Profile -- The Indore Zoo Conservation and Education programme

Sally Walker

ften we hear people in the conservation community complaining that they "can't do anything" because they have no money, no facilities, no training, etc. At Zoo Outreach Organisation our motto -- one of them..we have many mottos -- is to "THINK SMALL". What we mean by that is not what it seems or sounds. The meaning of "think small" for us is simply to avoid thinking about what we can't do "if only" we had money or staff or facilities, but to think what can be done with what is available. If more people, and organisations and zoos "thought small", perhaps more would be done.

An example of this is the Indore Zoo which has been led into a great many education and conservation activities by the tireless Dr. A.K. Mahodaya, his cooperative superior officers and enthusiastic keepers and gardeners.

The Indore Zoo is a very small zoo designed on the old style with cages of bars and chain link mesh. The budget has not permitted open spacious enclosures or innovative design, modern veterinary facilities, an education department or any of the accoutrements which one associates with a modern zoo. However, the Indore Zoo is one of the most active and innovative zoos in India with regard to their education programmes.

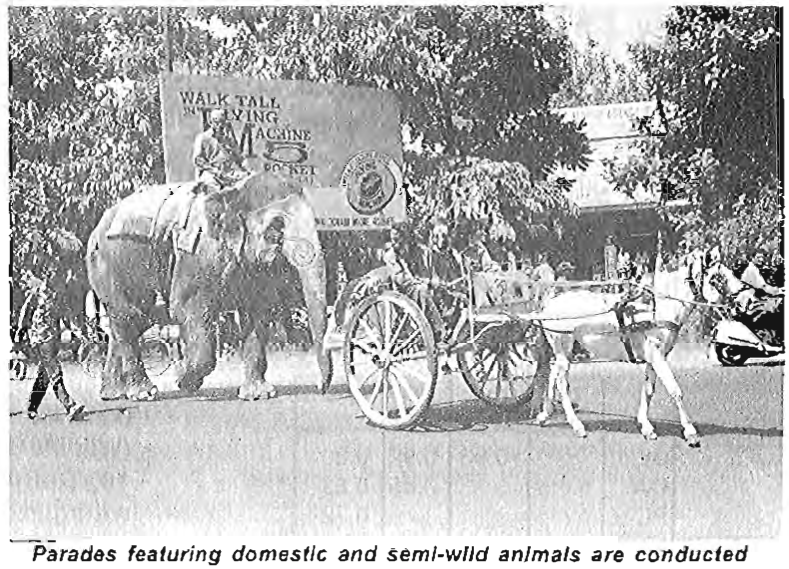
Dr. Mahodaya has created innovative graphics all around the zoo. These graphics are not "professional" in the usual sense of the word -- they won't win prizes in advertising art. But they do convey very clear messages of conservation and concern for animals and are attractive and colourful, with plenty of zap to attract attention.

The Indore Zoo was literally the first zoo in India to make a t-shirt with its logo on the front to give to keepers and distribute to prize winners.

Every year, the Indore Zoo celebrates both Animal Welfare Fortnightly and Wildlife Week in an elaborate manner.

Painting and drawing competitions with a great variety of themes are held during Wildlife Week and Animal Welfare fortnightly.

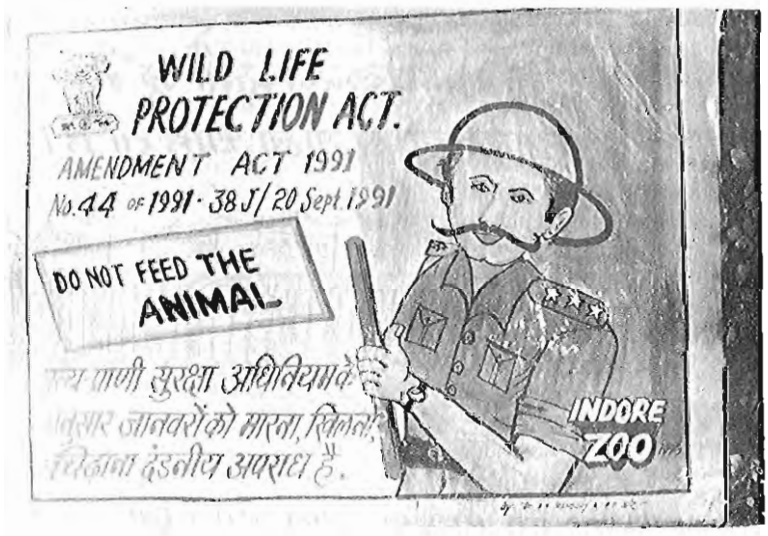
Dramas about the importance of forests and wildlife are played by disabled students during Wildlife Week.



Parades featuring domestic and semi-wild animals are conducted with school and college students of all ages following.

Students from all over Indore from tiny tots to near adults participate in the zoo parade celebrating wildlife

After all the activities and festivities, a grand function is held with dignitaries giving away prizes and speaking about our responsibility to wildlife



New graphics and waysides are made to remind visitors of their responsibilities toward the zoo animals.

There are painting and drawing competitions, parades with all manner of domestic and semi-domestic animals and animal lovers carrying banners, dramas with wildlife themes, rally of staff and children, programmes for invalid students including blind, deaf and dumb, functions with dignitaries, special new graphics, and handouts for the public.

The drama for Wildlife Week 1994 was particularly poignant. Entitled "There was one forest", the children played the role of trees and animals with the teacher giving commentary. The story was that all animals were happy in the forest until man came to kill them and cut the trees. This was a beautiful presentation by children showing the importance of forests.

The Indore Zoo tries to involve ALL the public -- they have special programmes for the youngest students, for college Nature Clubs and for Municiple Corporators.

