

## **South Asians to Singapore ... to the First Asian Zoo Educator Conference**

**Submitted by S. Walker, South Asian Rep for IZE**

The first ever Asian Zoo Education Conference was held recently from 6<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> September 2007, organized by the world famous Singapore Zoo. As Rachana Shah reported after attending the conference " the need for a platform for the exchange of ideas among Asian zoo educators has always been deeply felt, so the initiation was taken by the Singapore zoo to fill this gap, leading them to host the first Asian Zoo Educators conference."

Zoo Outreach Organisation has been a friend and fan of Singapore Zoo since ZOO's inception. Many years ago, ZOO arranged for Dy. Director, ZOO, Sanjay Molur and Brij K. Gupta, now Biologist, CZA to spend several weeks at Singapore Zoo to study their superior marketing and education sections as well as general zoo management. Some years later, Singapore Zoo invited Walker to design and conduct a 10-day South East Asian Zoo Educator Master Planning training which was sponsored by the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There have been many visits and friendships forged otherwise.

Therefore when ZOO heard that Singapore Zoo had decided to organize the first Asian Zoo Educator Course, we had to support it. We sent six people, all female zoo and conservaton educators with five fully sponsored by us with help from Columbus Zoo and Disney's Animal Kingdom and one with help from her parents, ZOO and from WCS. They were all accommodated together so South Asian networking as well as Asian bennefitted. Someone from each of five countries could attend, e.g. Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India.



**The South Asian Zoo Crew: Lanka from Sri Lanka, Bushra from Pakistan, Rachana from Nepal, Meena from India, Gawsia, and Payal from India at the South Asian Zoo Educator conference.**

We have collected short Reports from all participants which we include in brief below.

**From Rachana Shah, Curator of Education, Central Zoo, Nepal**

Zoo education was once largely limited to programs for school children. But modern zoos have moved on and become important centers for educating visitors on all aspect of our natural world. With rapid depletion in Earth's biodiversity the need for conservation has become ingrained in the direction and philosophy of most zoos. As natural resources diminish, zoos need to take on an added responsibility in promoting sustainable living. The need for a platform for the exchange of ideas among Asian zoo educators has always been deeply felt, so the initiation was taken by the Singapore zoo to fill this gap among the Asian Zoo Educators which led them to host the 1<sup>st</sup> Asian Zoo Educators conference.

The Theme of the Conference -- Engage , Educate , Conserve -- was most appropriate. We enjoyed Ms. Fanny Lai, Director, Singapore Zoo as she shed light on how zoos all over the world changed significantly from menageries to more biotope like enclosures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and now in twenty first century an update of the World Zoo and Aquaria Conservation strategy will lead zoos into the next stage of evolution. Professor Leo Tan, Professor of Biological Sciences, National Institute of Education and Chairman, WRS Animal Welfare and Ethics Committee emphasized on how the zoo all over can and is helping in educating about the wildlife and environment education and how crucial role they play in the society.

We had opportunities to learn by visiting different facilities and sites with a behind the scenes tour of Singapore Zoo, a visit to Under Water world, the Singapore Science Centre, and other places. Therefore the results of this conference were manifold. The conference helped me to develop a networking with the other educators and I could learn about many different conservation activities through others' presentation. I also found the interpretation at the Zoo very informative, and will implement a few of the tips to update our interpretations. I thought the zoo program by the name Dr. OOZ(ZOO) was very good in which the staff visit the school and give a talk program related with the wildlife which we will incorporate at Singapore Zoo. Singapore Zoo has a very strong volunteer program some of which activities and tools can be implemented in our program as well.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Ms Sally Walker, Director, South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation for making this conference possible for me and the organizer of this conference, and to Disney Wildlife Park for providing me the chance to attend this wonderful gathering. Submitted by Rachana Shan, Central Zoo

#### **From Payal B. Molur, Go Wild Workshops, Coimbatore, India**

The first Asian Zoo Educators Conference held at and organized by the Singapore Zoo and Night Safari was a perfect platform for us educators to meet and exchange a host of ideas and experiences with one another.

One of the features that greatly stood out at this conference for me, was the use of signages and touch tables for interpretation. Each area was thematically arranged thereby furthering the subliminal messages that the visitors were getting – take for example the shape of the signages in the Australian outback enclosures that were shaped like boomerangs and decorated with aboriginal artwork. There were also signs placed at low levels for young children to see easily and others at wheel chair heights and some signs that were written in brail. All the signs were pictorial, and had three languages beautifully showcasing the exhibit, the animal and/or conservation message. This whole experience gave me a great opportunity to understand how signages and interpretatives can be used in India in Zoos at more economical costs and yet have similar impacts on the audiences.

