

In another case, S.S. Bhadya, a teacher in a government school in suburban Bangalore retired in 1982. His troubles began immediately after—trying to get his pension commuted, he went to the Directorate of Public Instruction (DPI). For 18 months in different officials shrugged him off or shunted him to other officials. But last August, the frustrated teacher finally went to the DPO, who settled his complaints.

In Dharwad, a landless agricultural labourer called Lingarappa Bidigera put in a diffident plea for a modest 3 acres of land. The petition went in November. By December he had been sanctioned the land.

If these cases illustrate a judicious cultivation of tact and compassion by zoo officials, there are numerous instances to prove that exasperation and a lack of humour are luxuries zoo officials simply cannot afford. Last month T. Sudarshan of Mysore stormed into the department's office threatening to murder a government official. His provocation was that his name featured in the rogue's gallery on Devaraja police station in Mysore city. While he loudly protested his innocence and breathed curses on the wrongdoer, officials quietly checked back with the local police—sure enough, Sudarshan had nine cases against him, according to the police.

As is inevitable with any nascent organisation, the department still has some debugging to do before the system can function with greater efficiency. For one thing, some district officials are being deliberately uncooperative, delaying the disposal of grievances. This had in some cases led to the standard bureaucratic reply from embarrassed zoo officials: "We are looking into it." But after the Government threatened to take action against recalcitrant officials, the situation improved.

Other problems, seemingly minor, still have to be tackled before the benefits of the department are passed on to the common man. A tehsildar in Kodagu has a grievance: the typist and the clerk promised by the Government have not yet been appointed leading to a pile-up of grievances. In Chikmagalur, another tehsildar complained that he wasn't given money to buy stamps for the registration cards to be posted to the petitioners. He was having to pay for it with his own money.

Such problems are easily sorted out, however, and Lakshmisagar says: "The zoo has proved to be the surest way of quantifying and attending to public grievances. We now have a good ear for public complaints." If that is matched by an equally effective hand, Karnataka can certainly boast of being sympathetic to the problems of the common man.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

MYSORE ZOO

Cub Curbs

IN INDIA it is not only people who need to plan the size of their families. Lions need to do so too, as the Mysore Zoo authorities have realised. Last fortnight three of the zoo's 13 lions underwent vasectomy operations. Says Krishna Gowda, the zoo curator: "If we don't regulate their population we would need to buy up half of Mysore city to accommodate them."

The decision to sterilise the lions was hastened last fortnight when Ganga, a



Dr Schaffer gives a pre-operation tranquilliser

12-year-old lioness, gave birth to four cubs and increased the lion population in the zoo from 18 to 22. Already the lions are so cramped in the zoo, which is spread over 250 acres, that some of them have to be housed in monkey cages. The zoo authorities' efforts to sell the lions to a circus or other zoos have not met with success. Says Gowda exasperatedly: "No one seems to want lions even if we want to give them away free of cost." Much of the problem is due to the Indian Wildlife Act of 1972, which puts lions on the endangered list. They can be reared only by zoos and no member of the public can keep them in captivity. So there is no way the zoo can give them away free to individuals.

Sterilisation seemed to be the only way to control the lion population because releasing them back into the wilds would not have been feasible. As Sally Walker, convener of Friends of Mysore Zoo, a voluntary organisation, puts it: "Introducing wildlife back into the forests would destroy the delicate ecological balance in that area. It is also unlikely that the lions would survive for long in the jungle. They have not been taught to hunt for their food or defend themselves against other animals in a jungle where the only law is survival of the fittest."

Wild animals had never been sterilised in the country before because there was no need to and therefore hardly anyone specialised in such operations. Fortunately for the zoo Dr Nan Schaffer, an expert in reproductive physiology for the Chicago area zoos was in New Delhi last fortnight to collect lion semen for research. The Chicago zoos were keen to introduce a new gene pool for their lions to prevent too much inbreeding, which seems to weaken them. Schaffer was also competent to handle vasectomy operations and she agreed to come to Mysore and perform them free of cost.

The procedure for vasectomy operations on lions is not very different from that for humans, and as the 32-year-old Schaffer put it, "You just dope them and do it." Doping them is not as simple as Schaffer makes it out to be. Just walking up to the lion and putting a tranquilliser into its body would be dangerous for the lion would just turn around and attack whoever attempted it. Doctors now use a blow gun very similar to the toy guns used by children to inject the tranquilliser.

When the lion is unconscious minor surgery is performed on its testicles which blocks the sperm duct. The operation takes two hours and after that the lion is back on its feet. The incision takes about two weeks to heal and few complications have been reported.

Mysore Zoo boasts of being a pioneer in breeding lions. The zoo acquired its first two lions in 1968 when there was a controversy about whether lions breed well in captivity. Lions live for about 20 years and reach maturity within three. A lioness can give birth to cubs every two years.

The lions in the zoo bred so rapidly that within 12 years 18 lions had been given to other zoos in the country, six sold to circuses and another 15 given to the Bannerghatta National Park in Bangalore. After that the demand for lions fell. At present to feed a lion 10 kg of beef worth Rs 40 has to be bought every day. The lions also need a minimum open expanse of 100 sq m each to romp around in.

But, operation or no operation, the instincts of Mysore Zoo's lions seemed to have suffered no impairment. Two days after his operation, Shankar, one of the sterilised lions, was already busy courting Ganga. A relieved Gowda said: "Thank God he can't produce any more lions."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA