

The Kabul Zoo
 Written by Sally Walker, Zoo Outreach Organisation

There is so much to say about Kabul Zoo ... its history dates back decades when the then Faculty of Science at Kabul University kept some wild animals for research which captured the attention of the public and then inspired a zoo. The President HRH Prince Nader appointed a Committee of Zoological Projects in the country with members from the Royal Afghan government, the Municipality of Kabul and from the Afghan and German zoological faculty of Kabul University. Officially, the zoo was founded by King Zahirshah, in 1967, and in 1968 became a museum of zoological specimens.



The entrance to Kabul Zoo



During an Earth Day Celebration, the Kabul Zoo education team engaged local schoolboys in a Web of Life activity.

After the bombing it was quite some time before anyone could get into Kabul to help the zoo. Many people and organizations wanted to help but for a long time there were complications. In the meantime, Dr. David Jones, Director of the North Carolina Zoo raised the lion's share of over half a million dollars from other zoos and the public (over 6000 donors) which, when it was possible to get in, was used to feed animals and repair and rebuild exhibits as well as supply other things. Koln Zoo, under the directorship of Gunther

Nogge who was one of the most active faculty of Kabul Zoo when they were involved with the zoo, and Mary Rosevear, the Director of the British and Irish Zoo Association at London Zoo, energetically raised funds which were also administered by the NC Zoo. A small group of fellows working with David each quietly doing some spectacular service for the Kabul Zoo were Nick Lindsay, Curator of Whippsnade, who made several trips to Kabul Zoo to advise and help, James Hogan, Director of Mayhew Animal Hospital which fed the animals at Kabul Zoo for almost two years and Brendan Whitingdon-Jones, a zoo cowboy who had done a stint at Bagdad Zoo before spending many months at Kabul Zoo sorting things out. Several dedicated Afghans were much involved in these projects and visits; all the western organizations and individuals are quick to acknowledge the time, hard work and even risks many locals took to help the zoo animals and get the zoo operational.



Some of the Kabul Zoo staff are pictured in front of a map of the zoo.

Zoo Outreach Organisation (Z.O.O.) where I work in India has been involved with Kabul Zoo also. Ours has been a minor role compared to that of others, mostly having to do with education and training but very interesting and exciting for me and my whole staff. In July this year I finally managed to go over for a week to see the zoo and follow up on what other training might be useful for the Kabul zoo staff. The NC Zoo was kind to sponsor my visit.

I was surprised to find Kabul a happy and busy city instead of a ruined, dreary place. Construction is going on everywhere, including in the zoo. There are many nice restaurants and shops with modern conveniences such as cell phones, computers, etc. I didn't sense tension anywhere I went, or felt afraid, until I visited my very own embassy which was so intimidating, I was afraid of making an innocent mistake that might land me in trouble!

To the best of my knowledge, the Kabul Zoo never had an education department before the hostilities. In helping to rebuild the zoo, western zoo people impressed upon the municipal government the importance of an education officer and department. So, when Fazil Saidel, the first Education Officer, was hired, he had a repaired and redecorated education room thanks to The British Embassy and UK troops, as well as brochures, leaflets, posters



Mammals of Afghanistan Poster created by Zoo Outreach Organisation

and some equipment. Schools were visiting and Fazil carried on education programs there, working with all ages of the public. ZOO helped out by publishing 2 versions of Mammals of Afghanistan by Dr. Kushal Habibi (in English and Dari, the local language) with financial assistance from US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Fazil was able to attend 3 USFWS Teachers for Tigers training workshops thanks to David Jones and the North Carolina Zoo, who also supported the Director, Shah Nuri, and Fazil to Pakistan where we conducted short trainings in Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore, and the South Asian Zoo Association conference in Lahore. Fazil married and joined his wife in the USA and the current education officer, Najib Nazery, was hired and is doing a great job.

Najib works out of a new but temporary education office for the time being. The permanent Education office will be in a large, newly constructed building right in front of the zoo behind a statue of Marjan. Most readers will remember Marjan, the blind lion who came to represent the tragedy of hostilities destroying a place of innocence. Marjan is still much in the zoo in spirit in a beautiful statue that is a first sight of a visitor after buying a ticket. After Marjan there is a lovely fountain and behind that, a large, new attractive building which will house the Education Department once it is properly inaugurated. Already animal posters are up inside the windows, a project of the zoo assisted by W.C.S. and USAID. WCS and USAID recently have produced a number of educational materials to hand out when school groups or others visit the zoo.



