

National Zoo Policy, 1998

Preamble

1.1 The growing awareness for nature & wildlife conservation has made zoos a popular institution. Estimates indicate that 10% of the world's population visit zoos every year. There are about 350 animal collections in India, which are visited by more than 50 million people annually.

1.2 While there is a history of scientific interest, conservation and welfare of captive wild animals in the country, many zoos have evolved from menageries and private collections, and most zoos until the last two decades were set up mainly for entertainment and recreation. As wildlife resources were abundant in the past, scientific knowledge about the behavioral and biological requirements of animals did not receive adequate attention, with the result that scientific management of wild animals in captivity has evolved slowly.

1.3 The need for making conservation as one of the main objectives of management of zoos was realized by Government of India soon after independence and the Indian Board of Wildlife made important recommendations in this regard. The Government set up an Expert Committee on Management of Zoos in November, 1972 and its recommendations were accepted in June, 1973. The recommendations are relevant even now for improving the management of Zoos. The National Wildlife Action Plan of 1983 again emphasized the role of ex-situ conservation in national conservation efforts. However, because of varied ownership patterns and divergent nature of animal collections, not much was achieved.

1.4 Today when wildlife habitats are under severe pressure and a large number of species of wild fauna have become endangered, the zoos have not only to sustain their own populations but also augment the depleting populations of endangered species in the wild. This new role has been acknowledged by the global conservation community and Article 9 of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

1.5 As zoos are visited by a large number of visitors, zoos are a potent tool for educating people about the close linkage between protection of natural areas and maintaining the life supporting processes of nature. Well-planned and appropriately designed zoos can sensitize visitors to the dangers of a hostile or indifferent attitude towards nature.

1.6 In India, many well designed zoos were set up in some of the States but for the most part, zoos have not been able to meet the challenges

imposed by the changing scenario and still continue with the legacy of past i.e. displaying animals under conditions which are neither congenial to the animals nor educative and rewarding to the visitors.

1.7 The amendment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, in 1991, provided for the enforcement of mandatory standards and norms for management of zoos through the Central Zoo Authority. However, it is realized that the objectives of the Act can be achieved only through co-operation and participation of various government agencies, non-governmental organisations and people at large.

1.8 The National Zoo Policy aims at giving proper direction and thrust to the management of zoos by mustering co-operation and participation of all concerned.

Objectives

2.1 The main objective of the zoos shall be to complement and strengthen the national efforts in conservation and strengthen the national efforts in conservation of the rich biodiversity of the country, particularly the fauna. The objective can be achieved through the following protocol :-

2.1.1 Supporting the conservation of endangered species by giving species, which have no chance of survival in wild, a last chance of survival through coordinated breeding under ex-situ condition and raise stocks for rehabilitating them in wild as and when it is appropriate and desirable.

2.1.2 To inspire amongst zoo visitors empathy for wild animals, an understanding and awareness about the need for conservation of natural resources and for maintaining the ecological balance.

2.1.3 Providing opportunities for scientific studies useful for conservation in general and creation of database for sharing between the agencies involved in in-situ and ex-situ conservation

2.1.4 Besides the aforesaid objectives, the zoos shall continue to function as rescue centres for orphaned wild animals, subject to the availability of appropriate housing and upkeep infrastructure. Where appropriate housing and upkeep is not available, State Government and the Central Government would ascertain setting up rescue facilities in off-the-display areas of the zoo, subject to the availability of land.

Strategy for Achieving the Objectives

General Policy about Zoos

3.1.1 Since zoos require a significant amount of resources in the form of

land, water, energy and money, no new zoo shall be set up unless a sustained supply of resources including finance and technical support are guaranteed.

3.1.2 Zoos shall prepare a long-term master plan for development to ensure optimum utilisation of the land, water, energy and finance.

3.1.3 Every Zoo shall maintain a healthy, hygienic and natural environment in the zoo, so that the visitors get an adequate opportunity to experience a natural environment.

3.1.4 Zoos shall give priority to endangered species in their collection and breeding plans. The order of preference for selection of species shall be (in descending order) locality, region, country and other areas.

3.1.5 Zoos shall regulate the number of animals of various species in their collection in such a way that each animal serves the objectives of the zoo. For achieving this objective, a detailed management plan of every species in the zoo shall be prepared.

3.1.6 Every zoo shall endeavor to avoid keeping single animals of non-viable sex ratios of any species. They shall cooperate in pooling such animals into genetically, demographically and socially viable groups at zoos identified for the purpose.

3.1.7 Zoos shall avoid keeping surplus animals of prolifically breeding species and if required, appropriate population control measures shall be adopted.

Acquisition of Animals

3.2.1 Except for obtaining founder animals for approved breeding programme and infusion of new blood into inbred groups, no zoo shall collect animals from the wild.

3.2.2 Zoos shall not enter into any transaction involving violation of the law and provisions of international conventions on wildlife conservation.

3.2.3 Zoos shall not enter into any transaction in respect of their surplus animals with any commercial establishment. Even the animal products should not be utilised for commercial purposes. The trophies of the animals could, however, be used for educational or scientific purposes.

Animal Housing

3.3.1 Every animal in a zoo shall be provided housing, upkeep and health care that can ensure a quality of life and longevity to enable the zoo population sustain itself through procreation.

