

Zoo libraries conservation program

Every time I introduce myself to colleagues as the librarian of the Adelaide Zoo, the reaction is: 'It must be fantastic to work in such pleasant surroundings, and stroll around the zoo in your lunch time every day.' Few of my colleagues, however, have ventured deeper and asked about the challenges such 'pleasant surroundings' pose. There are many and very big.

Many libraries in organisations that belong to of Zoos and Aquaria Association or 'ZAA' are managed by a staff member with no formal training in librarianship and whose full-time position covers a different area of management like animal record management, teaching, or administration. Where library professionals are employed the maximum time for the position is 0.5

This leads to all sorts of challenges. Circulation is a major one. "It is always challenging to manage an area when it is open at all times, and it is only a small part of someone's job," one of my colleagues writes. "When I first started, I completed an inventory count and found there were approximately 170 missing books. In the following 7 months, some books have made their way back to the library but there are still approximately 140 books missing."

My record for a book return is ten years. The book was returned in a white envelope, anonymously. Consistently enforcing strict borrowing procedure is the only way to curb this problem.

We also have to contend with the logistics of managing circulation with clients working at different properties distant from each other. A good working relationship with staff and a strong sense of team work is the key.

Staff members in institutions like ours keep the most intensely used resources in their departments, on permanent loan. We need to find ways to entice them to explore the library. "I have tried to get more attention on the library by 'revamping' the area which has made it much more user-friendly and it has resulted in people understanding better what is expected from them (i.e. how long they can borrow books for, late fees, etc)," writes Tineke Nielsen-Joustra, Registrar of Auckland Zoo.

We are expected to source specialist information and grey literature (which forms a great part of our resources) with no access to specialist databases, whose

cost we cannot justify to our financial managers. The answer for me was to select *The hidden web* by Maureen Henninger as my PD personal study and learn to squeeze all I can out of Google and other free search engines. No choice.

Budgets are small or non-existent. Private zoos, like Adelaide Zoo, are financially very dependent on visitation. They are also outdoor facilities at the mercy of the weather. If visitors do not

Zoos), started a network of zoo libraries with colleagues from Perth Zoo, Taronga Zoo, and Western Plains Zoo, based on a similar network existing in North America. After a period of quiescence in the late 1990s, I managed to restart the network in 2003 as the 'ARAZPA (now ZAA) Libraries Network' and to gain formal recognition for the network as a sub-group of the Education Advisory Group.

The network was first established to share resources ('widening' our collections without spending money), to contribute ideas, and to keep in contact at a personal level, breaking the feeling of isolation. Within the network we offer interlibrary loan and document supply, free of charge. This collaboration works well with the type of resources we need, often held only in zoos and aquaria.

At the moment we are exploring ways to make our catalogues available to each other with nothing more at our disposal than MS Word. We are sure our collective lateral thinking will provide some solution.

So, with so many obstacles, why do we turn up at work every day? Why do we not seek employment elsewhere? Our strong belief in the value of zoos and other conservation centres is a huge motivator. We are also fortunate to work with clients that are friendly, patient, and helpful. To quote Tineke again: "The most rewarding part of the library [work] is when we have materials available to help staff with their professional development."

Zoos, sanctuaries, and aquaria implement conservation programs for wildlife in order to preserve the precious network of biodiversity we all are so reliant upon. We zoo librarians need to implement

a conservation program for ourselves, to preserve our network of information provision which our parent organisations are so reliant upon, even though they forget about this fact

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The photos show Liza Moser, Children's Zoo Keeper, and Cricket reading *Biology of the koala*, while Delta (named after Delta Goodrem who fell in love with the little joey when she visited the zoo) is absorbed in a facsimile edition of *Kangaroos* by John Gould. I wish to thank Mr David Mattner for allowing use of these photographs.

Photos © David Mattner.

come through the gates because it is too hot, too cold, or too wet, the already small budgets are cut.

If special librarians suffer from isolation, zoo librarians must be among those at the extreme end of the spectrum. My closest colleague is based in Melbourne.

So, how can we meet all these challenges?

In 1992 Margaret Apsy, Librarian of the Royal Zoological Society of South Australia Inc. (Adelaide and Monarto