Education Officer Najib holds up a youngster participating in the Earth Day special poster activity.



Behind the new fountain is the future education building.



At the entrance of the zoo is a statue of the zoo's famous lion, Marjan. Pictured are members of the zoo staff, along with Sally Walker.

Najib Nazery visits different schools several times a week to deliver talks about wildlife and the zoo, and also to schools which have not been involved with the zoo so far, to arrange visits by school classes as well as teaching visits to schools. There are frequent visits by schools during the week, just like most cities. Kabul Zoo is very well equipped for these visits, more than many of our zoos in the rest of South Asia. Najib gives power point presentations about wild animals and takes the students around the zoo describing the animals with a battery operated portable loudspeaker.

There are opportunities for special learning with some of the material developed by Kara Stevens of WCS during her months there. One of them is a series of questions linked with drawings of which 100 copies have been printed up and laminated. Najib hands out the laminated copy and a sheet of paper to the students and they reply the questions and make their own drawings on the paper. Since thousands of students are going through, this is a handy and inexpensive way to avoid printing costs.



Najib demonstrates a laminated learning guide for visiting school classes, an efficient and economical way to engage thousands of students.

The zoo education department always welcomes physically challenged groups also. Najib showed a film clipping of a large group of deaf students having the time of their lives imitating sounds and behavior of animals they were shown on screen.

Najib has copies of the local language version of Mammals of Afghanistan which he gives to teachers and older groups such as college classes. WCS and USAID provided these and sets of posters for their classroom on birds, mammals, herptiles and protected areas of Afghanistan.



Signs throughout the zoo encourage appropriate visitor behavior. This sign, in Dari, one of the two local languages, asks visitors to not feed or tease animals.

One of the big problems of the zoo is the behavior of visitors, as is the case in many zoos around the world. Najib and other staff have designed signage of different kinds to try and convince visitors to treat the animals kindly, and most people do...however it only takes a few to do irrevocable damage to an animal or group of animals.

WCS has also helped with signage. There is consistent signage on every enclosure with an attractive, simple line drawing of the animal, and some basic facts of habitat, diet, gestation and status in three languages, English, Dari and Pushtu.



Every animal exhibit has a standardized educational board in 3 languages, English, Dari and Pushtu, explaining habitat, diet, incubation and status.



Director Aziz congratulates a temporary zookeeper on becoming a permanent staff member.

Kabul Zoo is providing a great service for the city. It is actually the only place in or near the city where a whole family can come and find exercise, enjoyment and education. The Municipal Government is very interested improving and expanding the zoo for that reason. The vibrant and vigorous Director of the zoo Md. Azizgul Sabiq keeps the zoo in a constant state of transformation and improvement, urged on by the Kabul Municipal administrators, the dynamic new Mayor, Md. M. Y. Nawandish, Mr. Mahtabudin Ahmadi, Advisor to the Mayor, and more recently Mrs. Rahela Kohistani, the bright, new Cultural Director who oversees the zoo.

Education Departments in zoos all over the world can always use inspirational material...such as examples of packets, posters, brochures that other zoos have done. Also pictures of animals of any kind with a little text that tell basic information are always good to have around to teach visitors and schools groups that come to learn about all the world's animals. Kabul Zoo is no exception and you can be doing a service to send a package of some of your successful or particularly attractive educational materials. Najib is learning English very fast and has a computer programme which will translate any English word into Dari, so he will have no trouble with English. Also if you have sets of simple drawings of animals or people doing both right and wrong things at a zoo, Kabul zoo could utilize them. CDs are a safe and inexpensive way to send and store some items. Please send the items to: Najib Ahmad Nazary Education Department, Kabul Zoo [Kabul Municipality, Baricot Dehmazang, Kabul, Afghanistan. Email: najib_nazary009@yahoo.com](mailto:najib_nazary009@yahoo.com)

We wish the Kabul Zoo continued success!