3.3.2 The enclosure for all the species displayed or kept in a zoo shall be of such size that all animals get adequate space for free movement and exercise and no animal is unduly dominated or harassed by any other animal.

3.3.3 Each animal enclosure in a zoo shall have appropriate shelters, perches, withdrawal areas, wallow, pools drinking water points and such other facilities which can provide the animals a chance to display the wide range of their natural behaviour as well as protect them from extremes of climate.

Upkeep of Animal Collections

3.4.1 Zoos shall provide diet to each species, which is similar to its feed in nature. Where for unavoidable reasons any ingredients have to be substituted, due care will be taken to ensure that the substitute fulfills the nutritional requirement of the species.

3.4.2 For the well being of the animals, round the clock supply of potable drinking water shall be made available to all animals kept in the zoo.

3.4.3 With the objectives of avoiding human imprinting and domestication of animals zoos shall prevent physical handling of animals by the staff to the extent possible.

3.4.4 Zoos shall not allow any animal to be provoked or tortured for the purpose of extracting any performance or tricks for the benefit of the visitors or for any other reason.

Health Care

3.5.1 Zoos shall ensure availability of the highest standards of veterinary care to all the animals in their collection.

3.5.2 Adequate measures shall be taken by every zoo for implementing wildlife health and quarantine rules and regulations. Appropriate vaccination programmes shall also be taken up for safeguarding against infectious diseases. Timely action to isolate infected animals from the zoo population shall be taken to avoid further spread of disease.

Research And Training

3.6.1 The zoos shall encourage research on the biology, behaviour, nutrition and veterinary aspects of animals in their collection. They shall also endeavor for creation of expertise on zoo architecture and landscape designing, cooperation of recognised institutions already working in relevant fields in this regard shall be taken.

3.6.2 Zoos shall endeavor for transfer of technical skills available in the field for zoo personnel. The Central Government, Central Zoo Authority and State Government shall provide due support to zoos in these efforts. Assistance of Wildlife Institute of India (WII), India Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) and other institutions within India and abroad, having appropriate expertise shall be taken in this regard.

3.6.3 Zoos shall also endeavour for dissemination of information on scientific aspects of management through publication of periodicals, journals, newsletters and special bulletins. Help of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government institutions shall also be availed in such efforts. The Central Zoo Authority shall provide technical and financial support to the Indian Zoos Directors Association (IZDA) and other institutions in this regard.

Breeding programme for species

3.7.1 Before taking up breeding programmes of any species, zoos shall clearly identify the objectives for which the breeding programme is being taken up. The targeted numbers for the programme would be decided keeping in view the identified objectives.

3.7.2 All zoos shall cooperate in successful implementation of identified breeding programmes by way of loaning, pooling or exchanging animals for the programme and help creation of socially, genetically and demographically viable groups even at the cost of reducing the number of animals or number of species displayed in individual zoos.

3.7.3 Breeding programme shall be taken up by zoos after collection of adequate data like biology, behaviour and other demographic factors affecting the programme including the minimum number of founder animals and the quantum of housing facilities available.

3.7.4 Programmes for breeding of zoo animals for re-introduction in the wild shall be taken up after getting approval of the State Government, the Central Zoo Authority and the Central Government as the case may be.

3.7.5 Zoos shall give priority in their breeding programmes to endangered species representing the zoo-geographic zones in which they are located.

3.7.6 For carrying out breeding programmes in a scientific and planned manner the zoo shall mark every individual animal involved in the programme in an appropriate manner and maintain appropriate records.

3.7.7 Zoos shall take utmost precaution to prevent inbreeding. They shall avoid artificial selection of traits and make no explicit or implicit attempts to interbreed various genera, species and sub-species.

3.7.8 Special efforts shall be made to avoid human imprinting of the stocks raised for reintroduction purposes by providing off exhibit breeding facilities.

Education and Outreach Activity

3.8.1 Each zoo should have a well drawn-up plan for educating the visitors as well as others in the community. Zoos shall keep a close liaison with other ex-situ facilities in this regard.

3.8.2 The central theme of the zoo education programme being the linkage between the survival of various species and protection of their natural habitat, enclosures which allow the animals to display natural behaviour are crucial to zoo education. Zoo shall, therefore, display animals in such enclosures only where the animals do not suffer physiological and psychological restraint.

3.8.3 Attractive and effective signage methods and interactive displays to explain activities of various species to visitors, published education material and audio-visual devices are proven methods for driving home the conservation's message. A formal education programme should also be pursued for strengthening the education message.

3.8.4 Beside signage, the zoos shall also use guided tours, talks by knowledgeable persons and audio-visual shows for effectively communicating the message of conservation to the visitors.

3.8.5 The help of universities, colleges and non-governmental organisation shall be taken to educate the students about the benefits of supporting nature conservation programmes.

Extension Activities

3.9.1 To provide the urban population with a window to nature and to serve as green lungs for the polluting environment, zoos shall extend their expertise and help to State Governments and local authorities to create nature parks extending over extensive areas near big cities.

Amenities to Visitors

3.10.1 Zoo shall provide basic civic amenities to the visitors like toilets, drinking water points, shelters and first-aid facilities. Ramps shall also be provided for the benefit of visitors in wheel chairs for approach to animal enclosure and other civic amenities.

3.10.2 Zoos shall not provide any infrastructure for recreation/entertainment of visitors that is inconsistent with the stated objective of zoos.

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