Mahodaya is one of the only zoo directors to really use a species breeding programme to educate the public and policy makers. Indore Zoo is the proud owner of two wild origin Bengal tigers and was the first zoo to have a birth from these after it became truly well known that many zoo tigers in India were without a pedigree. Indore Zoo has put up graphics explaining the Indian tiger breeding programme and given press interviews about the importance of coordinated breeding and the standard of cooperation Indore Zoo is trying to keep.

Mahodaya prepared poster drawing sheets (the zoo doesn't have an overhead projector) for educating zoo visitors. He took some educational ideas from ZOOS' PRINT literature and added his own material in the local language. The result is a lecture programme with illustrations which Mahodaya can give effectively to any group. His philosophy on education is that people visiting the zoo do not really want to read much so the first point the zoo educator must attend to is attraction, which they do by creativity. Then education is possible. Mahodaya has even prepared posterboards on how to educate in the zoo.

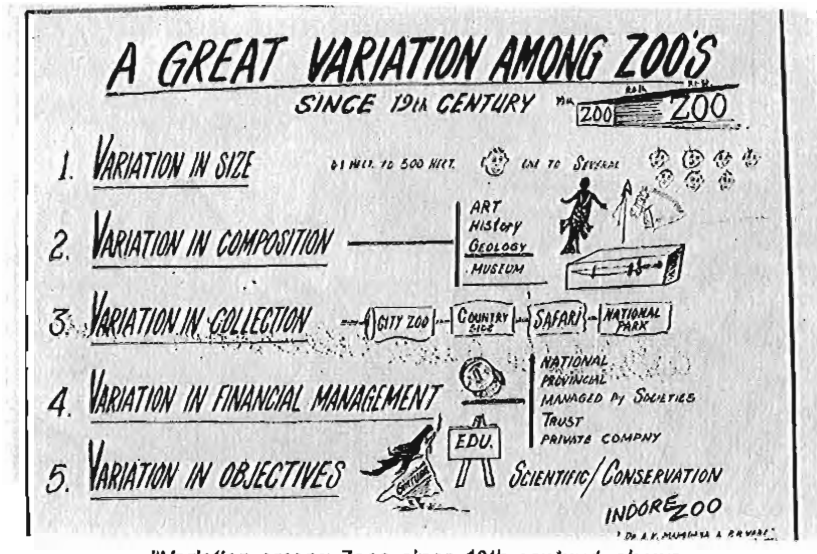
In this vein Mahodaya prepared some innovative waysides to try and get visitor's attention and to make them think about zoos. One of his waysides concerns "Variation among Zoos since 19th century". In this exhibit he illustrates the variation in size, composition, the collection, financial management and in objectives which have come about since the early days of menageries.

The zoo has also designed elegant and innovative posters enjoining visitors not to tease or feed animals and promoting the fact that this is now an offense under the Wildlife Protection Act. One of these shows a wildlife ranger instructing visitors not to feed the animals and giving the Wildlife Act reference very prominently.

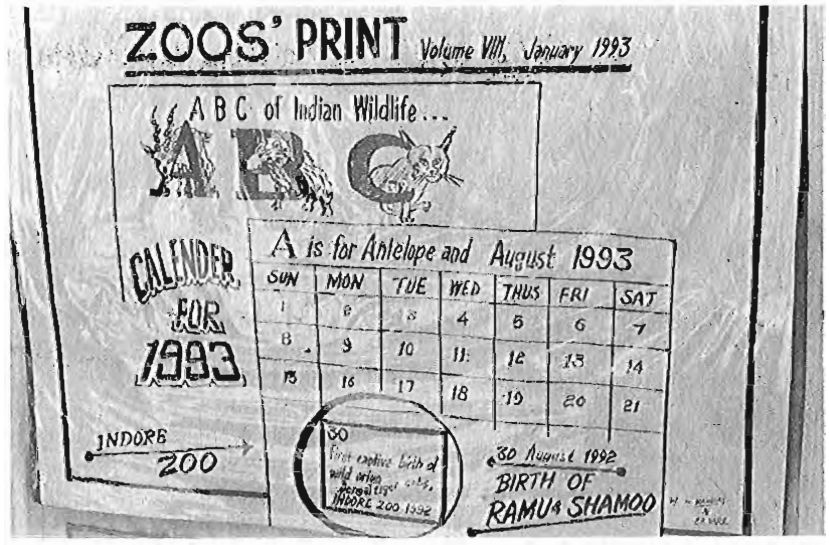
During 1992 the Central Zoo Authority conducted a contest for the CZA logo. The Indore Zoo's Director entered several ideas. None was selected but the creative effort and enthusiasm were unparalleled. An example is given below.

Finally, Indore Zoo is not so egotistical that they won't use ideas and material provided by others. Many of the drawings and themes used by Zoo Outreach Organisation in our booklets have been reproduced for use at Indore. As we send Indore Zoo materials, some of the illustrations and sayings that children get in a tiny booklet can also be seen on the walls and enclosures at the zoo. This makes for a nice effect also.

Zoos with elaborate budgets and facilities have many ways to educate their public. Hardly any Indian Zoo can match the efforts of Indore however. The enthusiastic staff lead the public in Indore into a greater affection and awareness of wild animals with every passing year.



"Variation among Zoos since 19th century' shows how zoos have evolved since the last 100 years.



The birth of Ramu and Shamoo, the first captive "wild" tiger cubs in the Indian zoo breeding programme were featured in ZOOS' PRINT which Indore Zoo has creatively used in a graphic wayside.

Central Zoo Authority contest entry by Mahodaya