards will be provided to the corporates involving in this scheme. *Times of India, New Delhi, 16th April 1998.*

Indian to chair Global Environment Panel

Mr. Madhav Gadgil, a scientist attached to the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, has been made chairman of the Scientific and Advisory Panel (STAN) of this Global Environment Facility (GEF) (the financial mechanism to fund environmental protection) At the inaugural ceremony of the first GEF assembly at New Delhi with delegates from 160 countries it was decided to start the job with \$ 2.75 billion and the STAN is the body to advise how to do so. The total foreign aid money contributed by all government on this planet is not even a third of total private direct investment from abroad. The need is to integrate economic with social and environment policies. Policies to develop technology through the market mechanism is another need. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 2nd April 1998.*

Environment to be subject in Schools says MEF

The Union government will introduce environment as a subject in school and college syllabuses from next academic session (beginning of 1999). Union Minister for environment (Mr. Suresh Prabhu) disclosed that syllabus was being worked on and in a period of 5 to 7 years the youth of the country would become environment conscious. Decision on many projects will be taken on the basis of the environment policy. A balance between environment and tourism would have to be evolved. *The Times, New Delhi, 14th April 1998.*

Green peace launches biodegradable credit card

At present, the credit cards are made of polyvinyl-chloride which releases harmful dioxin, a known carcinogen. The environmental Group known as Greenpeace has announced its affiliation with

a biodegradable credit card and challenged US financial services companies to adopt similar technology. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 6th May 1998.*

'Red tide' brings threat to Hong Kong fish stocks

A massive attack this year by a 'red tide', a reddish brown algae in and around the beaches of Hong Kong has destroyed 1500 tons of fish and left tons of dead fish floating on the sea. In the last two decades, the tide attacks have been growing in intensity. But the recent attack has been far more damaging than on any previous occasion. The algae kills fish 'by entering their gills and infecting them, producing a mucus in the gills which causes fish to die from lack of oxygen'. The sea water fish farms have already lost stock of fish. Government action was tardy. The fishermen demanded compensation. The local residents have been very careful about consuming any local fish. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 16th April 1998.*

EXTINCTION NEWS

The great extinction

Did an asteroid really land on the Deccan, explode and wipe out the dinosaurs? Gargi Das Patra, a science correspondent writes thus: 65 million years ago, a 40 km. asteroid hit the earth, creating a massive impact on the sea near the west coast of Mumbai. The resulting crater (500 km. long, 12 km deep) with its eastern rim near the Mumbai coast and the western rim in Amirants Arc (South of Seychelles). Geologists call this as 'the Shiva impact' which might have shaken the earth's mantle so violently triggering off spectacular volcanic outbursts. Basalt then filled the crater basin to form an immense lava lake. Due to the massive impact (1000 times more powerful than the explosion all nuclear arsenal of the world) many organisms would have died. There have been five major episodes of mass extinction when 50 per cent of the unrelated species died out fairly rapidly. The last extinction is called KT (Cretaceous Tertiary) which wiped out the dinosaurs and all land animals weighing more than 25 kg. Mr. Sankar Chatterjee of Texas Technical University and Dhiraj Rudra of the Indian Statistical Institute have written a paper 'KT events in India' and they pointed out that the occurrence of dinosaurs and eggs intercalated with Deccan lava flows indicate their demise due to the impact of asteroid. *The Times of India, New Delhi, 17th May 1998.*

REPORT ON DOLPHIN COURSE AT CALICUT

A 3 days course on Dolphins was conducted at Calicut from 30th April to 2nd May. The course was attended by 20 participants drawn from various Central Government, State Government, Universities and N.G.Os. Dr. R.S. Lal Mohan, Chairman, Conservation of Nature Trust and the Co-ordinator of Dolphin Protection Committee was the Convener of the course. Dr. Brian Smith Co-ordinator Asia, Cetacean Specialist Group of IUCN was the Chief Resource person besides Dr. R.S. Lal Mohan.

The course mainly dealt with the ecology of dolphins, taxonomy, field identification, general morphology of dolphins, distribution, conservation strategies, implementation of conservation laws and the threats posed by the marine and freshwater dolphins. The course included one day field trip to the sea to observe the dolphins in nature. The participants could learn the census techniques to estimate the dolphin population. They could observe about 11 dolphins (*Sousa chinensis*) in the field.

continued just after AVC College Abstracts