

## Bangladesh Zoos go for a National Zoo Association Sally Walker\*

Bangladesh is a small country but it has a very large human population. Naturally, with the expanse of population, the areas that used to be covered with vegetation and the living creatures which sustained the health of the forests, are shrinking. The citizens of Bangladesh have as much interest in wild animals as anyone and they visit the eight zoos in droves. The zoos are very popular.

The writer has been visiting Bangladesh for many years, at least once a year for 10 or so years. Zoo Outreach Organisation also conducted some training workshops at Dhaka and also one on a boat en route Sunderbans forest.

In 2002 ZOO/CBSG South Asia arranged a South Asian regional conference in Bangladesh and at that conference one of the activities was to follow up certain topics in working groups. The writer had been talking to the Bangladeshi zoo persons and their superiors about creating a National Zoo Association for their country to help them meet and interact with the other zoos and do what zoos do, such as exchange animals and expertise, visit other zoos and give or receive information, etc. The Bangladeshis who attended mostly joined the National Zoo Association Working Group and they came up with a request to government and a Charter for the association. The reasons never came to us but somehow the government did not take sufficient interest in this project and it languished and died.

Now it has been reborn and the zoo directors of Bangladesh are very enthusiastic. The writer also prepared a verbal presentation and handed out CD's full of information about the National Zoo Associations of the world, their administrative style, their charters, etc., as well as some books and articles which were important for zoo personnel.

One of the primary reasons I was keen for them to establish a national zoo association is because the Animal Husbandry (AH) Department that had established the most zoos was not on friendly terms with the Forest Department that had established two enormous Safari Parks. The angst was mostly at a higher level. When possible the two department officers collaborated from time to time. The AH departmental officers, when requested, gave advice and help to the Foresters in the form of medical help for the animals. In the meeting the Forest Officers from the Safari Parks were present and contributed a lot to the group. There is a good change that they may increase their interaction so that they may increase their joint activities and do smart things like exchange animals with an eye to avoid inbreeding.

The meeting was blessed with dignitaries who took part, such as the Chairperson, Dr. Mozammel Hoque Siddiqi, Director of the Animal Health and Administration, based in Dhaka. They had fixed the writer as the Chief Guest. Md. Abdur Razzaque Mia former Director General of the AH Department in the Ministry Dr. Enayet Hossain, Curator of Dhaka gave the welcome address. Dr. A.B.M Shahidullah, CVO, CVH, Dhaka and the host of the gathering also gave a speech followed by Md. Razzaque Mia and the final speech by the Chairperson Dr. Hoque Siddique, Director, AH & Admin. The whole programme was conducted by Dr. Md. Maqsdul Hasan Howlader, Deputy Curator, Dhaka Zoo.

Following this the meeting was thrown open to the zoo directors from all over Bangladesh, who shared their views with the rest of the room and thanked those who instigated the meeting very much.

A good lunch was served and the members disbursed. A dinner was held at a restaurant the same night also which was very pleasant.

We are hoping that this time the National Zoo Association of Bangladesh will be accepted by the AH superiors and the zoos can enjoy the prestige of having this useful body. There are approximately 50 national zoo associations in the world.

One reason to be so keen about a National Zoo Association is that the Regional Association, the South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation could not sustain the costs of underwriting all airfares, accommodation and meals of so many people.

SAZARC ran for 10 years but the superior officers of the various zoo personnel who were invited to the SAZARC meetings could not raise the funds for airfares and accommodation. The SAZARC project was very popular but it was not sustainable. The



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National Zoo Associations, by contrast, will be able to meet without such cost and also, sincere they will all be from the same country, their superiors will take a better view of the plan.

The writer thanks all those who prepared for and attended the meeting and for all hospitality and kindness to the writer over the years.

Please see below for a summary the writer's presentation to the zoo personnel.

**Presentation by S. Walker, Founder/Dir., Zoo Outreach Organization/ SAZARC**

Many thanks to all Bangladesh Zoos for meeting together today. It is an honor to be able to speak to all of you. This visit may be my 10th or 11th to your country. Your patience and long-suffering of my critiques and advice for your zoos is admirable.

In the past I have noted that your zoos don't interact sufficiently with one another, at least not so much as many other countries. Meetings like this are few and far between. This is the first time I have seen so many zoo personnel in Bangladesh meet together. I requested Dr. Shaihdullah to bring you together for me so that I might continue my bad habits of complaining and dictating(!), but I hope this meeting will be useful to you all. Also my most fervent hope and request is that you will meet again often (without me) to discuss your zoo and its problems and find solutions. You will be surprised how much meeting and interacting will help you.

This morning I want to talk to you about the Zoo Act of India, the quality of zoos and the importance of National Zoo Associations.

I want to clarify that when I say "zoo", I mean any facility that



Above: Abdur Razzaque delivers a presentation encouraging the zoo directors. Chairperson Mozammel Hoque Siddiqi, Director, Animal Health & Administration. Below: Zoo Directors listening to the presentations.





**Dr. A.B.M. Shahidullah, wearing the white shirt in both photographs was transferred from the Dhaka Zoo where he was Curator to a high post in the Central Veterinary Hospital, where he and his colleagues gave me a wonderful tour of the entire facility. Dr. Shahidullah doesn't let his new post keep him from his interest in zoos of Bangladesh. Above, a few veterinarians posed for a photo under the College sign and to the left, all the staff is shown in the picture.**

displays live animals (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, invertebrates, etc.) **and** is open to the public can be categorized as a zoo. So please don't leave out safari parks, aquariums, etc., as the rest of the world considers them zoos as well.

