Malcolm Whitehead (Talkin' Ed) joins Ardastra Gardens and Zoo in Bahamas

Home of the World-Famous "Marching Flamingoes"

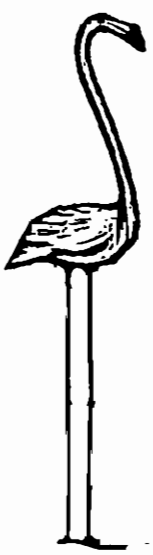
Our readers and members may remember Malcolm Whitehead, or "Talkin' Ed" -- the Ed Zoo cation Officer, who visited India as our guest to conduct zoo education training. While Malcolm was an excellent Education Officer -- creative, scientific, wacky and accurate -- he always wanted to be a zoo director or curator and work with animals. He was particularly interested in managing the animals for conservation, collection planning . . . professional zoo management.

Malcolm left Twycross Zoo where he was education officer for several years to take a job with the International Centre for Conservation Education. There he travelled extensively teaching conservation workers all over the eastern world how to use their skills and develop new ones for education.

About six months ago, Malcolm interviewed for a job in Bahamas and was accepted. As Indians you may not know the signficance of the Bahamas to Americans or Europeans (but particularly Americans). The Bahamas symbolise total tropical paradise with plenty of restaurants and bars. It is one of the important tropical resorts in the western hemisphere.

Malcolm found the zoo in a somewhat disorganised state with no budget, no powers for the director and a more or less "recreation" objective.

His main objective since joining has been to completely restructure the collection, which he is doing bit by bit. There are many single animals but rather than pair them, Malcolm is trying to surplus them to other zoos and keep fewer species which are meaningful for the region where the zoo is located. There are wonderful Bahamian endemics and rarities like several varieties of rock iguana with brilliant diversity and each with its own story -- classic island biology small population stuff. There are also Bahamas parrots, hutias, and "marching flamingoes". The garden itself can be an attraction with a potential for growing any number of tropical plants with a focus on Bahamian endemic plant species.



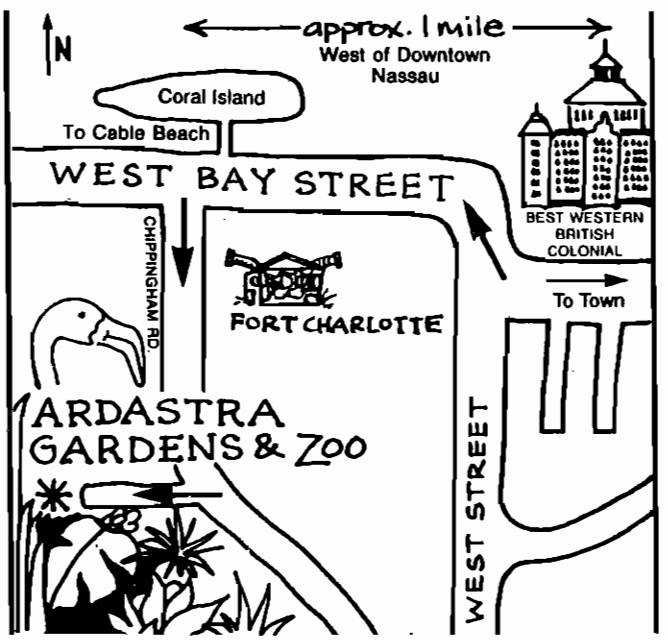
On the day to day management side, Malcolm has started a preventive health programme, arranging fortnightly visits by local vet and a 3-4 time per year visit by Dr. Susan Clubb (one of the worlds's best avian vets. He makes use of the Humane Society for faecals, infrequently used drugs, etc. More improvements to the veterinary section are in process.

In the zoo exhibit area, Malcolm has started building big flamingo breeding and holding area which is a major job. The hutia enclosure has been completed. The Schmidt's guenons have been moved to a large enclosure enriched by bungee cords, ropes, puzzle feeders, etc. and customised. The guenons were next to 2 female jaguars in a very basic old fashioned cage which is now being joined to double the size and provided with enrichment devices.

On the education side, Malc's speciality, he has made a brochure which is a sort of "read as you go" self guided tour and revised the colour flyer. (See Malcolm style Map below.)

There are lots of those clever graphics Malcolm taught us all to make. He hasn't got an artist yet but may get visual graphics courtesy of large bank sponsorships being worked up. Malcolm also developed a 'Wild Bahamas' animal show featuring Bahamas parrot, boa and rock iguana in which Malc himself explains interesting features of these animals. Joining ISIS (International Species Information System) is an upcoming project, as is starting a CBSG, Bahamas ! Imagine !

Malcolm is also getting involved in the administrative affairs of the state, presenting a sort of "white paper" in a series of letters to the Ministry of Agriculture of Bahamas requesting a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding between the zoo, the Bahamas National Trust (an NGO that runs the national parks and the Ministry. The potential for integration between the *in-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation communities in Bahamas is excellent. Malcolm has already requested to organise a CAMP for Bahaman endemics and the required PHVAs.

Malcolm made an inordinate number of friends among his students in our various training workshops. Altogether there were seven workshops in as many states and cities in southern and western India. If any of you want to write to him his address is :

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