

Training and Enrichment

Bwana Chai Finds His Inner Picasso!

By: Tracy Herman and Sara Wunder

Busch Gardens, Tampa Bay

The Rhino Team has been training a new behavior to Bawan Chai, a 12 year old bull black rhino, *Diceros bicornis michaeli*, who has been in our collection a little over 7 years. The keepers thought painting would be a great way to develop a stronger relationship with Chai. In addition, it is a way to enrich him and teach him patience, something a bull rhino generally lacks.

Tracy Herman, an Animal Care Specialist, became the primary trainer for painting with Chai. She worked with him a minimum of twice a day to establish this new behavior.

Before the actual process of painting could begin, Chai had to be desensitized to the canvas and the feel of the paint brush, without paint, on his prehensile upper lip. Once Chai was comfortable with this, he was trained to touch the canvas and allow paint to be applied to his lip. The following are the detailed steps taken to train Chai to paint:

- The first step was to call Chai by using the pre-existing behavior "target." The criteria for targeting the black rhino is to touch the trainers hand with lip, while the upper lip is presented down.
- Once he is under control, the SD "Brush" is used to apply paint to his upper lip, which is now pointing up. The paint is applied by putting paint on a thick brush, and then dabbing the paint on his upper lip. He is then bridged with "OK" and reinforced.
- Next, the SD "Paint" is used along with presenting of the canvas and Chai touches the canvas with his lip. Again, Chai is bridged with "OK" and reinforced.
- In a short time and with heavy reinforcement, Chai did not simply touch the canvas with his painted lip, but began to move his lip around the canvas on his own.

Painting did not come without its fair share of obstacles that had to be worked through. In the beginning Chai did not like the feel of the paint on his lip and would rub it off on the ground. Tracy took a step back and added water to dilute the paint so it was less noticeable, adding less water each day until it was no longer necessary.

Another hurdle was encountered after applying the paint to Chai's lip and reinforcing him with food. He was unintentionally licking all the paint off when eating. The reinforcement had to be changed from food to tactile or verbal, only giving him food reinforcement after he had physically painted.

Lastly, Tracy learned that placing the canvas outside the ballards and not against a flat surface would alleviate the chance of him putting his horn through the canvas! Despite the obstacles, Chai learned to paint in only 2 months!

In the future, painting will be expanded to the other rhino keepers. They will begin working with Chai on painting and then progress to the two adult female black rhinos. Ultimately, they would like guests to "participate" in painting sessions on the Animal Adventure Tours. After their tour, the painting will be available for purchase.

Original paintings by Chai will be available for purchase at Bowling for Rhinos, Tampa Bay American Association for Zookeepers (AAZK) fundraising functions, and in the gift shops soon. Proceeds from Bwana Chai's paintings will benefit the Anheuser-Busch Conservation Fund.



Editor's Corner

Greetings from Denver!

When we see the first robin, hope springs eternal that we will finally be released from the grips of a very cold and snowy winter in the Rocky Mountains! It is my goal to provide a quality newsletter with information that will help each one of us to improve the quality of the care we provide to our beloved rhinos. With that said, I would like to extend an invitation to all of our membership in helping provide articles, pictures, enrichment ideas, and research projects for the CRASH. Also, Dave Clawson has put an amazing amount of work into our awesome website, and could use help in finishing sections where information is still needed. (dclawson@thewilds.org)

Thank you all for your continued support of this fledgling organization!

Best Wishes,

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