There is a vast difference in the quality of zoos in the west, e.g. USA/Canada, Europe, and Australia and of zoos in developing countries. In the region of South

Asia there are 7 countries that have at least one zoo or animal facility: Bhutan has one zoo, a Takin Center; Kabul, Afghanistan has 1 very nice zoo, Sri Lanka has 4 zoos (1 of them still being constructed), Pakistan has 27 zoos, deer parks, etc. & Nepal has 27 zoos, (one is a proper zoo but the others are mini zoos or tiny exhibits in parks. I am told Bangladesh has 8 zoos and some uncounted mini zoos.

India has 195 zoos now. At one time they had almost 600 zoos of all kinds and quality from 17 different agencies!. In 1991 the Ministry of Environment completed and published an Indian Zoo Act that set up the Central Zoo Authority of India to monitor, inspect and help all of the zoos. They created different levels of inspection for Large, Medium, Small and Mini-zoos. After inspection they evaluated all of the zoos and sent all of them an inspection report. I was much involved in this project for years and am happy to have been tolerated and that it was taken up. All the zoos were required to fix their defects that teams from Central Zoo Authority inspected and pointed out. They did not have to do it alone ... the Central Zoo Authority provided a 50% matching fund for all the improvements made. The states were requested to provide the rest.

Now, India has 195 zoos (down from nearly 600). That means that India CLOSED 350 zoos that could not pass re-inspection even after getting funds from the concerned Ministry via CZA .. and distributed the animals.

Bangladesh is in a good position with your zoos because you don't have many yet. You should try and keep the number of zoos low because the more zoos a country has, the more substandard zoos crop up. It would be wise to eliminate the mini zoos unless they have the ability to expand and improve. I hope your Zoo Act has something to limit the number of zoos as well as a document which provides for zoo inspection and closure of zoos that are not following the Act. I take this opportunity to congratulate you for creating a Zoo Act ... I hope it is approved soon as your official legislation.

India does not permit zoos to collect animals from the wild ... ever. I have noted that Bangladesh has the same legislation but it is not always observed. Obviously with such a large population of human beings in a small country the forests and wildlife are shrinking on their own so if zoos go against the law and take more animals, you will lose many species.

The zoos of Bangladesh need to be more up-to-date or modern in their animal care ... I understand that you are not exchanging animals to avoid inbreeding or marking the animals so you can easily distinguish one from another. These are difficult things to

learn perhaps, but if you want to be a country with zoos of good standing, you should permanently identify your animals and keep a record of crossings and births in a studbook. After one or two births, the males should be shifted to other zoos & replace them with non-related animals to come to you. This is basic practice for western zoos ... no good zoo would dare neglect their Studbooks or breed closely related individuals. This is difficult but so is replacing severely inbred stock. Now I will move to Zoo Associations.

There are over 50 national zoo associations listed in the International Zoo Yearbook. The zoos that are members of these national associations are nearly always much better than zoos standing alone. The role of National Zoo Associations of the world is very important. They help member zoos with a broad ranges of activities, and the bigger and better zoos in NZA's can help the smaller or not-so-good zoos to improve ... if these zoos want help. The primary virtue in belonging to a well-run National Zoo Association is indeed getting help. No matter how good a zoo is, or how you THINK it is, there are always problems and always things to learn. Sharing your problems with other zoo personnel can help you solve problems in your zoo.

I am happy that Bangladesh has formulated a Zoo Act. Soon after your Zoo Act has officially been approved, you may consider establishing a National Zoo Association.

I can't tell you more about National Zoo Associations as our time does not permit, so I have put together a book of information on NZA's and other books of interest and transferred it to CD's. I think there are enough CD's for everyone here to have one. In the CD you will learn about other National Zoo Associations and how to begin. I will also try to match you up with some people who will help you via their zoo association.

As mentioned before, Zoo Outreach Organization attempted a Regional Association with SAZARC, including all SAsian countries but it was not sustainable. We had to raise \$35,000 to \$50,000 to conduct one Regional conference. Even so people complained because we could not invite more people, or because we didn't give them extra days to talk with forest officers, etc. We at ZOO, which is a "Mom and Pop" organisation didn't like to continue this begging for money from western zoos and had to stop holding SAZARC meetings.

In any case, if each country had a national association it would fill this gap and any zoo professional in a country could afford to travel to a

venue in the same country, unlike SAZARC which required 5-6 countries to be given international air fares. In the ten years of SAZARC NObody would or could convince their government to pay their airfare or even accommodation. We requested many times but participants were afraid to ask their government for such a large sum as an air fare to a neighboring country. So the SAZARC activity now is visiting the South Asian countries and urging them to start National Zoo Association country by country. Already India and Nepal have a Zoo Association each. In Nepal they call it a National Zoo Network and they have not registered it. Their government is uncomfortable with the word "Association"...it sounds too much like what labour unions do.

So if there are such problems and it is difficult to create a National Zoo Association for your country, then at least consider an informal zoo network ... a loose configuration of zoo personnel that want to come together from time to time and discuss their problems and solutions, exchange of animals, latest exhibit(s) etc. Some photos and a short talk about how they managed a particular problem, at what cost, & what they would do differently in their zoo.

There is no rule that you MUST have a formal zoo association in order to get together and come to know one another and develop some trust with one another, like today. After some time of doing this I think you would want to formalize these gatherings.

Thank you for listening to me. As I said I have visited Bangladesh many times and I am very sentimental about the country and its zoos, its people and its wild animals. I will come again, if you like. I hope to see a Bangladesh Zoo Act in Action and a Bangladesh Zoo Association in Action.

We at Zoo Outreach Organisation are thankful to our sponsors for their travel support to visit S.Asian countries to discuss establishment of National Zoo Associations. We could not have done so without assistance from the Chester Zoo, UFAW and Conservation Breeding Specialist Group.