Another experience that I felt I would like to incorporate in some zoos was how the Singapore science centres used the garden to teach various aspects of ecology. Including building a tree house with various aspects of the denizens of the tree dwellers, as you climb up into the tree house, pointed out. A small wetland patch with frogs, toads, dragonflies etc and water plants native/exotic where people of all ages could explore, and an area where kids could carefully rake thought dead leaves to discover the small insects that live there. All these experiences backed with education material and a knowledgeable guide could easily be adapted.

Many thanks to Sally Walker, IZE Regional Rep for South Asia, to Wildlife Conservation Society and to my parents for encouragement, coordination, and funding which enabled me to attend.

#### **From Gawsia Wahidunnessa Chowdhury, Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh**

For me the most important role of AZEC 2007 lies in assisting the educators from developing countries of Asia to inspire them how they can perform well as an Educator. All the delegates

got the opportunities to hear from the keynote speakers, learn from over 26 papers and 8 poster presentations, participate in various interactive sessions and visit various important animal displays. It gave the participants a chance to communicate conservation education potentials and problems, the courage to accept challenges which come on the way. Finally we agreed that in the face of diminishing natural resources, we all educators with zoo education need to take on an added responsibility in promoting sustainable living.

#### **Future planning to do with these experiences and in the AZE network afterwards**

- share my conference experiences with the zoo educators in Bangladesh;
- create awareness among zoo visitors by preparing leaflets, posters, bill boards, etc;
- organise talks for students and others;
- organise zoo visits for disabled students and others; and
- develop a regular education programme involving zoo educators and students.

In addition, I would like to keep in touch with other zoo personnel of the world through AZE and IZE. On behalf of the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh I would like to organize workshops for the zoo educators in Bangladesh where we may expect resource persons from this network. I express my deep sense of gratitude to Sally Walker who made this trip possible for me. I thank the organizers for making this event so successful and for looking after us so well. I owe much to all the participants who helped me know more about zoos and its education programmes. Submitted by Gawsia Choudhery, Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh, Bangladesh.

#### **From Meena Nareshwar, Centre for Environmental Education, Ahmedabad, Gujarat**

The first Asian Zoo Educators' Conference (AZEC), 2007 was hosted by Singapore Zoological Gardens. The Conference provided an excellent platform to exchange and share ideas and expertise of Zoo Educators' not only from the South-east and South Asia but also Australia and UK. About 56 delegates representing 11 countries participated in the conference. It was a very good mix of experts in the field. The conference had over 26 papers and 8 poster presentations which were rich and varied. There were also interactive sessions, which gave a good opportunity for the participants to ask questions and exchange ideas.

The outdoor sessions included interacting with the Singapore Zoo staff and learning from them the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of the education programmes carried out at the Zoo. The session focusing on the vital role of animal hospitals and veterinary requirements in zoos was of great value. Outdoor visits and interactive sessions broadened the outlook of the participants and gave a totally new perspective on how creative we can get in designing and developing educational programmes for such learning centres. The Conference was very well organized and time management was excellent with opportunities for interactions not only amongst the Singapore Zoo staff but also within the Conference participants. Many thanks to Sally Walker of ZOO and to Renaud of Awley, France for coordinating and sponsoring my attendance at this conference. Submitted by Meena Nareswar, CEE, India

#### **From Bushra Mahmood of Lahore Zoo, Pakistan**

I'm really grateful for a chance to see a world class zoo and an "open zoo ". Before my visit my concept of modern zoo was quite different so it was an eye-opener trip for me. I learnt a lot about education, animal habitat, animal management and night safari. The AZEC workshop will really help us to educate our visitors in more appropriate way. Thanks to Sally Walker and Columbus Zoo for providing me a chance to interact with international zoo education community. Submitted by Mrs. Bushra Mahmood, Education Officer, Lahore Zoo Pakistan

**Ms. Lanka of Pinnewala, Sri Lanka** sent a profuse thanks by email which vapourised. Her thanks reflected her interest in the conference and her plans for the future.

Zoo Outreach Organisation and the South Asian Network of International Zoo Educators also thanks the sponsors of the group's attendance at ASEC

**Disney's Animal Kingdom**

**Columbus Zoo**

**Awley**

**Wildlife Conservation Society**

**Payal's fathers frequent flyer miles**