ZOO-TASTIC!

One's love for wild things can only grow in zoos

By Sneha Thapliyal

As a child, I absolutely loved my annual trips to the National Zoological Park, Delhi. Every summer holiday when I visited my grandparents in Delhi, at least two trips to the Delhi Zoo were mandatory. I can still vividly recall the winding gravel pathway leading from one cluster of enclosures to the next, overlooked by the glorious Purana Qila.

No electric cars

Over two decades ago, there were no electric vehicles to zip you through the 2-and-a-half km of main road within the 178-acre Delhi Zoo. So, armed with my armour against the summer-sun cap and water bottle, I would walk merrily. On each trip, I observed the fauna patiently and instinctively picnicked them in the wild. A Great Indian Hornbill with its splendid yellow and black casque perched amidst the green canopy of Hollook Gibbons hooting their characteristic calls as they swung carelessly from one tree to the next or a leopardess effortlessly leaping up a tree with her kill. And my love for all things wild only grew.

Apart from interesting facts about the fauna, posters placed in front of the enclosures are also extremely informative. I learnt how we were fragmenting and destroying the natural habitats of these magnificent creatures. For instance, Lion-tailed Macaques are bred in captivity in Delhi Zoo since their numbers have dwindled down to a few thousand.

Western Gats

These silver-bordered primates are endemic to the Western Gats in India. Zoos also serve their mandate of creating public awareness by providing us with snippets of species-specific horror stories. Case in point being how Sloth Bears wince in pain (perceived as 'dancing') when the madari pulls the chord stuffed through their noses. For me, this whole experience led to the crucial leap from awareness to sensitisation at an early age.

However, we must not forget that there are not only one-off guard available. The trouble some boy fell off the railing and was visibly shaken. I could not help but feel inwardly at the lesson learnt for the day for the throng of onlookers.

Though the man-made confines of a zoo can never substitute the exhilarating wilderness but, in bustling megacities like Delhi, the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the wild species is delightful and educational. So, next time you have to plan an itinerary for your holidays, make the National Zoological Park numero uno on your list and try to experience it a little differently this time!