



Tiger and Sloth Bear. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR.



## TRIVIA

Zoological parks are a part of off-site conservation strategy called ex-situ conservation.

Dissemination of relevant information to create public awareness regarding conservation issues is also one of the main objectives of zoos.

Such 'out of the natural habitat' facilities house and care for specimens of endangered species for captive breeding programmes.

The first zoological park was built in Schonbrunn (near Vienna) in 1759.

Historically, kings and emperors in India had small collections of animals in the palaces. It is presumed that Raja Mullick Bahadur started the first zoo in 1854 with a collection of many mammals and birds in his private mansion in the centre of Calcutta.

At the time of Indian independence, there were 22 zoos across the nation.

A pair of leopards was the first animal acquired for the Delhi Zoo in 1958.

Zoos are divided into smaller zones for maintenance called 'beats'. Each beat has about 4-5 different animal enclosures with specified caretakers. They clean the enclosures, feed the animals and keep a close watch on their activities. The Delhi Zoo has 20 beats.

Exchange programmes are done regularly between Zoological Parks across India to get partners for solitary animals, to change the gene pool and prevent inbreeding.

# 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 176-acre Delhi Zoo. So, geared 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 pictured them in the wild. A Great Indian Hornbill with its resplendent yellow and black casque perched amidst the green canopy or Hoolock Gibbons hooting their characteristic calls as they swung carelessly from one tree to the next or a leopardess effortlessly skipping 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 arenas 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 Ghats

These silver-maned primates are endemic to the Western Ghats in India. Zoos also serve their mandate of creating pub-

lic 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 never forget that these exquisite animals and birds are not in their ideal habitats. Mistaking them for puppets to respond to your cues not only demonstrates callousness towards fellow living beings but can also be a critical error. This brings me to an interesting chapter of my little Zoo-book from my days of interning with the Delhi Zoo in 2006. I recall one chilly morning when I was on my daily round of the beats in the Zoo. A boy was leaning over the railing of the leopard enclosure, tapping on the mesh and shouting. His attempts to provoke a response were ignored by the leopards for over 5 minutes.

## A lesson

Finally, Baaghu Singh, the alpha male, swiftly leapt from the

floor to the mesh growling. And Baaghu did this in a few milliseconds catching everyone off-guard! The troublesome boy fell off the railing and was visibly shaken. I could not help but smile inwardly at the lesson learnt for the day for the throng of onlookers!

Even 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!

Do you have any zoo stories? Write to us. [dhschools@gmail.com](mailto:dhschools@gmail.com)

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Bangalore